

## Minutes of Meeting

### Earth Building UK

#### Inaugural Meeting

Date: Wednesday 24<sup>th</sup> October 2007, 11.00am  
@ The Building Centre, London

#### Present:

	St.	Gp.	
Pete Walker (chair)	✓	Bath University	p.walker@bath.ac.uk
Tom Morton (sec)	✓	Arc Architects	tom@arc-architects.com
Chiara Peronne	✓	Buro Happold	chiaraperrone@burohappold.com
James Young	✓	Raw Studios	james@rawstudios.co.za
Dr Jelena Petric	✓	Strathclyde Uni	j.petric@strath.ac.uk
Lex Harrison	✓	Ibstock Brick Ltd.	a.harrison@ibstock.co.uk
Mike Archer	✓	Eden Archt. & Env. Des.	mike@edenarchitecture.co.uk
Maggaly Ruiz	✓	Student	mamaan33@yahoo.com
Bousmaha Baiche	✓	Oxford Brooks Uni.	bbaiche@brooks.ac.uk
Linda Watson (ICOMOS)	✓	Plymouth University	l2watson@plymouth.ac.uk
Jill Smallcombe (DEBA)		Cob Builder	jill@abeysmalcombe.com
Jackie Abey (DEBA)		Cob Builder	jackie@abeysmalcombe.com
Charles Augarde	✓	Durham Uni.	charles.augarde@dur.ac.uk
Nick Clarke	✓	IHS BRE Press	nick.clarke@ihs.com
Leslie Cornell	✓	Cob Builder	cornellcob@btinternet.com
Dr Matthew Hardy		INTBAU	matthew.hardy@intbau.org
Rowland Keable	✓	Ram Cast CIC	rowland@rammed-earth.info
Peter Trotman		BRE Associate	peter.trotman1@virgin.net
Andrew Biggs	✓	Akristos Ltd.	andy@akristos.com
Dirk Bouwens		EARTHA	dirkbouwens@aol.com
Mischa Hewitt	✓	Low Carbon Trust	mischa@lowcarbon.co.uk
David Clark	✓	Plymouth & Bath Uni	david.clark@linxcel.co.uk
Jason Hawkes	✓	J3 Building Futures	jason@j3buildingfutures.co.uk

Apologies: Ian Pritchett Limetec  
Neil May Natural Building Technologies  
Pat Borer Architect, Wales

Purpose: The purpose of the meeting was to discuss the formation of an association to promote earth building in the British Isles.

The meeting was hosted by UPKEEP who described their work at the start of the meeting. Warm thanks to them for this, and to *IHS BRE Press* for providing lunch.

#### ACTION

##### 1.0 Introductions.

Those present introduced themselves and outlined their experience and interest in earth construction. The group broadly reflected the diversity of fields, professions and geographical distribution in earth building throughout the UK (Wales and NI excepted).

## 2.0 **Background Statement.**

Peter Walker read out the draft Vision Statement. Through the meeting this was returned to, with minor revisions suggested. See 5.1

## 3.0 **Comments from Organisations**

Comments and guidance from established UK earth organisations had been sought in advance.

### 3.1 Devon Earth Building Association (DEBA).

Linda Watson and Jill Smalcombe commented after a recent DEBA meeting where the proposed national association had been discussed.

DEBA have been in existence for 20 years, with about 100 members currently. Their main purpose is the promotion of cob. It has no formal organisation, operating as an effective loose organisation with a steering group. They raise public awareness and foster conservation and new build through a range of activities. They have a website, newsletter, produce leaflets and meet every 2<sup>nd</sup> month.

They have good contacts with the local authorities and have an influence in the southwest outwith Devon. They have created a fantastic network across the county.

They advised that they found it beneficial to have an informal basis as this meant time was spent on achieving the goals rather than administration. They found their website open discussion forum very useful.

Check out [www.devonearthbuilding.com](http://www.devonearthbuilding.com)

### 3.2 Earth Architecture & Conservation in East Anglia (EARTHA)

Dirk Bouwens represented EARTHA as its Secretary and outlined its experience. EARTHA has been established 15 years and has about 150 members.

They have a constitution, adapted from the Lime Forum's, but would prefer not to be burdened with the formal requirements.

