CONCRETE BLOCK ASSOCIATION

CBA Update

Autumn 2002

Contents

Chairman's Report

"A Good Year For Concrete Blocks"

The UK building block market has continued to perform well this year, sales from CBA members were up 2.4% at the end of February and are now at 3.8% above last year. The aggregate levy increase has largely been reflected in prices according to our customers, who themselves have expressed surprise at its acceptance.

House building statistics support the market improvement:

- **Private housing starts up 14.5% in the first six months**
- **NHBC registrations up 17.8% for the first five months**
- **UK average daily sales up 6% in the last three months**

The only sign of weakness in demand was in June when CBA member's sales appeared to collapse, 20% behind last year. The effects of the Queen's Jubilee, World Cup and the inevitable UK summer wet weather were all listed as reasons in commercial reports across the country. However sales in July returned an improved performance to last year and August appears to have started in a positive vein.

However, behind all the euphoria there are a few concerns that we need to take note. The equity markets on both sides of the 'pond' are highly volatile following the Enron and WorldCom scandals, house price inflation is still hitting record levels preventing many people making their first purchase in the housing market, and there is plenty of talk in the media of a potential conflict in Iraq. The house building industry relies on consumer confidence and as such, growth can be a fragile affair. We need to ensure that our industry builds on the gains of the first half instead of losing it all by the end of the year.

The spectre of timber frame housing is also lurking in the background. Despite a static performance of 10% of new housing starts for the last year and a half, Quarter 2 of 2002 saw this figure increase to 13% with increases in both England and Scotland. Clearly the work of the CBA and THB is still required to promote the benefits of brick & block construction.

"We should all be pleased with the progress this year but also conscious of its fragility."

Chris Hudson, Chairman,
Concrete Block Association

DTI Statistics For GB (000's sq.m.)							Product Share	
		Dense	Lightweight	Aircrete	Total Agg	Total	Aircrete	Aggregate
2001	1st Half	18381	11495	14866	29876	44742	33.2%	66.8%
	Full Year	36517	22669	29320	59186	88506	33.1%	66.9%
2001	Jan-Apr	11325	7355	9318	18680	27998	33.3%	66.7%
2002	Jan-Apr	12155	8000	10271	20155	30426	33.8%	66.2%
	% change	7.3%	8.8%	10.2%	7.9%	8.7%		

- The overall market for April 2002 YTD is almost 8% ahead of the same period last year
- Aircrete performance is slightly stronger but aggregate blocks share of the market is holding up well at circa 66%
- It is too early to asses from these figures what impact the introduction of the Aggregate Levy on 1 April has made.

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Technical Report

THB Brick & block built For living and for life

The Traditional Housing Bureau continues to be highly active in promoting the benefits of masonry construction:

- **P.R.**
  The scheduled number of press releases has been sent out with a further 7 agreed. Pick-up is less than the same period last year but journalistic response is evident in the second and third quarters - with still plenty of time left to recover.

  The analysis of cuttings and releases show that January to June are about 50% down on the same period last year; however, this has now improved. The large press cutting count we had last year was distorted by the cover given to the MORI Attitudes Towards House Construction Survey.

- **Publications**
  The "Home Life" has been updated and reprinted. A "Self-Build" brochure is now available to support THB presence at national self-build shows.

- **Exhibitions**
  Self-build shows held at Harrogate, Edinburgh and Bath & Wells have been booked.

  There is an increased number of visitors at all self-build shows, but in particular on the THB stand. This clearly demonstrates the need for a larger stand at events in 2003 thus enabling stand personnel to respond effectively to visitors demands.

- **Media Advertising**
  Ads are on schedule and additional ads will be run in Scotland.

European masonry unit Standards

The five parts of EN 771 (covering clay, calcium silicate, aggregate concrete, aac and manufactured stone) have now been circulated for formal vote which is the final stage of the process in preparing an EN. These have been reviewed by the Technical Committee and it was agreed that we should recommend a positive vote on EN 771-3 Aggregate Concrete units and EN 771-5 Manufactured stone units.

