

RIBA Practice Bulletin – No. 442

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[*Technical note: this bulletin is mailed as plain text. An enhanced HTML version containing live hypertext links is attached – this can be viewed with an Internet browser, newer e-mail packages such as Microsoft Outlook Express and recent versions of Microsoft Word.*]

Catchment area goes nationwide

The government is preparing to ditch its wave-by-wave approach to *Building Schools for the Future*, potentially opening up the investment programme to all local authorities across England from next year.

Last week's consultation from the DCSF proposed that local authorities should enter the programme when they are ready, rather than when they become eligible in one of the nine remaining waves. But this is no open invitation; the BSF gatekeepers are to be given a wider range of criteria on which to prioritise the plans coming forward.

The consultation document floats a number of new prioritising factors, including the contribution to area regeneration, the sharing of sites with other community facilities such as healthcare, the need to tackle under-performing schools that do not fall into convenient geographical areas, and the need to ensure that schools are in place for new community developments. It all adds up to a more flexible system that will rely more on the strength and creativity of bid submissions.

So far 72 local authorities are engaged with the BSF programme (waves 1-6) with over 1000 projects in the pipeline. So with another 76 local authorities looking on, the DCSF is presenting its proposals as a 'mid-programme' review, even though only 12 projects have actually been completed.

The new timetable means that all of these non-participants will be invited to re-submit their existing expressions of interest between August and October this

year, with these proposals forming the next groupings of projects to go forward. The DCSF says it will name the new intake of local authorities to BSF in spring 2009.

The DCSF's initiative to accelerate the BSF programme's impact follows the efforts of its enabling agency Partnerships for Schools (PsF) to speed up the process through its ongoing procurement review. Though final details are still awaited, PsF is promising more robust early design stages with less wasted effort that will shorten the pre-procurement stage by six months and additional reductions in procurement timetables. A fast-tracking of some recent local authority recruits to BSF is also planned for this summer.

Consultation on the DCSF proposals runs until July. The consultation paper, '*The Management of Building Schools for the Future Waves 7 to 15*,' can be found at <http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/consultations/conDetails.cfm?consultationId=1538>

Et in arcadia eco

If there is one thing certain this year it is that the eco-towns debate will intensify, testing the planning system along the way as the government maintains that normal procedures will be followed at all stages. The 15 shortlisted sites were named earlier this month, with the challenge now to survive and make it onto the final list of ten. The stakes are high with reports of enormous no-win, no-fee deals already on offer to consultants.

Architects can see exactly what is on offer so far in the consultation document at <http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/housing/ecotownsgreenerfuture> (*Eco-towns: Living a greener future*), which has just been published by the DCLG. This document also amounts to the first stage of planning consultation.

Meanwhile the TCPA, with government support, is working on a series of eco-town worksheets setting out design principles for these sustainable exemplars, drawing on best practice in countries such as Germany, Sweden and the Netherlands along the way. Three have already been release – on transport, water cycle management and community – with others in the pipeline and expected shortly.

Apart from helping to outline the eco-town vision for the government, the TCPA seems to be hosting the emerging eco-towns design resource on its website at <http://www.tcpa.org.uk/ecotowns.asp>

Bio-energy goes for growth

Another week, another renewable energy grants scheme, it seems. This week's is a £4m bio-energy capital funding round aimed at public and private sector organisations in England.

Eligible technologies are biomass boilers and CHP equipment, and sponsoring department Defra is stressing that applications will be welcomed from the smallest of private businesses to the largest, alongside schools, hospitals and social housing schemes.

Grants of up to £100,000 are available, based on a share of up to 40% of the additional cost of installing bio-energy plant rather than the fossil fuel alternative. The application window closes on 20 May 2008, but Defra is promising similar bidding rounds between now and 2010 with another already scheduled for the autumn. More information at <http://www.bioenergycapitalgrants.org.uk/>

Last week saw the launch of a new Lottery-funded grants scheme for community-based microgeneration projects and the announcement of a similar scheme in Scotland (*Practice Bulletin 441*).

Architects keeping an eye on community heating and decentralised energy systems, which local authorities are now supposed to demand wherever possible for large scale developments, can catch up with the latest best practice in a joint report from the Combined Heat and Power Association and the TCPA. Sponsored by English Partnerships, the new guide looks at the different solutions that can be applied in a hypothetical city – ‘*Community energy: urban planning for a low carbon future*’ is at <http://www.chpa.org.uk/>

RIBA Council elections – a reminder

Members are reminded that the closing date for nominations for the RIBA Council elections and President-elect is 14 May 2008. For further information check the website at www.architecture.com/elections or contact the RIBA's Constitutional Affairs Secretary, Margaret Ader (0207 307 3883 or margaret.ader@inst.riba.org).

Forthcoming events...

SMARTWaste and Site Waste Management Plan training. BRE, Watford; 28 April 2008 plus dates in May, June and July. Interactive event demonstrating how to use the free online SMARTWaste Plan to comply with site waste management regulations that came into force earlier this month. Cost is £125 plus VAT. More information at <http://www.bre.co.uk/eventdetails.jsp?id=1928>

Product Innovation in Architecture – Towards zero energy 8. The Building Centre, London; 29 April 2008. PIA breakfast meeting looking at two innovative products from PIA members used on the external envelope: basalt fibre-reinforced wall ties and thermal control-coated steels. To reserve a place contact Jayne Blackborow (jayne.blackborow@rehau.com).

Civic Trust – Inclusive design conference. The Roundhouse, London; 15 May 2008. In association with the RIBA, this core CPD course on inclusive and accessible design has been developed by Prof. Keith Bright. RIBA members pay the Civic Trust member rate of £220 plus VAT. More information at <http://www.civictrust.org.uk/events/CTA%20-%20Inclusive%20Design%202008.pdf>

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