# Annex 16:

# Communication with property owners to raise awareness of raising awareness of climate change, it’s mitigation and adaptation

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# Communication with property owners to raise awareness of raising awareness of climate change, it’s mitigation and adaptation

Owners of existing properties are a large group and together they are a potentially major force in the delivery of climate change mitigation and adaptation. Some property owners, such as organisations which have a large estate to manage have the staff and resources to raise their own awareness about the issues and how to mitigate them or to adapt to them. These include:

1. Public service providers (Local authority, health service etc.)
2. Social housing providers and communities
3. The managers of commercial estates
4. Developers constructing new properties
5. Builders working on existing properties for
   1. Public service providers
   2. Social housing providers and communities
   3. Managed estates

However, others are more limited in their capacity to increase their awareness and capacity. These include:

1. The owners and occupiers of private rental sector residential properties as part of a community
2. Owner, occupiers of private residential properties as part of a community
3. Owners and occupiers of lone residential properties
4. Owner, occupiers of commercial properties
5. Occupiers of rental business properties
6. Builders working on existing properties for
   1. The owners and occupiers of private rental sector residential properties as part of a community
   2. Owner, occupiers of private residential properties as part of a community
   3. Owners and occupiers of lone residential properties
   4. Owner, occupiers of commercial properties
   5. Occupiers of rental business properties

How we can best communicate with these property owners and occupiers who are remote from information that will help them mainstream measures that will be more beneficial to them in terms of their financial, physical and mental wellbeing?

Also how can we best communicate with the small building contractors and sole traders who are equally remote from the information?

## The scale of the problem: A focus on UK Housing – National Office of Statistics 2013

The following table shows the changes in household ownership and occupancy (in thousands) between 2004 and 2013. The changes are also shown graphically

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Year | Owned outright | Buying with mortgage | Owner Occupied | Council/ Housing association | Privately rented | Total Rented | All households | House construction |
| 2004 | 7,515 | 20,911 | 28,427 | 5,291 | 4,702 | 9,993 | 38,448 | 207 |
| 2013 | 8,158 | 17,567 | 25,725 | 5,976 | 8,594 | 14,569 | 40,329 | 141 |

The figures show that the majority of homes are owner occupied, although there has been a decline in owner occupancy, mainly through a reduction in the number of people buying with mortgages. At the same time there has been a largely equivalent of the number of people living in private rented accommodation, whereas there has only been a small increase in the number of council and housing association rented properties. Over the period, the annual number of new houses built has declined and at 2013 levels it would take significantly more than 200 years to replace the current housing stock. This means that if the current stock is to be improved to face the challenges of climate change, more than 25 million owner occupiers and more than 8 million occupiers of private rented accommodation need to be reached. Alongside the need to raise the awareness of this audience to climate change, there are also other issues such as the depletion of finite resources.

How can we reach 34 – 35 million householders and enthuse them about things that many of them don’t want to know about. It seems unlikely that we can get to them all. Stopping smoking in public buildings and the wearing of seatbelts didn’t happen voluntarily. IT took political leadership and Government Interventions to make things happen.

## Approaches to communication

One idea would to be to communicate with people who are actually doing something to their homes. This will reduce the number of people to communicate with at any one time. In oreder to achieve this it seems to make sense to identify who those people are likely to contact about what they are about to do and are who likely to be able to influence their choices.

There are times when local authorities are in contact with householders and so they have a role, but this is by no means always the case. Utility suppliers, (gas, electricity and water) also have the potential to and do communicate with householders. Another group includes builders merchants and DIY and home improvement stores who communicate with householders directly or through the builders that they employ.

Each of these groups of organisations takes steps to promote climate change adaptation and mitigation and sustainable use of resources, but they do it in their own way. Perhaps the most effective examples that exist in the UK are the pursuit of energy efficiency in new buildings through Government Regulation and the voluntary, Government sponsored “Green Deal” which aims to improve energy efficiency in existing stock, but outside these there is little co-ordination in a competitive commercial market in which maximising the shareholders’ wealth is the prime objective of directors.

A brief review on mainstreaming sustainability and climate adaptation and mitigation through the DIY and construction material and component supply sector in England accompanies this note. This review concludes that although information on sustainable products is available on the web sites of the national suppliers and on some regional/local SME suppliers, the competitive nature of the sector ensures that there is an emphasis on price on the product pages and in store. This means that the potential benefits of more sustainable products are not fully implanted in customers’ minds. Thus there is little positive promotion of sustainability. The exceptions to this are energy efficiency where there is regulation and sustainable sourcing of timber. Without some form of intervention it is unlikely that this will change as sales are dependent on price. Therefore, the promotion of sustainability needs to be promoted in some other way. It cannot be left to the suppliers to do this themselves as it flies in the face of survival in a competitive market, especially in the challenging conditions of the post-crash economy.

## Improving the situation

Possibly the most effective way would be to develop a national political consensus which in effect depoliticises the problem. Although there will always be differences in detail, common acceptance of the need to do tackle the problem would enable an appropriate degree of regulation to be put in place, which does not cause problems in a competitive commercial market.

Failing that, it might make sense for the organisations that can influence the decisions of householders to work with each other to develop a common approach to informing householders about the issues and how to take steps to deal with them in cost effective ways

Whether this is dealt with at local, regional or national scale or a combination of all three needs to be considered, but unless something is done, then householders will largely remain in ignorance of the need to adapt and mitigate with respect to climate change and to be more sustainable in the use of finite resources. That being the case they will simply continue to be driven by economic factors.