A number of editorial corrections were identified and these have been forwarded to BSI to accompany the UK vote. At this formal vote stage only editorial changes can be made. If there is a technical sticking point then the only option is to vote against the standard. Informal consultations with the various experts involved in drafting the standards suggest that most European countries will vote for the package of masonry standards. It is known however, that Germany has written to the European Commission complaining about a number of standards including the masonry unit standards, calling on them to intervene with CEN before EN 771-1 to 5 are published. The reason for this objection is unclear as it is written in uncharacteristically poor English but they seem to be objecting to the lack of detailed requirements for factory production control.

Part E of the Building Regulations for England & Wales

After a long delay, mainly as a result of prolonged negotiations with the HBF, a statement about the publication of Approved Document E was made in the House of Commons on Friday 5 July 2002. The Building Regulations division of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) hope to publish the new AD in the Autumn (they are aiming for September 2002) and the provisions are due to come into effect for residential buildings and conversions fully in July 2003. For new dwellings the requirements for pre-completion testing are to be delayed until January 2004 to give the HBF time to prepare the Robust Solutions document they have been lobbying for and which they wish to use in place of site testing. These would have a similar status to 'deemed to satisfy' provisions in earlier regulations. If HBF produce their Robust Solutions document in the extra 6 months they have been allowed for this purpose the AD will be amended and reissued with the Robust Solutions as an annex.

If HBF fail to come up with Robust Solutions acceptable to the ODPM by this deadline then the need to carry out pre-completion testing will come into effect for new dwellings as from January 2004.

Various trade associations including CBA have been invited to sit on the HBF Robust Solutions steering group. HBF are at present working to appoint an acoustics consultant to lead the group.

It is likely to be an extremely difficult task to identify robust solutions as, to be robust, constructions will have to work reliably and consistently and this will mean only high performance walls (i.e. significantly better than $45D_{nTw} + C_{tr}$ dB) will be considered. The wall type 1 & 2 solutions in the present AD are unlikely to satisfy these high performance criteria but a wall type 3 may. Non-masonry walls such as those used in multiplex cinemas, are also a distinct possibility.

Even if Robust Solutions are developed there is no guarantee that they will be used by housebuilders, as it may prove simpler and or cheaper to use a traditional construction and carry out pre-completion testing.

PII projects (Partners in innovation)

Bids for DTI funding for research have to be lodged in September & October 2002. CBA are likely to be involved in applications for several projects either as lead partner or as a partner in a bid led by others.

Fire Alarm

"Almost 20 years after a devastating *World in Action* exposé, the timber frame industry is back under the microscope. This time, government-backed research has found that poor workmanship is exposing occupants of timber frame buildings to potentially fatal fire risk."
- read the headlines of 'Building' magazine, 19 July 2002.

The report was produced after a private seminar, organised by the DTI and industry researchers, revealed evidence that badly installed drylining and fire protection measures mean a fire can spread uncontrolled through cavity walls. It is believed that one in four properties have problems with fire stopping. However, timber frame buildings are most at risk because their cavities are lined with combustible materials.

If you wish to download a copy of the 'Building' 19th July 2002 feature entitled 'FIRE ALARM' you can do so by visiting

www.cba-blocks.org.uk/news_press_release.html

Visit our website for the latest information - www.cba-blocks.org.uk

THB Brick & block built For living and for life

continued.

- **Website**
  We now have software to analyse hits and it is encouraging that there is an average of 63 visitors to the site per day, resulting in 34,000 pages being viewed over the 169 days monitored.

- **News Flash**
  "Fire Alarm" article in "Building" which reported on the results of a private seminar at BRE; this examined problems with fire barriers and other fire issues related to cavity walls. The article specifically focused on timber frame construction due to its combustible nature. The THB as a responsible body, felt it should bring this factor to the attention of national bodies and support our **"Right To Know"** campaign.

The following action was taken:

- Letter to Lord Rooker (ODPM) re. Sellers Pack, reinforcing role of traditional build for low cost housing programme.

