

BlueBox Newsletter

Technical briefing for surveyors, energy assessors and property professionals *Issue Four Dec. 2008*

The new HomeBuyer Report 'A new product for a changing market place'

The Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors (RICS) has recently announced a series of half-day, afternoon seminars promoting their new HomeBuyer Report due to be launched in July 2009.

Extensive RICS-sponsored market research in 2007 established the need for a range of new, quality, consumer-friendly products designed to be flexible, that have the potential of generating new business for Surveyors. The first output is the new HomeBuyer Report (HBR) that is due to be unveiled early in the new year along with the accompanying official Practice Note. This will give time for Chartered Surveyors to get used to the product in time for the public launch.

BlueBox *partners* (BB*p*) has been centrally involved in this development:

- Chris Rispin (Managing Director of BB*p*) is a member of the Product Review Group which has driven this new development, and;
- Phil Parnham (Professional Development Director of BB*p*) has helped write the standard paragraphs for 'Survey Writer', the RICS's new report writing software that will be published at the same time.

Phil has also been commissioned to write 'The Surveyor's Guide to the HomeBuyer Report' to be published by RICS books in the new year. The new HomeBuyer Report will compliment the recently established Home Report in



What's in this issue?

Welcome to the fourth issue of 2008 of our technical newsletter. It includes:

- The new HomeBuyer Report;
- Revised course for Data Gatherers and Commercial Energy Assessors;
- Expert witness
- Remedial DPC repairs

If you have any comments on this newsletter or would like to make a contribution, please contact the BlueBox *partners* office on 0845 260 3500.



Scotland by introducing the concept of 'condition ratings' of the main elements. In addition to this objective assessment, unlike the Home Report, the new HBR will also include advice to the purchaser.

Future developments will include a series of additional standard modules that can be added to the core service. Although the detail has yet to be established, these could include modules on 'Energy', 'Cost of repairs', and 'Further Investigations', to name but a few.



BlueBox 'HomeBuyer' courses

To support this new development, BlueBox *partners* will be launching a series of initiatives including:

- a series of one-day seminars aimed at Chartered Surveyors who want to improve, broaden and deepen their technical skills ready for the new HomeBuyer report;
- our regular programme of HomeBuyer 'Masterclasses' that are based on the inspection and assessment of a real property, and;
- more specialised sessions that help participants prepare for the additional modules.

As soon as we have established our programme, we will publish the details on our website at www.blueboxpartners.com

New flexible course for Commercial Data Gatherers and Energy Assessors

Following the successful launch of our new training programme for Data Gatherers and Energy Assessors in November (see Newsletter 3), our participants recommended that we make the programme even more flexible. Consequently, our new course has three options:

Option 1: Data Gatherer (site based data) - this 3 day course will suit those who want to limit their involvement to collecting information from the building itself;

Option 2: Data Gatherer (software support) - this second 3 day course has been designed for those who want to understand how the collected data is processed and entered into the iSBEM software so they can offer further assistance to their Energy Assessor;



BlueBox partners course for Commercial Data Gatherers and Energy Assessors

Our next Energy Assessor and Data Gatherer course will take place on the following dates in Coventry:

- 27th, 28th and 29th January 2009 (Option 1)
- 10th, 11th & 12th February 2009 (Option 2)
- Assessment process – 12th February onwards (Option 3)

The Data Gatherer part of the course will provide all the knowledge and understanding required. However, if you are interested in following this route, you must consider the following issues carefully:

- a Data Gatherer will work closely with a qualified Commercial Energy Assessor who will issue the EPC, take full responsibility for the certificate's contents and be accountable for the conduct of the Data Gatherer;
- the BRE Global Accreditation Scheme is happy with the form and content of our course.

However, as this is a new development, if you intend to join another scheme, you should check to see if they have any particular requirements.

Option 3: Building Energy Assessor (Non-dwellings) - based on the same courses described in Options 1 and 2, this package also includes all assessment costs associated with the ABBE Level 3 Diploma in Non Domestic Energy Assessment.



We have adjusted our programme to match the differing roles and relationships that are developing between Data Gatherers and their supervising Building Energy Assessors. This allows a broader range of practitioners to quickly and economically take advantage of this growing market area.

Join our Blog!!!

