

sensible and balance the social, economic and environmental impacts of development. The government needs to stand firm and implement its proposals asap. We cannot afford the social and economic implications of delay.

Shaun Spiers

Chief executive, Campaign to Protect Rural England

The government's plans are skewed towards economic, at the expense of environmental and social, development. We all want a strong economy, but we also need a healthy environment. The proposed reforms will be environmentally destructive without doing anything for long-term growth.

The government should start with a clear definition of sustainable development; a return to the brownfield-first policy that has been successful since 1995; and a recognition of the intrinsic value of the "ordinary" aspect of our unprotected countryside.

Colin Haylock

Senior vice president and chairman of the Board of Trustees, RTP1

Much debate revolves around a "presumption in favour of sustainable development" which we think needs to be clarified. Local plans – the policies that councils use to guide their decisions on planning applications – remain key, but must fit in with the policy in the national framework. If there isn't a local plan then planning applications will be approved if they match the rules outlined in the NPPF. This is why the wording of the document is so important, as are the



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Feedback

Why you should be using mediation; the problem with our sustainability agenda; and "shoebox homes"

Don't litigate, mediate

Michael Dawson FRICS, MCI0B

The article "Recession boosts litigation" recently published on your website highlights the fact that the Technology & Construction Court is reporting a 25% increase in cases due to "cash flow problems and contractors looking to cover for the taking on [of] jobs at suicidal bids".

Any contractors experiencing cash flow problems in particular would be well advised to stay clear of long-winded and excessively costly litigation. As a practising mediator, my advice would be to take advantage of the speed, economy and flexibility of settlements which only mediation can provide.

In addition, mediation is informal, non-adversarial, and enables the parties to retain control of the dispute. What's more, in litigation only one party wins and the other losing party invariably has to pay the winning side's costs, which often exceed the value of the original dispute.

It should also be borne in mind that even in the low percentage of claims which do not settle at mediation, the parties are still able to have the dispute resolved entirely by litigation or to litigate only those points of claim on which they were unable to agree during the mediation.

Too many sustainability cooks

Steve Townsend MCI0B

I totally agree with many of the points raised in your article "Taking the green gremlins in hand" (CM, September). I have been involved with a new company led by experienced directors with all the right credentials in terms of "construction" expertise. We have hit the wall in terms of real integrated knowledge and a quango-based funding methodology.

Unfortunately we have the usual constraints outlined in the article. Too many cooks spoil the broth.

The article suggests that we are playing with the subject hoping it will sort itself out. I see the problem being

simplified into six points:

- How much energy do we need to run UK business and homes?
- How much are we wasting through old and saving through current technologies in new buildings?
- Why do we need to reduce energy consumption when what we need is renewable energy that is of a low carbon base?
- How do we design develop and manage a shift from central power generation to local or domestic power generation?
- Why haven't UK contractors developed solutions?
- How much would it cost to upgrade all houses to reasonable standards free of charge verses the cost of one nuclear power station through its lifecycle?

The following comments are from our website responding to the story (web 16 September) about the furore when the RIBA criticised housebuilders for building "shameful shoebox homes".

I live in a relatively new house and agree whole-heartedly with the RIBA. Most modern houses have no character and are far too small. The roof space, which could be used to create extra living space, is wasted by the use of trussed rafters. However, town planners are as much to blame for allowing such poorly designed property and estates to be built.

Tom Metcalfe

You can always build your own home! It can be cheaper and you can then have as much space as you can afford.

Paul McGrath

On the story "Contractors to get Whitehall mentors" (CM September) Excellent innovation, let's hope it works.

Godwin Teye Kwablah

Surely the answer is to employ qualified people at source. Not introduce more red tape to an already overloaded system.

Eddie Monk

→ **Online poll**

This month
Should construction companies routinely offer more than statutory maternity pay?
Vote now at:
www.construction-manager.co.uk

Last month
Recruitment companies are reporting increased activity in the jobs market. Do you hope to move jobs in the next 12 months?

yes 64% 36% no