

# BlueBox Newsletter

Technical briefing for surveyors, energy assessors and property professionals *Issue Nine August 2009*

## The new RICS HomeBuyer Report is launched

*On July 1st, the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors (RICS), launched the new RICS HomeBuyer Report (HBR). Chartered Surveyors across England and Wales are now able to offer the report to their clients for the first time and many see it as a promising opportunity in these challenging times.*

To support this development, BlueBox *partners* developed a range of training and support services designed to help surveyors get to grips with condition ratings and the new approach to report writing. These include:

- A new module in our distance learning programme called '**The new HomeBuyer Report**'. It provides a practical introduction to the new HBR and although we cannot cover all aspects in just one module, we have chosen two elements from one property to give you an insight into the new report. The supporting information includes a number of specially written BlueBox *partners* introductory guides that will help you develop your skills.
- The '**HomeBuyer Report Assessment Service**'. This is a bespoke, personalised service that will allow you to develop your own skills and knowledge **before** you offer the service to the public. You convert one of your existing HSV reports into the new HBR format and send it to BlueBox *partners* together with appropriate supporting material. We will evaluate it and provide you with a personalised 'feedback' report so you can reflect on your strengths and weaknesses.

Additionally, most of our other distance learning modules are 'HBR compliant' and will help you prepare for the new format.

### Unrivalled expertise

BlueBox *partners* is well qualified to offer this support because our Directors have:

- Been part of the RICS Product Review Group who initiated and developed the new HBR;
- Contributed to parts of the new Practice

### What's in this issue?

Welcome to the ninth issue of our newsletter. It includes:

- The launch of the new HomeBuyer Report
- The affect of climate change
- Evaluating environmental risks seminar;
- The HIP and condition surveys - help or a hindrance?
- Movement of buildings - the review of CIRIA report TN107

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.

Note;

- Provided most of the paragraphs to be used in '*SurveyWriter*', the new RICS report writing software; and written '*The surveyors guide to the RICS HomeBuyer Report*' that is due to be published by RICS Books in September 2009.

For more information visit our website at [www.blueboxpartners.com](http://www.blueboxpartners.com)

## Have you done a HBR yet? Let us know your views and win a copy of the new HBR book

Although the new HBR has got off to a slow start, an increasing number of surveyors are beginning to offer the new format to their clients. Are you one of these pioneers? What are your experiences so far? We are especially keen to hear your views on the following questions:

- What is the template like to use? Are you printing out your reports, or have you been able to save and send it electronically?
- Is the elemental structure of the report easy to use? Have you come across any issues that do not easily fit into the format?
- What did your clients think? Is it better received?
- What is your overall opinion of the new format?

Please send your emails to:-

[info@blueboxpartners.com](mailto:info@blueboxpartners.com) titled '**Yes I have done a new HBR**'. The best response will win a copy of the '*Surveyor's guide to the RICS HomeBuyer Report*' when it is published.

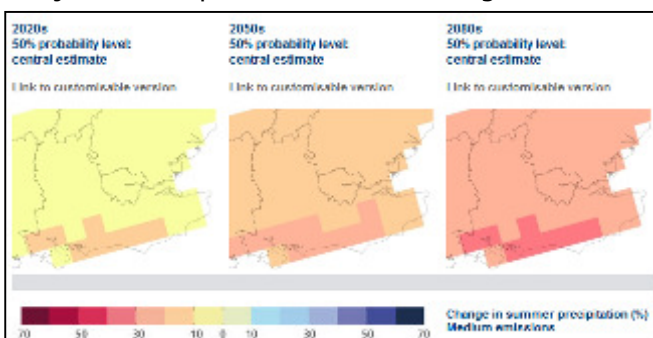
## Climate change - the impact in your area

The Department of Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) have made a new service available on-line. The UK Climate Projections (UKCP09) went live in June and provides the latest information on how continued emissions of greenhouse gases may change the UK's climate over the 21st century. Although the information will be of most value to those responsible for forward planning in the public, private and voluntary sectors, it does give a broad insight into how the climate may change in specific regions of the country.

