

CONSTRUCTION NEEDS AND AFFORDABILITY: BRIDGING THE GAP- WORKSHOP REPORT



On the 4th June 2013, Construction Products Europe held a workshop on construction needs and affordability to coincide with their annual General Assembly that was held on the same day. The themes of the workshop included financing, competitiveness, sustainability and environmental performance for the construction industry.

In addition to Christophe Sykes, Director General of Construction Products Europe presenting the industry's view of the competitiveness of the sector, the guest speakers included UK MEP Phil Bennion; Juan Perez Lorenzo, Policy Officer from DG Climate Action; John Slaughter, on behalf of the European Union of Developers & House Builders; Pavel Misiga, Head of DG ENV, Eco-innovation and Circular Economy unit; and Carlo Pettinelli, Director of Directorate Sustainable Growth and EU 2020 at DG ENTR.

Over 70 people attended the event, who heard the speakers conclude that 'enabling policies' would help support the sector's efforts towards more efficient housing. Moreover, they agreed that it is these policies that must meet the double requirement of promoting both the affordability and quality of construction.



CHRISTOPHE SYKES COMPETITIVENESS OF THE CONSTRUCTION SECTOR

Christophe Sykes highlighted the benefits of investing in the European construction sector, stating that there were both economic and environmental benefits, including the reduction in dependency on imported fossil fuels through energy efficient buildings and improved air quality through new and well-maintained transport infrastructure. He said that the construction industry needed support now because of the great number of economic, regulatory, financial and social challenges it faces. He argued that an EU policy framework which is stimulating, predictable, reliable and coherent would help overcome these challenges.

MEP PHIL BENNION AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Phil Bennion stated in his presentation that the European Parliament was developing a non-legislative document for affordable housing. He acknowledged that the concept of affordability is linked to employment, efficiency, and green houses amongst other things, and that finding the right definition of affordable housing is not easy, which is one of the main goals of the document. He added that building and renovation are important approaches to reach affordable housing. However, the main difficulties are attaining agreements both at European and Member States level taking into account the different schemes on this issue. Mr. Bennion concluded that low performance housing through cheap construction is not a solution, and that long term investment is the right way to act.





PAVEL MISIGA SUSTAINABLE BUILDINGS

Pavel Misiga introduced the European Commission's sustainable/green buildings and Product Environmental Footprint initiatives. Mr. Misiga explained why the Commission is working on the two initiatives. He stated that it was important that existing policies, mainly on energy efficiency, need to be complemented with policies for resource efficiency looking at a wider range of resource use and environmental impacts, across the life-cycle of buildings. The initiatives were also influenced by the 2011 [Resource Efficiency roadmap](#).

After exploring what actions were already being taken by the European Union and the barriers to green buildings, Mr. Misiga explained that they will consider establishing and promoting an assessment framework for the environmental performance of buildings that takes into account the building as a system, the building components and the construction products. Mr. Misiga concluded his presentation saying that competitiveness of the construction sector had to be supported and that these measures would strive to be enabling policies.

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JOHN SLAUGHTER BARRIERS TO DELIVERING MORE HOMES

John Slaughter stated that there were three main barriers to delivering more homes: mortgage lending/business finance, Planning and Regulation. He remarked that while large companies are being refinanced, many smaller firms are still constrained by lack of business finance. Using an example from the UK of zero carbon homes, he illustrated how a collaborative approach between government and construction sector can reduce the cost impact of new homes.

He added that sustainable development is dependent on the local context and finding the best balance between environmental, social and economic objectives.

He then concluded that to increase the construction of new homes it is vital to have positive and informed dialogue with government and that policy makers need to understand the commercial context, while also keeping in mind the consumers.



CARLO PETTINELLI EU STRATEGY FOR THE CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY

Carlo Pettinelli clarified the compatibility of the Sustainable Competitiveness of the construction sector strategy and affordable houses initiative. He stated that the sustainability of the construction sector mapped out in this strategy is dependent on low-energy buildings and that Member States should be in line with the EU initiatives.

Mr Pettinelli asserted that Thematic Groups are the key forums to understanding the industry and deciding future regulatory actions. The conclusions of these forums will be developed in October and presented in at the High Level Forum meeting of November. He confirmed that the outcome of the Sustainable Competitiveness strategy will be in line with the adaptation to climate change strategy and the goals of the resource efficiency roadmap.

JUAN PÉREZ LORENZO LONG-TERM INVESTMENT NEEDS & ADAPTION TO CLIMATE CHANGE

Juan Pérez Lorenzo highlighted the vulnerability of the EU to climate change and summarized what the EU has done so far to try to combat its effects. He stated that it was important to have actions that are EU wide and more streamlined.

He introduced the EU Adaption Strategy Package which would lead to a more climate-resilient Europe and stated its three main priorities are: to promote action by Member States, to have better informed decision making and to promote adaptation in key vulnerable sectors.

Within the three priority sectors considered by the strategy (transport, energy and construction), Mr. Pérez Lorenzo stated that the Commission will map the standards that contribute positively to the adverse effects of climate change and start revising existing standards with a view to adaption to climate change.



We would like to once more thank the speakers and all those who attended the workshop. To hear about future events and workshops by Construction Products Europe, please follow us on twitter [@ConstructionEU](https://twitter.com/ConstructionEU) or sign up to our newsletter on our website www.construction-products.eu.