

# Achieving sustainability in construction procurement

(This document accompanies the GCCG Sustainability Action Plan)

## Background

The UK Government affirmed its commitment to sustainable development with the publication of A Better Quality of Life<sup>1</sup> and the strategy for more sustainable construction, Building a Better Quality of Life<sup>2</sup>, places construction at the heart of this agenda. In the move towards sustainable construction, the clients of the construction industry have a key role.

In the Achieving Excellence Initiative<sup>3</sup> GCCG declared its commitment to change and improvement in the performance of the NI Departments as construction clients.

This document supports the Sustainability Action Plan adopted by GCCG under the Achieving Excellence Initiative, and gives further details on the Themes for Action.

## Procurement on the basis of value for money

Government procurement policy requires that all public procurement is on the basis of value for money. Value for money is the optimum combination of whole life costs and quality (or fitness for purpose) to meet the user's requirements.

Although the overarching aim of procurement must always be the achievement of value for money, there is much that can be done on sustainability issues within the value for money approach. Relevant factors relating to sustainable development and the environment can be incorporated into contract specifications (e.g. specifications can reflect environmental matters in keeping with departmental green strategies) and by taking award decisions on the basis of whole life costs.

A joint Treasury/DETR note<sup>4</sup> explains how departments can specify their requirements in line with their environmental strategies. It is within this framework that environmental issues should be taken forward in public procurement.

## What is Sustainable Construction?

Sustainable construction is the set of processes by which a profitable and competitive industry delivers built assets (buildings, structures, supporting infrastructure and their immediate surroundings) that-

- enhance the quality of life and offer customer satisfaction;
- offer flexibility and the potential to cater for user changes in the future;
- provide and support desirable natural and social environments; and
- maximise the efficient use of resources.

It is possible to set common sustainability goals in the procurement of all built assets since, in many respects, the issues that revolve around all construction projects are the same. It is recognised that specific objectives within a framework of common goals and the timetable by which these can be delivered, will differ from one Department to another. They will be dependant on the nature of the core business, on factors such as the funding available for new construction, refurbishment etc. and on the Department's starting point.

A comprehensive understanding of what makes construction sustainable will evolve, meanwhile, the action themes below represent current thinking and can be embraced without significant risk of future change.

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<sup>1</sup> A Better Quality of Life; A Strategy for Sustainable for sustainable development of the United Kingdom ISBN 0-10-143452-9, DETR May 1999

<sup>2</sup> Building a Better Quality of Life; A Strategy for Sustainable Construction. DETR: 2000

<sup>3</sup> Achieving Excellence for Northern Ireland, Implementation Programme; GCCG, 2002

<sup>4</sup> Environmental Issues in Purchasing - Note by the Treasury and DETR - 1999