Book review

KNOCK IT DOWN OR DO IT UP?

F. Plimmer, G. Pottinger, S. Harris and M. Waters. IHS BRE Press, 2008, ISBN 9781848060203, £50, 72 pp.

This publication aims to examine the sustainability of refurbishing existing housing as compared with the demolition and construction of new housing within the context of the UK government's sustainable communities plan. It assesses the attitudes of the construction industry to the sustainability of new build versus refurbishment, and examines the methods available to assess the relative sustainability of either option. It provides background to the intent of the sustainable communities plan in supporting the delivery of sustainable communities in both urban and rural areas. This is illustrated through case study examples as well as outlining the drivers for sustainable development and improvement of the environmental performance of the housing stock.

The pros and cons of refurbishment as opposed to demolition and new build are presented concisely, and the sustainability

of each option is evaluated on the basis of a number of factors such as ongoing maintenance costs, environmental performance of existing housing stock, VAT (value added tax) regime and sustainable construction techniques. It highlights the need for detailed evaluation of these issues at the feasibility stage of any project in order to establish the best option to pursue. A critique of existing sustainability indicators and an analysis from a survey into industry attitudes about redevelopment versus retention of housing are also presented.

As a research publication, this report raises a number of questions that still need to be answered and the presentation could be improved to make the key conclusions more accessible. Nonetheless, it does provide a valuable resource as a basic decision-making framework for anyone involved in redevelopment projects.

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