

[THE] ASSOCIATION FOR ENVIRONMENT CONSCIOUS BUILDING
COMPANY NO 5336768

ANNUAL REPORT

COVERING THE PERIOD OCTOBER 2010 TO SEPTEMBER 2011



INTRODUCTION

AECB Chair: Chris Herring

In my introduction to last year's Annual Report, I said that I felt that it had been a pivotal year for the AECB. Looking back, I think that was probably true. What has followed in this last year has been a period of consolidation as the Association has reached a new level of maturity and effectiveness, both in its operations and in its influence. Having been part of the running of the AECB now for 16 years, and chair for 7, this is both exciting and very encouraging for me. Our organisation is in very good heart and very well positioned to take on the challenges that the next few years will undoubtedly pose for us all.

In conversation recently, our CEO Andy Simmonds said two things that stood out for me. The first was that in his view the AECB is 'bucking the trend'. These are difficult times for charities and not-for-profit organizations. Significant numbers have disappeared in the last year alone. However, for the AECB, our membership levels are stable - well, in fact are growing - and financially we are also stable. We have always worked on the principle that our core functioning should be self financing from membership fees. We should not be subject to the vagaries of funding rounds, grant bids and all of the financial rollercoaster to which so many not-for-profit organizations are subject. Provided our membership continues to see value in what the AECB does, then we can retain our stability and independence and continue the important work that we all share.

This year has seen a strengthening of our core operational team, headed by Andy. With the help of three years' funding from the Esmee Fairbairn Foundation we have been able to develop and strengthen the team. What is exciting for me is that the team should be able to be funded from core, membership, funding at the end of the three year term. Everyone working for the AECB is on a part time contract, and gives well beyond their contracted role, so I would not like to give the impression that the AECB does not continue to place big demands on all involved. But I am delighted that the demands on the board and other volunteers have reduced as more of the key functions are taken on by paid staff, which is ultimately far more sustainable.

The other thing that Andy said to me was that there is 'rather a lot to do'. As a classic example of understatement, it takes some beating! There is 'rather a lot to do'. I have regularly opened our Annual Conference, and introduced Annual Reports in a similar vein, referring to the latest understanding of climate change science, peak oil and so on. I think we are now at a point when there is absolutely no need to do this. We all share the view that there is 'rather a lot to do', and all of us in the AECB are working in our own ways to address the most pressing environmental issues in the built environment. And it's why the AECB is here, both to act directly and to support our members in this work.

The influence of the AECB on policy at all levels is now very significant. Just over a year ago we established the Passivhaus Trust. This grew out of the CarbonLite programme, and was the AECB's response to a clear need for a public-interest, not-for-profit body supporting and promoting the development of Passivhaus in the UK. The last year has seen the Trust grow more rapidly and have more demands placed on it than we could have imagined when it was being first established. This is a result of the phenomenal increase in interest in all things Passivhaus in the UK, but it is also a tribute both to the vision of the AECB in establishing it, and to CEO Jon Bootland and his team, as well as the board of the Trust itself. A key milestone this year for the Trust has been its acceptance as the UK official affiliate to the International Passivhaus Association, which established it as the key body in the UK for Passivhaus.

While the launch of the Passivhaus Trust might have been a sufficient achievement for one year, in fact the AECB has been hard at it, influencing policy in other areas too. The AECB's key involvement with the Technology Strategy Board in the Retrofit for the Future Programme has demonstrated just how respected the AECB is for its core expertise in this field. Our involvement continues through our ongoing work on the low energy database, established through the RFF programme, which is playing an important role, recognised by BRE, EST and the National Refurbishment Centre. The AECB has also been working on the Less is More key strategy paper, which was previewed at our September conference this year. This paper is at consultation draft stage, and is going out to key policy makers and voices within the UK for comment. Apart from emphasizing the fundamental importance of energy efficiency, the report also challenges some key assumptions in other work such as the CAT report, or Professor David McKay's recent work. Consequently, I hope it will play a role in informing the direction of national policy in this vital area, in the UK.