They are primarily concerned with clay lump buildings, but there is also some old cob, one pise and one or two new buildings.

EARTHA has a website [www.eartha.org.uk](http://www.eartha.org.uk) and into activities include demonstrations and shows. It abandoned subscriptions as they were not spending the money.

It would have liked to have carried out a systematic inventory of earth buildings in the region, but funding was not secured and the poor record of earth buildings was echoed with comments from Devon & Cornwall. Leslie Cornell has gathered some record of earth building distribution in Cornwall through his presence at shows over the years. This is an area the association might look to pursue.

### 3.3 Other Regional Activity.

It was noted that there were other local informal groups or individuals who were active across the country. Mike Archer

noted that there was not a formal organisation in Cumbria, but there was considerable interest. Lincolnshire and Wessex were also mentioned. It was agreed that the association should look to support these activities.

#### 3.4 ICOMOS

Linda Watson described the activities of The UK ICOMOS Earth Structures Committee, from her position as its chairperson. The work of the committee reached its zenith at the Terra 2000 conference, which was successful on many fronts. This included raising international awareness of British earth building cultural heritage; with the Georgian and Victorian buildings being particularly noted.

Since then it has been rather inactive. There was some discussion of the need for standards, which might have provided a focus for further activity, but this was not developed.

The committee is part of the ICOMOS network, set up by UNESCO, primarily to raise the international agenda for vernacular buildings. The international committee has been inactive for 20 years. English heritage funded conferences in 1994, 95 and 96 as well as the major one in 2000.

In recent years some key people in the UK committee have retired. Linda Watson questioned the value of being part of the international organisation, as this brought an administrative burden.

#### 4.0 **Open Discussion.**

There was a wide-ranging discussion in which the key following points were raised.

4.1 Areas of Interest. It was agreed that the association should be interested in all aspects of earth construction and that the different sectors have much more in common than they do differences. Part of the attraction is the potential for collaboration across sectors. Sustaining living traditions compliments developing innovative techniques.

#### 4.2 Value of Earth Industry

RK suggested it would be informative to be able to quantify the value of earth construction as an industry, so that growth could be recorded and government lobbied. It was agreed that this would be useful, and noted that the association was not only concerned with earth construction as a commercial activity, but also for its cultural and technical qualities.

#### 4.3 Cement.

Rowland Keable proposed that use of cement as a stabiliser should be excluded from the definition of earth materials supported by the association. There was some discussion over the merit of distinguishing cement from other stabilisers and the potential for the development of innovative products with use earth combined with other materials such as natural polymers or gypsum waste.

There was some support for the view that it was better not to

single out cement and to engage with the debate strongly rather than excluding it from discussion. Nonetheless it was recognised that there was a danger that this could give the impression that the association endorsed the use of cement additives. An item for further discussion...

#### 4.4 Bibliography Resource.

Linda Watson and others suggested that the website could provide a useful means of accessing relevant publications, unpublished phd theses and current research relevant to earth construction.

#### 4.5 Networking.

Jelena Petric commented that the meeting was useful in making new contacts and this should be one of the immediate benefits of the association, in providing a forum for conversations and developing inter-disciplinary relationships. This should be facilitated by information provided on members in the website.

#### 4.6 Standards.

Peter Walker noted that the lack of a standard was an impediment to development of earth construction and the experience in Germany and New Zealand was discussed. Bruce King's current work on an international standard in the US was also outlined. Translation of the German standard could be a worthwhile step towards development of a UK standard.

### 5.0 **Aim's & Structure**

#### 5.1 Aims & Objectives.

It was agreed that the vision statement was a reasonable expression of the organisations aims and objectives, with the following comments.

Mischa Hewitt noted that sustainability was a key characteristic in promoting earth construction.

A range of adjectives in the vision statement were felt to be unnecessary. An amended version, re-named Draft Aims & Objectives is attached to these minutes.

#### 5.2 Constitution.

Regional organisations, such as DEBA, operated successfully without a formal basis as they are geographically and technically focused. A national organisation would be more diverse in its interests and its membership would be more geographically spread.

It was agreed that it was probably appropriate to have a formally constituted basis to the association, and a number of possible forms were discussed. Issues included whether the organisation would be set up with charitable status, and be able to lobby politically, etc.