Why should the kids have all the fun - Energy Assessors can enjoy social networking sites too! Well maybe 'social networking' is not the correct term, the '*Allied Surveyors & BlueBox partners Bulletin Board*' might be a more accurate description.

Accessible from the BlueBox *partners* website under 'Technical Discussion', the Bulletin Board has been designed for those involved in the energy assessment of commercial and industrial buildings. Current discussion topics include:

- Does an unheated building need an EPC?
- Carbon Checker versus iSBEM—which is better?
- The length of DHW 'deadlegs'?

Although this may sound like a refuge for a bunch of sad, lonely people, it does deal with some very important and current issues. For example, the CLG has failed to clarify whether an unheated building needs an EPC and this has resulted in Energy Assessors taking very different decisions. Not only does this lead to confused clients but it is likely to result in legal challenges as some building owners ask for their money back as they realise they did not need an EPC anyway! We cannot claim that our 'Bulletin Board' will resolve these problems but at least it can help us achieve consistency across the Network.



This b!!*y thing would never meet the minimum standards for an open chimney under RdSAP!

Expert Witness Update



In our Newsletter Two, we reported on the launch of the BlueBox partners national network of Expert Witnesses. Since that time, we have recruited and trained over 60 surveyors. In future Newsletters, we will include information and articles of interest to those developing their role in this potentially lucrative area.

Identification of a subject property during a valuation - new case law.

A recent case between Platform Home Loans (PHL) and Bank of Scotland (BoS) trading as Colleys, involved the incorrect identification of a new property. PHL successfully sued BoS in the Court of Appeal under contract for failing to identify the correct property. Although there appears to have been some sympathy for the Valuer, they considered that the Lender relied on the report, was not at fault and therefore should not have suffered a loss.

The case was refused referral to the House of Lords and therefore the decision stands. There are some important points that need to be considered:

- This was a case in contract where the valuer had to sign a declaration to the effect that "I confirm that the above mentioned property is the one I inspected". Consequently, the contract is applied when the valuer confirms the declaration;
- This was not a case of negligence. The Court accepted that the applicant (who directed the Valuer to the wrong plot) provided false information. However, the court thought that it was not the Lenders fault that this happened as the Valuer was under contract to inspect the correct property;

Many contracts do not require the Valuer to confirm the inspection of the property so the rule in this case is not likely to apply. However, where there is doubt we think Valuers need to state what they have inspected.

RICS has recommended a phrase that should be used with new property cases and conversions. A modified version should also be used where boundaries are unclear.

"The property was identified by reference to the applicant/ the site representative/the broker.....etc and this is assumed to be correct, conveyancers should check that this aligns with the description of the property and if there are any doubts the details need to be referred back to the Valuer".

RICS will be putting out a note shortly and CML has been consulted to try and persuade Lenders to remove the disputed contract term.

Is that my phone ringing?



Most of us in the property sector are living through 'interesting times' where work levels have plummeted like never before. With our business plans ripped to shreds, it is difficult to look towards the future with any level of confidence. Although he would not claim to have all the answers, Alan Appleby one of the BlueBox presenters, takes a sideways look at the life of a sole practitioner.

Now be honest, you'd never have thought, even as little as 6 months ago, that we could be so underwhelmed by a 1% cut in the base rate. But here we are, totally not 'bovvered' and maybe just a tad cynical about whether it will make any real difference to our lot. Hang on, that's the postman. Oh super – the falling Pound has meant that my timeshare maintenance fees have increased by more than the flights used to cost me to get there! No holidays for a while then.

Still there's always the excitement of the daily lottery of life to look forward to. How much will the diesel cost this tank full? Is the estate agent I must return these keys to still in business? Who's the highest bidder in the retail pre-Christmas discount war today?

Wait....is this a bit of good news? Yes, the cost of my replacement car for next year has come in and it's nicely discounted (plus the 'massive' saving on the VAT of course). But the finance quote is at a higher interest rate than 3 years ago - how does that work? And the part exchange offer – is this for the car or the ladders in the boot?

I need some relief from this recession and although there are no magical solutions there is some light on the horizon:

- More Regulation and Red Tape? Bring it on! That will mean more work for those on the Building Energy Assessors and Data Gatherers Courses;
- More claims against Valuers? Get yourself on the BlueBox Expert Witness Course and help their Insurers defend them.
- New RICS Homebuyer format? Get updated and up-skilled with Bluebox (did you spot the buzzword there?)