The projections show three different scenarios representing high, medium and low greenhouse gas scenarios. For example, if you practice in the south and east of England, you had better start stock piling bottled water and sun-screen now; at medium probability levels, by 2050, summer rainfall is likely to fall by as much as 20% and summer mean temperatures rising by as much as 4C.

These projections provide no surprises but they do give a clear indication that authorities are beginning to actively plan for a drier, warmer future. Many agencies are taking action now (see our article on porous driveways in issue eight of our newsletter) and we can expect more regulatory responses over the next few years.

If you want more information, it is best to start at <http://ukcp09.defra.gov.uk> as the information on this website gives a general introduction to the UK Climate Projections. If you need an in-depth view then you can go to their technical site. The UK Climate Projections are based on a new methodology designed by the Met Office, which allows a measure of the uncertainty in future climate projections to be included in the information. All of the information available through the UK Climate Projections is provided free of charge.



**Example of the climate change maps available from the Defra site.**

## Reporting on Environmental issues in residential surveys

To help residential practitioners cope with changing environmental expectations, BlueBox *partners* in partnership with Contact Property Training (CPT), have organised a series of one day seminars.



We have linked up with one of the UK's leading suppliers of digital mapping, property and environmental risk information to create a highly interactive day that will help you to add value to your reports and create opportunities to expand your services. The day will be structured as follows:

- Provision of pre-course information, a resource and study pack that will help you prepare for the day;
- Introduction to environmental issues and standard survey products– what should be included in MVs, HBRs and building surveys;
- Assessing environmental issues – using the 'free' websites and commercially available environmental risk information;
- Problem solving workshop where participants will analyse the environmental risks to a number of specific properties and consider what should be reported;
- Presentation of a 'model answer' using the results from a more thorough analysis using a commercially available product.

The afternoon will finish with a presentation of how surveyors can 'up-sell' products to their clients.

We think the seminar will help you broaden and deepen your knowledge, discriminate between data that is useful and that which simply misleads, and how to report environmental issues to clients.

### More information

For more information and booking details, please visit [www.blueboxpartners.com](http://www.blueboxpartners.com) and follow the link for 'Residential Surveys: Reporting on Environmental Issues'

Or

<http://cptevents2.co.uk>



## The Home Information Pack and condition surveys – help or hindrance?

Whatever you think of the Home Information Pack, it is likely to be part of our lives for some time to come. Although a future change of government may result in its abolition, nothing is for certain. So do we continue to ignore it or can we put this much-maligned document to good use? Alan Appleby, a Director of BlueBox partners, explains how he uses the HIP to improve his own HomeBuyer Reports.

### Getting hold of the pack

I have carried out residential surveys and valuations in the same area for over 25 years. I know the local agents and have a good relationship with most of them. Consequently, when I phone about access arrangements I ask them to send me a copy of the pack by email. In a few cases, they only have hard copy versions so I ask them to post me a copy. If this is not convenient, I call into their office to pick up the document - I might need to call there for the keys anyway.

Once received, I check through the document **before** I go on the inspection because this can give me useful information and advance warning of potential issues. Rather than run through a number of generic headings, I thought I would go through one specific HIP for a HBR recently completed. I did not specially select this; it is a typical example of the property I encounter. I have taken out any specific references to people or places.

### The Property Information Questionnaire

I accept we have to take the response with a pinch of salt, but some PIQs can be very revealing. In this case, it confirmed the address and postal code, and the council banding (although I do not assume this is correct). The next few answers are 'don't knows'

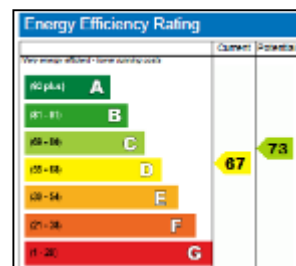


but under the central heating question, it states 'Gas supply currently tapped off by British Gas as it was leaking somewhere' – result! Although this could be obvious on site, it is good to know now.

### The Energy Performance Certificate

I am always a little cautious with the EPC but this property is in the D banding and is relatively high for a property of this type. Characteristics noted by the energy assessor included:

- Uninsulated cavity walls;
- 250mm loft insulation;
- Double glazed windows;
- 'Very good' heating and hot water system – this usually means a condensing boiler.