The THB also wrote to:

- The Housing Corporation
- AOBC
- IBS
- NHBC
- University vice-chancellors "Student blocks could be death traps"
- Council of Mortgage Lenders
- RICS
- Scottish Assembly
- Welsh Assembly
- Fire spokespersons of political parties.

The content of the letters focused on government and housing corporations support for timber frame. A copy of the article was enclosed. We emphasised the need to reintroduce the "Sellers Pack" in support of the THB's **"Right To Know"** campaign.

- **THB Administration**
  With the recent appointment of Martin Clarke as Chief Executive of BPCF, the THB internal administration has been relocated to the BPCF's office at 60 Charles Street, Leicester; the new THB secretary is Sandra Reece.

For the sake of our external clients, the existing tel 01344 725757 remains unchanged and will be automatically transferred to Leicester.

The use of admixtures in building blocks

by Alan Stubbs, Sika Limited

Admixture use in the building block industry has risen steadily over the past fifteen years. They are now used extensively by the majority of manufacturers.

Admixture grades have been developed to cater for blocks made from natural rounded aggregates, crushed stone aggregates, lightweight and furnace bottom ash materials, or combinations of all these. They can also accommodate all the various production processes such as egg-lay and static machinery in all their different forms.

The advantages gained from admixture use are many and varied, though their main function is to enable significant economies in mix costs to be made.

Since the admixtures formulated on plasticisers have strong cement dispersal properties, even when as much as 15% of the cement is deducted from the mix design they are able to provide blocks of similar strengths to those with the usual cement contents. The cement dispersal admixtures are designed to have a neutral effect on the filling rates of the feed box and subsequently the weights of the blocks produced. This type of admixture is the one used most commonly by the block manufacturers, though there are many advantages to be gained from other formulations.

Some admixture types are formulated to be of benefit in assisting with the compaction effort of the block machine, for instance to improve the appearance of the blocks, particularly the fair faced products, or to give a more consistent block over the whole mould box. This is achieved by the ability of the admixture to lubricate the mix ingredients, allowing the mould box to fill easier, quicker and more evenly, resulting in less wear and tear on the block machine. The whole production process is speeded up because of the lower pre-vibration and full vibration times needed to make a satisfactory block. Compaction aids are also used extensively in egg lay block machines to assist with the more limited pressing and compaction efforts this type of equipment possesses when compared to static block machines.

For concrete blocks made outside or where curing space is limited, the use of a rapid hardening and accelerating admixture is a real benefit. Significant savings in time are made which enable the blocks to be moved earlier to speed up the production process during inclement weather.

Dense concrete block masonry often incorporates a waterproofing admixture. Waterproofers line the capillary walls of the hydrating cement paste, giving the blocks a water repellency and assisting pigmented blocks to stay cleaner and keep their depth of colour over a longer period of time. Waterproofers also give a reduction in the incidence of lime bloom (efflorescence) on the block's surfaces.

The costs of the pigment used in coloured blocks can be minimized by the use of a colour enhancing admixture, which works by thorough dispersal of the pigment powder through the mix. Colour enhancers also provide a degree of water repellency to the blocks to maintain the richness of their colour over time.

With an ever increasing range of admixture types and systems available to the block manufacturer, it is envisaged that the degree of efficiency and profitability obtainable from these chemicals will ensure that their growing use will continue into the foreseeable future.

Better Brickwork Alliance

The Alliance was initiated in 2000 to address the issue of skill shortages in the construction industry, particularly in relation to bricklaying.

The Alliance comprises representation from a wide range of interested parties including major housebuilders, trade guilds, unions, brick and block manufacturers, colleges, CITB and other trade federations led by the Brick Development Association.

The CBA are firmly committed to the aims of the Alliance and have pledged support in the following specific ways –

- For members to support colleges local to their production plants by the supply of materials, provision of information and expertise and facilitating visits. Information can be obtained from the Marketing Committee.
- Financial support towards the provision of prizes and awards for competitions directed at trainees.
- Further financial support towards the *'Book on the Wall'* campaign which seeks to promote interest in careers in the construction industry to secondary school pupils.

The Council of CBA regards the work of the Alliance as very important to the future of our industry.

"If they cannot lay them - we cannot sell them"