



Radical thinking is needed for this crisis

Comment

EX-PRIME MINISTER Tony Blair had his catchphrases. One was: education, education, education.

Being the prime minister of spin, he hoped to convince the voting public that he and New Labour were giving our children the best education – without favour. The spin was great but the result for the children was at best average.

Not so the schools. In a desperate attempt to keep the country's construction workers from the dole – and in an update of Roosevelt's New Deal – government borrowed to stave off a downturn.

It worked – for a while. (I am still of the opinion that by putting off the downturn, it turned into a recession).

In the interim, however, other factors came into play. The education sector is very important for the building services industry for not only is it keeping consultants, contractors and suppliers working, it has the potential to achieve a high level of sustainability in a major portion of the UK's building stock.

When you read the AECOM story (*piv*) which leads off this supplement you will see

that Ant Wilson and co-writer Katie Marsden have looked at the different factors and guidelines. The pair say a sustainable school is one which will work efficiently for the next 50 years. Designs need to take into account predicted developments, rather than being based on plans which are 20 years old.

But I occasionally find myself at odds with the rest of the market.

History helps us to make sense of the future. I find it difficult to understand why local authorities are not more willing to undertake more out-of-the-box thinking or, perhaps, not so out-of-the-box!

I have, since I have been editor, watched as district heating systems become old fashioned.

But as schools, academies, and further education colleges become bigger and bigger, their roles in the community have got smaller and smaller.

Schools have become hubs. Households move to be in school catchment areas.

Schools use energy mostly during the day. Households use it mostly during the evening.

Isn't district heating the answer and aren't

schools ideally placed to be the boiler houses?

Yes, I know this is simplistic. There would be mountains to climb in selling the concept.

But, look, government has also been pouring money into social housing even to the extent of putting ground source heat pumps into existing housing stock. How many private householders can afford heat pumps or PV?

With a little forward thinking, couldn't all the effort be put into putting photovoltaic cells on the roofs of schools, ground-source heat pumps, CHP, solar thermal panels etc and then inviting nearby householders to join the club. There would be gains, massive gains in reduced emissions and in energy costs to shops, offices and other buildings in the catchment area.

We all know that something radical has to be done, not just in terms of emissions, but for the country as a whole.

We are facing probably the worst debt crisis since World War II and an emerging energy crisis. Our school buildings could be part of the answer, not today but in time.

Paul Braithwaite / editor

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