Having mentioned these key areas of activity, there is as always so much else going on. Our local groups continue to go from strength to strength, with a new part time member of staff involved in helping to co-ordinate and support. With the AECB as essentially a membership networking organisation, I have no doubt that our local groups are one of our most important activities, strengthening the networking between members, as well of course as helping to develop our expertise. Other ways we have spread the word have been through our presence at Ecobuild and other events. Not only does this allow us to spread the word about the AECB, but it also acts as a beacon of good practice amid what can only be described as proliferating greenwash. The AECB has been there, and the AECB has been needed.

The AECB has sometimes been described as 'punching above its weight' and sometimes as the 'best kept secret in the industry'. Both have some truth in them. There is no doubt that the AECB is having an influence beyond its still very limited resources. It is also, undoubtedly, something of a well kept secret, but this could be seen as part of its success. For our members, once found, rarely let go of. The AECB connects together and supports many of those in the UK most committed to, and most skilful at, furthering sustainable construction in all its aspects. There is so much to be done, that the AECB needs to continue to do just that. This year I think the AECB has really demonstrated just how significant it is as an organisation, as well as reaching a point where it can do its job effectively and sustainably.

AECB BOARD

Secretary to the Trustees: Neill Lewis

The Board of Directors of AECB Ltd. met to conduct routine business four times during the year in Birmingham.

The summary of attendance at meetings is attached as an appendix.

The minutes of each meeting are published on the website at www.aecb.net.

FINANCE

Finance sub-group: Christine Armstrong, Peter Wilkinson

Finance and Administration Officer: Sally Hall

The Association continued to operate within its income and maintained good reserves. Despite the recession most members renewed and several new members joined. Membership was around 1400 over the period, with a 12% increase in income.

The third and final tranche of funding from the Esmee Fairbairn Foundation was due at the end of the period to fund the Business Operations Manager's post (formerly the Business Development Officer's post). The previous post holder resigned at the end of the last period and for most of this period the work was undertaken by other AECB staff. In August Gill Rivers was appointed.

Warm Company (SW) Ltd took over the running of the CarbonLite programme (CLP) (www.carbonlite.org.uk) courses under contract with the AECB. The AECB now receives a fee per delegate.

The AECB continued to make a surplus from the sale of the Passivhaus Planning Package (PHPP) software. Towards the end of the period the AECB entered into a new contract with the Passivhaus Institute as an official reseller of the PHPP. This enables us to buy the packages at a cheaper price (based on a fee and license).

The Passnet project was completed and the final grant instalment paid in August 2011.

A surplus was achieved from the annual Conference held in September 2011.

Christine Armstrong resigned as a Trustee at the Conference and the Finance Team puts on record their sincere thanks to her for all the work she has done for the AECB and her contribution in helping to ensure the AECB maintains a healthy balance sheet.

The accounts are published separately and are in the members' area of the website at www.aecb.net.

CONFERENCE AND AGM

Conference sub-group: Fran Bradshaw, Neill Lewis, Geoff Stow

Conference Secretariat: Karen Purvis

Due to the postponement of the 2010 conference from June to October the Association was in the unusual position of holding two annual conferences in the same financial year.

The 2010 conference / AGM was also the 21st celebration of the AECB. We were lucky that the revised date coincided with the much awaited completion of the WISE building at The Centre for Alternative Technology. This proved not only to be a popular venue but also a wonderful space to be in with its very light, modern and airy feel. The demand to see the building must have been one reason that for the second year running the conference was a sell-out despite CAT not being the easiest place in the world to get to. Many of the workshops were based on the energy work of the AECB and the Passivhaus Trust over the past year. With excellent presentations from CAT on their Low Carbon Britain 2030 report and a Keynote speech from campaigner and journalist George Monbiot as well as the usual range of in depth workshops.

It was good to see the AECB's founders Keith and Sally Hall at the event and Sally cut the 21st birthday cake.