So that just leaves me with how I'm going to find my Tax for the end of January.....

Alan Appleby

Q - How many damp proof courses can you fit into a wall?

A - As many as a gullible property owner will allow!

As homes get older and damp proofing fashions change, surveyors and inspectors are coming across more examples of 'multiple damp proof' installation in external walls. This process often starts when a surveyor records a few 'red' readings on a moisture meter and calls for further investigations by a 'competent contractor'. Vested interest or poor diagnosis usually results in the installation of a DPC the building does not need. Where a property regularly changes hands, this cycle can be repeated a number of times over.

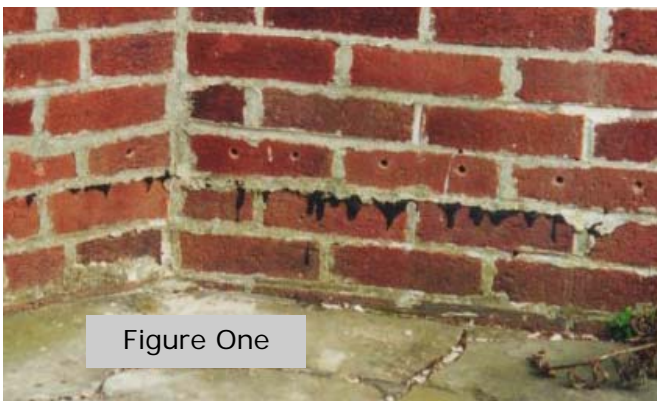


Figure One

Figure One shows a typical example. The surveyor found a few isolated high moisture meter readings in an under-stairs cupboard and recommended a further investigation. The 'specialist' submitted an estimate for a new injection DPC to the whole property even though it clearly had a bitumen DPC and no other evidence of dampness.



Figure Two

Contact

This newsletter is published by BlueBox partners, part of the Allied Surveyors group. For more information contact us at 3 High Street, Chipping Sodbury, Bristol BS37 6BA. Tel. 0845 260 3500 or email info@blueboxpartners.com. Visit our website at www.blueboxpartners.com



Figure Two holds our record at the moment (unless you know differently). The wall has three DPCs including a blue engineering brick, an injected chemical damp proof course, and a row of Doulton 'siphon' tubes - it is a wonder that the wall is still standing!

New 'dutch' kid on the block

The latest fashion in the remedial treatment sector is one based on the Dutch 'schrijver' system. Looking more like footholds on a

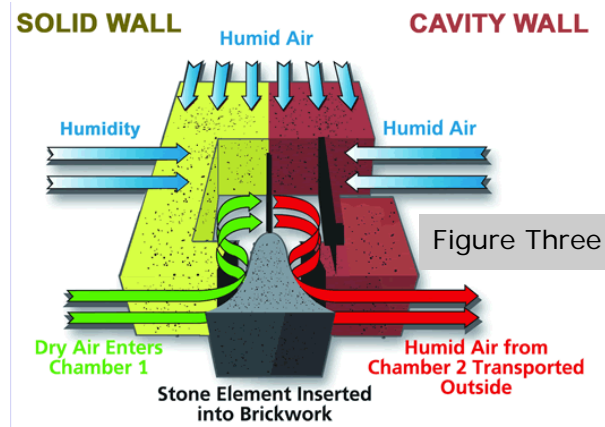


Figure Three

climbing wall, these are meant to reduce dampness levels by allowing air to pass around voids created within the heart of the wall (see Figure Three). Figure Four is a recently installed example (spotted by John Wheller in



Figure Four

Taunton). We will not express an opinion on the effectiveness of these systems as the stream of expletives may offend!

Although we might find these examples mildly amusing, they occur because home owners are desperate to find a solution to persistent dampness problems. They are often let down by contractors and other advisors (including surveyors) who fail to approach the diagnosis objectively and thoroughly.

The 'add-on' modules of the new HomeBuyer Report will provide an opportunity for surveyors to offer specialist diagnostic services to help property owners caught in this cycle of mis-diagnosis. In the meantime, has anyone got a photo of four or more DPCs in the same wall? I bet there is one out there!