



THIS MONTH : COMMUNICATION

Something of a mixture this month, but all items are loosely connected by the theme of communication. The ability to communicate clearly and effectively is as important in architecture and construction as in any other walk of life and is not, of course, limited to the written and spoken word. Perhaps it's a good thing we do have alternatives such as drawings and models, to judge by a couple of examples of architect-speak that came across my desk this last month.

Explaining the form of a new building one architect was quoted as saying:

"We adopted elliptical cones and cylinders with a single curvature that can be flattened into a planar surface to ease construction"

No doubt the contractor was grateful for that. A second architect, explaining the background to an urban design study, noted:

"My project aims to go a step further than the pervasive model of urbanism that focuses on the polycentric city connected by public transport corridors."

Jolly good. Now on the basis that people in glass houses shouldn't throw stones I'm sure that, in context, these utterances were not as abstruse as

they at first appeared. However, it is important to consider carefully how best to communicate what you wish to convey to a particular audience and avoid compromising the message. We have come to understand, for example, the relationship between speech and non-verbal signals and the confusion that can be caused when the two appear out of kilter.



I turn therefore to two new government construction initiatives that came to our attention this month. Both are connected with water.

First of all we learned that the government plans to ensure that developers provide sustainable drainage systems (SUDS) on all new developments in England and Wales by removing the automatic right to connect

to a public sewer. This is part of the government's flood risk reduction policy and arises from the recommendations of Sir Michael Pitt's review of the floods of summer 2007. Details can be found in a Defra consultation paper launched alongside the draft *Flood and Water Management Bill*.

The message here is clear: new developments flushing their water down public sewers increases the risk of flooding, so we need to find alternatives.





During May the government also announced changes to Part G of the Building Regulations, to come into effect for new homes from October this year. Amongst other things, the changes introduce an efficiency standard of 125 litres per person per day for new dwellings. This does not mean that your water meter will be connected to the local police station where an alarm will ring if your three person household hits 400 litres of water drawn in a single day. But it does communicate that water is a precious and possibly reducing resource, the consumption of which we must seek to reduce.



To help with this the government has published a companion **Water Calculation methodology** alongside the changes.

No doubt there will be some who read these two pieces of legislation as contradictory: if water is so scarce, how can flooding be such a concern? With just a little thought it is clear that there is no contradiction involved but it would not harm the government's case to set this sort of legislation in context for those of us not involved in such matters on a day to day basis.

After all, if it is possible to send every household a leaflet on swine flu, it shouldn't be beyond the government to explain the logic of legislation aimed at improving living conditions. But communication between government and electorate has historically not been the strongest of suits.

I have mentioned before that I find the *Code for Sustainable Homes* one of the foremost insomnia busting efforts of the Whitehall mandarins. On its publication, the **Water Calculation Methodology** becomes the official assessment method for the *Code for Sustainable Homes*. A revised technical guidance manual setting out requirements for the Code for Sustainable Homes was issued during May. The new requirements and the

assessment process for the Code come into effect on 8 June 2009, yet the current version only dates from October 2008. The fact that there is not only a new **Technical guide - May 2009** now available online, but also a separate **summary changes** of guide to the latest update that itself runs to 40 pages, suggests that my view that the Code is not the high point of government communication may have some validity.

One 17 celebrated just over one year in our new home at Armitage Bridge with a barbecue on Spring Bank Holiday Monday. The weather was glorious, making the charity dip by partner Mark Lee and some other hardy souls into our mill pond marginally less traumatic than it might otherwise have been (see the above picture). All funds raised have gone into the One 17 Charity account, to be distributed at the end of the year.