Costs were kept as low as possible but allowed us to make a small profit. AECB members can find a short report on the conference and the results of the on-line feedback survey on the website at www.aecb.net/members

A copy of the programme and copies of most of the presentations can be found on the website at www.aecb.net/conference2010

The 2011 Conference was held on the Jubilee Campus of the University of Nottingham. Again this proved to be an excellent venue with a good central area and lakeside spaces outside as well as plenty of accommodation on campus which is a huge advantage. The whole campus has a range of exciting environmental initiatives.

The conference, branded as "Moving In and Moving On", was a co-event with the university's Department of Architecture and the Built Environment. One theme running through the event was chosen to coincide with the completion of many of the Retrofit for the Future projects funded by the Technology Strategy Board and looked at aspects of renovation and retrofit. We also addressed some of the issues such as community involvement, materials and usability.

The AECB is very aware that, although we believe the event represents very good value, it is still difficult for many members to afford and to this end the cost was kept the same as the previous two years.

Initial feed back was very positive with no major complaints. Again many of the presentations, a fuller report and a synopsis of the feedback can be found on the web site at www.aecb.net/members

PR & MARKETING

PR & Marketing sub-group: Christine Armstrong, Geoff Stow

The AECB does not pay for traditional advertising as it is seen as both expensive and not particularly effective. The Association is promoted via a presence at the major national exhibitions such as EcoBuild, Grand Designs Live and the free eco advice stand at the National Homebuilding and Renovating Show. We take these opportunities to explain the role of the AECB and the services we offer, as well as encouraging people to join, thus achieving three goals: to offer independent advice to the public, to promote the website and to show the services of our members.

The local groups and Network newsletter are also an excellent way to promote the AECB and the work of its membership.

The Association is encouraging members to provide a range of well written articles to counter the ever-increasing greenwash in the media

Green Building magazine provide a free quarter page advertisement.

MEMBERSHIP & REGIONAL GROUPS

Membership Officer: Peter Wilshaw

Regional Groups Co-ordinator: Joanna Saady

Groups keep in touch via the website at www.aecb.net

APPENDIX 1
BOARD MEMBERS, STAFF AND PROFESSIONAL ADVISORS

Trustees (Directors)

Christine Armstrong
Nick Grant
Chris Herring
Neill Lewis
Joanna Saady
Geoff Stow
Peter Wilkinson
Peter Wilshaw

Officers

Chair, Chris Herring
Secretary to the Trustees, Neill Lewis
Treasurer ,Peter Wilkinson
Company Secretary, Peter Wilkinson

Officers and Staff

Chief Executive Officer, Andy Simmonds
Finance & Administration Officer, Sally Hall
Web Editor, Kate de Selincourt
Network newsletter, Chris Lord-Smith

Auditors

Keith Bridgford & Co Limited

Building Society

Ecology Building Society

Bankers

The Co-operative Bank

**APPENDIX 2
ATTENDANCE AT MEETINGS**

DATE OF MEETING		DEC 10	JAN 11	APR 11	JUN 11	SEP 11
AECB DIRECTORS	POST/S HELD					
Christine Armstrong		0	1	1	0	0
Fran Bradshaw		0	0	1	1	1
Nick Grant		1	1	1	1	1
Mischa Hewitt		0	1	1	1	1
Chris Herring	CHAIR	1	1	1	1	1
Neill Lewis	SECRETARY TO THE TRUSTEES	1	1	1	1	1
Jo Saady		0	1	0	0	1
Geoff Stow		1	1	1	1	1
Peter Wilkinson	COMPANY SECRETARY AND TREASURER	1	1	1	0	1
Peter Wilshaw		1	0	1	0	1
TOTAL DIRECTORS PRESENT		6	8	9	6	9
AECB OFFICERS	POST/S HELD					
Andy Simmonds	Chief Executive Officer	0	1	1	1	1
Sally Hall	Finance & Administration Officer	no requirement to attend meetings				
Kate de Selincourt	Web Editor	occasional attendance but no requirement to attend meetings				
	TOTAL PRESENT	6	9	10	7	10