All giving a rating of 67 – not bad. Although the new HBR only requires the figures to be transcribed, this information can help me visualise the property and prepare for the inspection.

### The sale statement

This told me the property was freehold and for sale with vacant possession and that it was being sold by someone under the power of attorney.

### The Property register from the Land Registry

I got a few decent 'nuggets' from this:

- The construction date – although not always accurate, the first (and only) conveyance was in 1961;
- The person who bought the property was the current owner. Therefore this is the first time it has been on the market;
- The developer was the same as the one who built a large estate in another part of my area around about the same time so I am very familiar with their construction practices;
- The boundaries were clearly shown on the title plan of the property and the map shows a brook running close by. This may not be evident during my inspection.

### The search information

This supplied the following information:

- Planning permission to use former nurseries as land for housing from 1960;
- Building regulation approval for cavity wall insulation in 2000 (contrast with the EPC certificate!);
- The road is adopted;
- The % of homes above the Radon Action level in the area the property resides in is less than 1% - that saves me looking that one up!

With other packs I have reviewed, this section can include dates of consent for extensions – something I often find is a real 'head-scratcher'!

## Drainage and water searches

- The property connects to the main sewer (how many times have I assumed that with my fingers crossed);
- The property has a water meter;
- The map also shows a shared foul sewer that passes through the front garden; a separate surface water sewer discharges into the local brook; and water main to which the property is connected is located in the road.



## What does this tell me?

This analysis (including the phone call to get hold of the electronic copy) probably took me 15 minutes. It sounds a lot but it has raised the following issues:

- What is the problem with the gas? This sounds like a further investigation and a condition rating three even though the boiler is likely to be new;
- The property has never been on the market before and so is untested;
- What is the story about the cavity wall insulation? The EPC states there is none, yet the local authority search shows building regulation approval has been given for Rockwool cavity fill. Additionally, the elderly owner is likely to have had a grant to improve the energy efficiency of the dwelling. In this case, both the loft and cavity walls would have been insulated at the same time; another reason to doubt the judgement of the energy assessor;
- Because of this, I will be checking all the other energy related assumptions;
- I will be checking to see the boundaries are roughly in the same position as those shown on the plan;
- I will not need to check the radon map (but I knew this because of my local knowledge anyway);
- I will want to look for that brook running close by and I will be checking this on the Environment Agency flood map;
- I will be looking for the public sewer where it runs through the property to make sure it has not been built over and no grey water or foul connections have been made to the surface water system. I will also make appropriate recommendation for the legal advisor to check this.

On reading this article, you may shout 'checking the HIP is not part of our role; it is

*not in our terms of engagement'* and you would be right. I **choose** to prepare for my inspection by spending 10 or 15 minutes reviewing the HIP (usually over a coffee in the warmth of my office). In my view, this has a number of advantages:

- It actually saves me time as I do not have to go looking for a number of things – I know roughly where to find them;
- It adds to the quality of my assessment. By using information that is in the public domain (albeit beyond the duties described in the Practice Note), it gives me extra confidence in the report I produce, and;
- Hopefully, this will result in well informed happy clients who will come back to me in the future.

## What do you think?

*Like all surveyors, Alan has developed his own approach to his work. Do you use the HIP in this way? Do you think this approach is inappropriate? Please let us know your views because we want to encourage a debate about how we carry out our work. If you would like to contribute to the debate, please email your views to [info@blueboxpartners.com](mailto:info@blueboxpartners.com).*

## Movement in buildings: update of CIRIA guidance TN107

CIRIA, the construction industry research and information association, is to review its report on avoiding damage to buildings arising from movement occurring after construction is complete. First published in 1981, the report has led to improvements in practice. However, problems continue to arise often requiring expensive remedial work and delaying the occupation of buildings. Despite its age, the original report remains widely used, and while many of the fundamentals are still valid, practice and regulations have evolved in the intervening years. CIRIA wants to review the changes in regulation, policy, practice and case studies which have occurred since the original publication of CIRIA TN107. If you would like to get involved in this project, contact Alan Gilbertson at CIRIA at [lan.gilbertson@ciria.org](mailto:lan.gilbertson@ciria.org).

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