It was agreed that this needed further consideration by a steering group, but that the formal documents should be kept simple.

### 5.3 Proposed Activities.

A range of possible activities were discussed: Networking was seen as a key initial activity; and the drafting of standards is a medium-term aspiration.

Promotion of building with earth to the public has been a very successful activity of the regional organisations; allaying fears and receiving an enthusiastic reaction. Promotion within the higher education sector was also seen to be crucial.

Professional CPD was another opportunity for professional skills capacity. Developing the craft skills base is also important, working from the existing NVQ in earth building and opportunities for training in German.

Representation at international events was seen as important in developing partnerships and raising the profile of British earth building.

Recording existing buildings and developing a database is another activity.

### 5.4 Website.

A good website was seen as a key target; and will aid networking and facilitate building the membership of the association. It is a key means of promoting the aims of the association, disseminating information and managing inquiries efficiently.

Good funding will however be needed. NC volunteered his publishing skills in editing material and DEBA may have a website designer contact.

### 5.5 Funding.

It was agreed that there should be an affordable subscription rate, of around £10 for individuals. This will not fund key development work and dedicated funding would be sought for things like the website.

### 5.6 Name.

There was some discussion over names. 2 emerged and there was a vote in which should be a working title. Earth Building GB (EBGB) received 8 votes. Earth Building UK (EBUK) received 13 and was therefore adopted.

## 7.0 **Who's Doing What**

### 7.1 Steering Group.

It was agreed that a steering group should meet to develop the constitution and other matters before a full meeting in the spring can confirm arrangements. Most of those attending joined this (see attendees list).

### 7.2 Office Holders.

Peter Walker was nominated and accepted the role of chairperson. Tom Morton agreed to act as Secretary. James

Young volunteered to be treasurer.

**8.0 Next Steps.**

8.1 Public Launch.

It was agreed to launch the association at Ecobuild in February 2008. Jill Smallcombe and Jackie Abey, Andy Biggs (Akristos) and Ibstock will have stands there, and could distribute leaflets.

Steering  
Group

8.2 Steering Group

It was agreed that the steering group would meet before then to develop matters, arrangements to be confirmed.

Steering  
Group

8.3 Web Group.

Jason Hawkes will set up a yahoo discussion forum to allow the association to develop. This will be a closed forum, with people being invited to join. All those at the meeting will be automatically invited.

JH

8.4 Conference.

It was agreed that a one-day conference would be arranged for later in 2008.

Steering  
Group

Recorded: TM, 30.10.07

Distribution: All present + those with previously notified interest

# Earth Building U.K.

This is an amended working draft, with further suggestions welcomed, please forward to Tom Morton.

## Mission Statement:

- to inspire (*alt. foster*) the conservation, understanding and development of building with earth in the United Kingdom.

## Aims:

- **Conservation:** to promote the recognition, understanding and cultural significance of existing earth buildings in the UK. To promote the appropriate repair and maintenance of earth buildings.
- **New Build:** to promote earth building in contemporary construction, through the development of innovative products and techniques. To work towards the development of appropriate standards and testing methods.
- **Knowledge:** to promote research and the development of understanding of earthen materials and their applications.
- **Skills & Education:** to foster the traditional skills base and promote the development of new skills and techniques. To promote earth building during the education and training of construction professionals.
- **Networking:** to represent earth building interests as an authoritative national body, fostering links to other relevant organisations, both within the UK. and internationally. To promote the development and dissemination of guidance on earth building. To foster networking between members.

See also the Earth Building Association of New Zealand's version at <http://www.earthbuilding.org.nz/objectives.htm>

And the Earth Building Association of Australia's at <http://www.ebaa.asn.au/ebaa.html>

**SUPPLEMENTARY NOTE:** There has been some further comment about use of UK or GB. Some people feel that the use of the term UK is anachronistic and implies a hierarchical society and that GB is more citizen based and pluralistic. However, it has also been pointed out that these terms exclude the republic of Ireland and it would be good to include the geographical island of Ireland. The terms British Isles would do this and define the organisation by geographical rather than political or royal criteria. British Isles is however less recognised internationally. Can we please continue this discussion on the web forum?