

Sustainable construction won't wait

The Government's carbon neutral target for new build set for 2016, the Code for Sustainable Homes, Planning Policy Statement (PPS1): Delivering Sustainable Development, and the consultation draft PPS Planning for Climate Change mean one thing – the whole construction sector has to fast track towards managing sustainably now.

The South East Centre for the Built Environment (SECBE), core funded by the South East England Development Agency to grow the built environment sector in the region, is helping the construction industry prepare for the new agenda.

The first initiative, 'Fast-Track-14', supports companies in the implementation of an Environmental Management System(EMS) to reach the standard ISO 14001 inside six months. The 'FT-14' programme has been developed by ISYS to help companies, and their supply chains, to raise their performance by understanding and controlling environmental risks to improve efficiency. A series of groups led by a 'champion', usually a major builder, will work closely with their suppliers to help them to set up an EMS. Using a proven web-based tool kit which divides ISO 14001 implementation into 24 easily-followed steps, companies can benchmark their current performance, and then plan and set up their own customised system.

FT-14 was launched recently in the South East by SECBE in conjunction with 'champion' Willmott Dixon, who want strong environmental management performance in their supply chain. They have just started work on converting Marks and Spencer's Bournemouth store into the company's first 'green store'. A host of 'eco-features' will reduce the carbon footprint and improve energy efficiency, aiming for 25 per cent less energy use and up to 50 per cent less carbon dioxide emissions than average. It will use renewable energy, minimise heat and energy loss and install more efficient systems throughout. All suppliers contracted to the project will be working in a 'greener', more efficient way such as operating a green travel plan for all construction traffic and recycling waste materials where possible.

As Willmott Dixon's Supply Chain Manager, David Patterson explains: "Basically, there are two major drivers," he says. "Firstly, we've always been very environmentally aware. We've got our own in-house business, which concentrates on environmental issues and innovation and we have environmental managers in all our regions.

“Secondly, we’re committed to a holistic approach to supply chain management. We have three tiers of supply chain relations: partners, project partners and preferred suppliers. If companies want to get into our top, partner tier, an environmental management system is now mandatory.”

“They don’t have to use FT-14, but we like it because it’s a good collaborative route for subcontractors. When everyone’s spurring each other on, it’s a really good motivator.”

Although SECBE’s scheme has only just started, Derek Rees says that FT-14 is already a proven winner. “Birser Rail, a specialist engineering company, introduced FT14 to its supply chain in 2006 because it was a business opportunity to save money and win new contracts. It is an integral part of Birser’s management approach which they say will be a necessity as the sustainability agenda moves forward fast.”

SECBE together with its project partners SEEDA, SECE and Business Link is also developing a Built Environment Sustainable Procurement Network (BESPN) to promote best practice in sustainable procurement across the public, private and academic sectors.

“There will be huge opportunities in our region for built environment companies who can meet the sustainability requirements of public sector specifiers,” says Derek Rees, SECBE’s Chief Executive. “And all parts of the public sector, agencies and local authorities, are headed in the same direction. Our industry must be prepared. ”

As part of BESPN, SECBE will be producing case studies and delivering breakfast briefings across the South East to help public sector procurers and suppliers to the built environment tackle the issues surrounding sustainable development in the Government’s new Sustainable Procurement Action Plan.

All aspects of sustainable procurement will be examined, including understanding sustainable construction and the procurement process which goes with it, how to put sustainability at the heart of tenders, constructing energy efficient buildings, buying green materials and designing buildings to withstand climate change.

“The reality is that sustainability could become the main driving factor in every contract; that, in turn, means that all companies in the sector - large or small - cannot overlook the new agenda. Our programmes focus on how companies can meet the demands increasingly to be placed on them,” concludes Derek Rees.

SECBE - South East Centre for the Built Environment

The South East Centre for the Built Environment (SECBE) is a consortium of business leaders that exists to inform policy and drive business-to-business learning and networking. They take regional strategies and industry issues and develop action plans to improve business performance throughout the sector. SECBE is a not-for-profit company limited by guarantee - owned and driven by its business members. SECBE aims to help businesses operating across the South East – Oxon, Bucks, Berks, Hants, Surrey, Sussex and Kent to create a sustainable built environment through better business.