



RE: SOLUTION

The Office Environment

It is probably an understatement to say that commercial property development and environmental protection do not sit happily alongside one another in the popular perception of the industry. However, an Edinburgh based consultancy, Re:Solution, which specialises in sustainable development, is aiming to change that view with a new initiative called Eco-Office Scotland.

SUSTAINABILITY was initially thrust into the public consciousness by the 1992 Rio Earth Summit and has been a buzz word for government, planners and business ever since. In essence, sustainability aims to mitigate the negative impact of human activity, particularly economic activity, on the planet's environment.

Re:Solution aims to establish a network of eco-offices with facilities in Edinburgh, Glasgow, Dundee and Aberdeen, before spreading out to centres throughout Scotland.

Eco-offices will be high-quality, open-plan offices, each of which will house several organisations such as small businesses, co-operatives, charities and community groups in a shared environment.

Re:Solution intends that the offices become examples of best practice in sustainable working. Greig Robertson, director of Re:Solution, explains: 'The offices will make use of renewable energy sources, state-of-the-art energy efficiency and water saving measures, ecological interior design and eco-friendly building materials.

'In addition, the offices will aim to reduce car dependency as well as achieving simpler goals such as making use of environmentally friendly office stationery.'

By using technological solutions and flexible work patterns, including hot desking, Robertson believes that eco-offices will 'reduce the impact of the users' energy and resource demands, and create innovative, supportive and affordable office space'.

Although the project is new to Scotland, in other parts of Europe this approach is relatively commonplace, with similar developments taking place in Copenhagen, London and Dublin. The Danish model has been adopted as the basic framework for expansion in Scotland with Re:Solution relying heavily on the

experience of ecological development promoters such as the Copenhagen Energy and Environment Office (KMEK) and Ecological Initiators.

However, an eco-office will be far more than a room and a box of recycled paper. Integrated within each eco-office will be an advice and support function to assist community groups in the development of their projects. Groups seeking to develop positive examples of sustainable living and working will receive introductory training in the use of the office resources, including sustainable development, best practice and the use of information technology.

Each eco-office facility will be leased and managed by a service co-operative, which will represent the interests of all users, or 'partners', by providing a management and strategic role. In return, users will be expected to pay a monthly rental as well as to attend quarterly management meetings. Each office facility will encourage and facilitate the cross-fertilisation of skills, networks, experience and projects between the partners and serve to encourage the development of new projects.

Robertson sees this structure as providing financial, as well as ecological, benefits, 'Through the co-operative structure, it will be possible to source common business commodities such as office materials, photocopiers and support or reception staff - many of which individual organisations would not be able to afford'.

Although Eco-office Scotland is a new development for Re:Solution, the organisation has a background in promoting sustainable development in residential planning and building, providing advice and support to groups of between ten and twenty households who wish to live in a co-operative and more sustainable manner.

Re:Solution is currently seeking partner organisations in each of its four initial target cities such as Local Enterprise Companies, architects, property developers and companies that are looking for something a little bit different.

Contact:
ecooffice@re-solution.co.uk

Buildings use roughly a third of all the energy we use, transport and industry sharing the rest between them. If global warming has the predicted effect on our climate, (chaotic and random) we could



face extra energy demands from colder winters, and, increasingly, air conditioning to cope with hotter summers. About six per cent of building energy use is currently devoted to cooling. In the US nearly fifty per cent of building energy goes to cooling; in cities, of course, this creates a negative loop as buildings expel more and more of their heat into the streets and consume increasing amounts of energy to cope with the results.

Passive cooling systems, which architects have known about for centuries, solar power arrays on roofs, super efficient insulation, built in, and retrospectively fitted, and many more technical fixes will be essential features of our urban environment if we are to meet the deadline of a sixty per cent reduction in carbon dioxide emissions by 2050.

The built environment will have to play a central part in making these savings.

The big builders should be playing a much greater role in making progress in this direction, and the Scottish Executive should be doing more than simply setting out tighter voluntary guidelines. We need competition in building energy efficiency, with contractors and architects vying with each other to produce the most energy efficient buildings. Even now, you can visit any show house in Scotland, and be given only the vaguest indication of how much it will cost to heat over its lifetime. The shame of this is that the pay back times on most low tech, energy efficiency measures are no more than five years or so - our future is being compromised by this lackadaisical approach.

Robin Harper is the Green Party's list MSP for the Lothian Region.