

Awards 2014 Case Study

Award Winner

The Achiever's Award

Colin King - BRE Wales

Extreme weather events affecting the UK with increasing frequency have forced the issues of climate change and sustainability into mainstream focus in recent years.



But this wasn't the case early in the career of Colin King, BRE's plain speaking technical director for Wales when, he maintains, the climate change debate was strictly the domain of 'tree huggers and hippies'.

It is thanks to a relatively recent 'quantum leap' in attitudes that these issues are now firmly on the agenda of all construction proposals and Colin has become one of the 'go to' professionals for stakeholders across the board.

CEW's Achiever's Award recognises an individual who has been inspirational in the opinion of the sector peer group. Against these criteria, Colin King has been in the running for this award since its inception. His passion, commitment and knowledge have, without doubt, met the judging criteria in having 'changed the behaviour and performance of others, and delivered disproportionate benefits for, and left a legacy in, the outputs of the built environment sector'.

His key responsibilities at BRE are as lead officer on housing and building solutions in the new build and refurbishment sector, focussing on energy and ICT integration. He is the senior BREEAM representative in Wales, one of the technical authors of the Code for Sustainable Homes in England, and has delivered sustainable refurbishment specifications

and advice to the Welsh Assembly Government, local authorities and registered social landlords.

Colin is currently working on the DECC research project on understanding heat loss from external walls, with specific responsibility for the unintended consequences work package, examining the risks and opportunities associated with the thermal upgrades of buildings.

This is an area about which he is passionate: a surveyor by profession, Colin started his career at a major national housebuilder, before moving to Cardiff City Council where his role in delivering viable housing solutions enabled him to witness first-hand the real cost of poor housing. For 20 years he has been looking at the consequences of inadequate risk assessments, particularly in relation to the hygro thermal performance of walls, and studying the knock-on effect of this on both the health of structures and their occupants.

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"The increase in schemes by the government for external wall insulation poses the biggest potential risk to housing stock in the UK at the moment," maintains Colin. "The real cost of poor quality housing is much wider than people imagine. Often it is those who are least able to afford to heat their homes properly who are given government grants for insulation, to help meet carbon reduction targets. Mould is then almost a given."

"Insulation is a good idea but we are not doing it well and we don't conduct risk assessments properly. The right materials need to be used in the right way but, at the moment, it is all still percolated down to lowest cost. There is then a risk to buildings and to health, with increased risk of asthma and bronchitis. This is putting a huge burden on the NHS and the country's infrastructure. Providing decent housing that is straightforward to heat would ease that burden."

It seems that the government is, at last, listening to the scientific arguments put forward by Colin, BRE and others, and progress is gradually being made in providing much-needed clear direction on the sustainability front. But attitudes will have to change radically if we are to establish a resilient infrastructure to deal with conditions increasingly affecting us, with much longer term planning and investment needed to replace the current reliance on knee jerk reactions to individual events.

The key to successful adoption of a sustainable solution for housing is to strike a balance between social, environmental and economic factors and not setting the bar so high that it is either financially unachievable or frightens people away, says Colin. "If you set the standards too high, they seem unachievable, so it has to be a step at a time, bringing people along willingly by convincing them with sound reasoning."

Colin's commitment to best practice in all that he has achieved, and his willingness to share his expertise as far and wide as possible, is evident in the staggering number of presentations he has delivered right across the UK. Buildings are his passion and he has been able to impart this to audiences with a sensible, common sense and often straight-talking methodology. In doing so, he has made a major contribution to the technical advancement of our understanding of buildings - how they perform, how to improve them and how to resolve problems.

As a director of BRE in Wales, his work is leading UK advances in retrofit and the development of holistic integrated solutions that deliver high quality buildings with minimal impact. His approach is inclusive and he demystifies the subject of building physics and carbon reduction, making it accessible to all stakeholders.

There is no doubt that Colin is a champion of change, a leader and a thoroughly likeable, engaging individual, as well as being one of the most experienced professionals in his field in the UK. He has supported CEW and all it represents since its inception in 2002, often working alongside the team, providing support, advice and acting as a sounding board when guidance was sought.

The positive difference he has made to the Welsh construction industry, his influence and inspiration, make Colin King a most worthy recipient of this Achiever's Award.