

Whole house future

Until now, the Futures Group has spent its four years in existence largely under the radar. But at this year's Ecobuild, it upped its visibility with the launch of its second publication, offering masonry solutions to the new Part L. According to one of the group's key members, HBF's Dave Mitchell, the response to the document was "very positive."

But back to the beginning. The Futures Group formed in 2007, after members of the HBF and Modern Masonry Alliance (MMA) realised that the two bodies had common goals, namely the wish to meet the future challenges of Building Regulations on the path to the 2016 deadline, and to assist the industry.

"In early 2007, the Code agenda had just been announced and Part L 2010 was on the horizon, so it was decided that the organisations should get together to provide construction solutions for mutual benefit, concentrating on the energy and carbon aspects," explains Cliff Fudge, the group's chairman and H+H's technical director.

scoping meeting

"We set up a scoping meeting in which Dave Mitchell asked if I could manage matters from the manufacturer side," he continues. "We had a discussion on solutions, but needed support from others in the industry."

Cue the membership of a range of organisations, including the BRE (Building Research Establishment), NHBC and Robust Details.

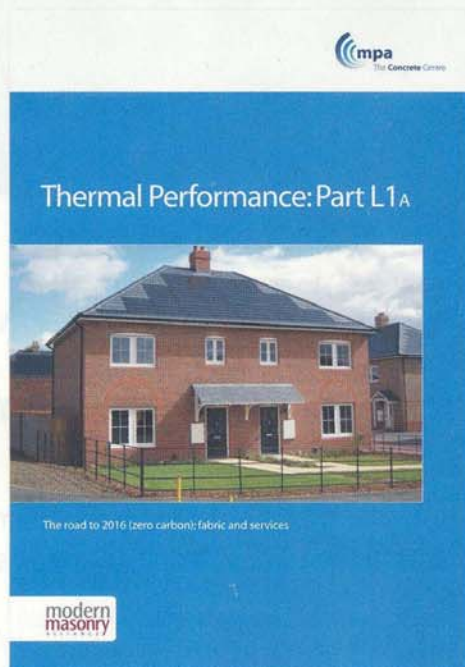
"The fundamental point was to create an environment in which members could talk openly, share experiences and benefit from each other's knowledge in order to find solutions," says Mike Leonard, key player of the group and MMA's director. "Members shared examples of exemplar projects with each other."

It was the exemplar projects of the BRE Innovation Park that formed the basis of some early meetings. "But we soon realised that we needed to look at more than just the wall of a house and focus on whole house solutions," Fudge comments, detailing what arose from the initial meet-ups. Over time, the group saw that masonry could also comfortably score points outside of the non-energy sections of the Code.

Before the long Part L consultation process, the group looked at what was necessary to achieve the 25% and 44% improvements above the 2006

Since 2007, the Futures Group has been working up masonry solutions to aid housebuilders on the road to zero carbon.

Suzie Mayes talks to the group's key players to find out more



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regulations on existing house types. This was helped greatly by the housebuilder members who put forward their own designs. "Members of the group arrived at a set of proposals using SAP [Standard Assessment Procedure] and the rest of the group said that they looked reasonable," Fudge explains.

This work spawned the Futures Group's first document published in 2009 by the MMA and Concrete Centre. Entitled *Energy and CO2: achieving targets with concrete and masonry*, it contained information on airtightness, the structure of the Code and Code solutions for external walls.

As the Part L consultations began to churn out, the Futures Group sought to influence the consultation process. Looking into Part L working groups, the group heard complaints about "onerous" proposals and took these on board.

Eventually, the new Part L hit industry. "The Part L experience wasn't comfortable," concedes Leonard. "It was launched on industry when the principle tool – SAP – hadn't been upgraded.

"For Part L 2013, we hope for a more collaborative approach. This is very important to smaller housebuilders that might not have that level of expertise."

The new publication – *Thermal Performance: the road to 2016, fabric and services* – concentrates on Part L 2010, including ways to conquer the problematic party wall thermal bypass – and covers Part E acoustic solutions. NHBC and Robust Details were on hand to help retrofit insulation to party walls on sites and have them tested.

"We've come up with workable walls that don't have to be half a metre thick and can be constructed using a traditional skills set," Fudge says. "We've also looked at new innovations such as heat recovery showers and the potential heat leakage from junctures."

What needs to be more prominent on the agenda, Leonard says, is airtightness versus air quality.

whole process

But for a less chaotic Part L 2013, he states that the group would "like to become engaged in the whole process, not just at consultation stage. If we can't input beforehand, we'll just be reacting to what the government has proposed."

"The industry as a whole has been holding back a tsunami of regulations, some of which may never work," he adds, pointing out that the Futures Group has focused on regulatory burden from the outset. "We've had to prove that some wouldn't work and that cost money. We must concentrate on what is achievable."

And that, it appears, is precisely what the Futures Group is doing. **hb**