



FUTURE TRENDS IN MEASURING SUSTAINABILITY

Comment by

Keith Mason, Technical Director, SHCA London.

Many clients now routinely set sustainability objectives – using benchmarking schemes like LEED and BREEAM. In fact the large majority of our projects now have specific targets.

These schemes have been invaluable in ‘raising the game’ but they are relative, not absolute. They review local standards and then set relatively ‘greener’ targets. But they are less relevant out of context, for instance, LEED naturally focuses on US issues that may be less important in say the Middle East or even in Europe.

Ultimately, we will have to move towards setting absolute rather than relative targets. For example, how much energy and water does your building ‘deserve’ to use? What is its fair share of waste?

We see a possible way forward based on the growing consensus on national targets. For example, the UK intends to reduce its carbon generation from 560 megatonnes of CO² per year now to 150 megatonnes by 2050, that is 20% of 1990 levels. If your building stock occupies a certain percentage of the total UK estate, it ‘deserves’ the equivalent fraction of carbon production – and no more. Similar policies will undoubtedly emerge around the world based on the Copenhagen agenda.

Governments will turn up the screws on energy efficiency over the next few years. In the UK this will mean a move towards net zero carbon for all new buildings by 2019. Eventually there will be pressure to retrofit existing buildings to achieve the overall targets: much better to think of the implications now than wait for later, more efficient, buildings to outclass stock built over the next few years.

Buildings use 40-50% of the world's energy and have a major impact on climate change. Enlightened clients recognise that they need to set challenging targets, and that if addressed from the earliest stages of a project they can deliver substantial benefits with a rapid payback in running costs and environmental quality.