

Sustainable cities

Richard Byatt reviews the Base London event which took place in the capital last month

For those in facilities management who want to look beyond the confines of the building, Base is an excellent place to get an overview of trends and technologies that are shaping the way cities are built and run.

The city-focused Base events bring together experts on the built environment and infrastructure, including areas such as energy generation and distribution, transport, energy efficiency, waste and water. The emphasis is on delivery, commercial opportunity and how this underpins economic growth, investment, enterprise, job creation and a sense of place.

Alongside the conference, a small exhibition included names familiar to FMs – Carillion, Interserve, Vinci Facilities, Siemens and ISG as well as Microsoft, IBM, UK Power Networks and the Carbon Trust.

Sustainability is at the heart of the Base Cities programme, the themes are smart and green. After introductory talks from UEL's pro vice-chancellor Selena Bolingbroke and Newham's Mayor Sir Robin Wales, Ed Gillespie spoke on the need to "change the sustainability narrative." Gillespie is a London Sustainable Development Commissioner and founder of Futerra, the sustainability communications agency.

His argument, engagingly presented if not new, is that sustainability needs to be visible and positive if people are to be persuaded. In his words: "We need to embrace the doom but also show that we have the potential to bloom." Gillespie pointed to the way cycling now has the "social proof" to be seen as a legitimate urban transport option.

Picking up the transport theme, Gordon Wakeford, managing director infrastructure & cities at Siemens, said: "An advanced city is not one where the poor have cars but one where the rich choose public transport." Wakeford commented that there has been a 9% "modal shift" from cars to sustainable transport in London since 2000.

Sixteen parallel sessions either side of an extended networking lunch break covered energy efficient homes, waste in construction, building resilience, 'industrial



symbiosis', water management and more.

The 'commercial property' session brought together some key players on London's real estate scene, including Munish Datta, head of property Plan A, M&S; Matthew Tippet, director of sustainability services at Jones Lang LaSalle; Jenny Pidgeon, director, responsible property investment, Henderson Global Investors and Miles Keeping, partner with Deloitte Real Estate.

Datta said that all new buildings procured by M&S have green clauses in the lease and MOUs are being agreed to put such clauses into the leases for existing buildings. Tippet argued that although genuine progress has been made in terms of the numbers of people reporting "at a base level" on the sustainability of their buildings, there is still too much confusion on actual performance measurement. All the panellists agreed that there is a performance gap between design and use, although it wasn't clear whether this is primarily due to inefficient operation or buildings being occupied in a way the designers hadn't envisaged. Pidgeon said there simply weren't enough people doing post occupancy evaluation.

Keeping said the 'commercial Green Deal' was a great idea in principle but "something needs to happen" for it to take off. Energy performance contracts have not been widely adopted, outside of PFI. Part of the problem is that most commercial property owners don't want anything "hanging off" their assets in terms of undertakings or agreements.

London boroughs are looking at charging substantially for the carbon impact of development schemes. Keeping was worried that this was being done in a crude way, using multiple methodologies across the city. He advocated a proper "life-cycle carbon" approach.

One of the most interesting speakers of the day was the chief executive of a company that has shaped large chunks of London, Chris Grigg of British Land. It is relatively straightforward to improve the

energy efficiency of new buildings and with some tenants (such as UBS) to go further than regulation demands, he said. But it's "hard to find any economic justification that such investment will generate a return in either higher rent or asset value. We're doing it on faith, not an ROI model."

British Land is also trying to improve the performance of existing buildings, said Grigg. The developer has saved 38% of energy used in the common areas of its estate. This has been achieved mostly by introducing relatively simple control systems, monitoring them and making changes quickly.

Government has a role to keep the regulatory environment simple and to lead by example. He advocated the National Australian Built Environment Rating System, known by the wonderful acronym NABERS www.nabers.gov.au "The landlords of Australia have bought into it and the government of New South Wales has opted to occupy only space with a high rating under the scheme, which has increased take-up."

I'd recommend the Base events to anyone interested in how FM fits into the bigger picture of urban and infrastructure management. You'll find familiar themes, new ideas and people ready to exchange ideas.

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