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An illustrious line

Which architect's building best celebrates 175 years of the RIBA?

WARMING TO THE WRONG THEME

Prince Charles had the ideal opportunity to engage with the RIBA on the overriding issue of climate change, but he fluffed it, says **Aubrey Meyer**

HRH PRINCE CHARLES' speech at the RIBA on 12 May was expected to address climate change and sustainability. In the middle of a row about the Chelsea Barracks, he described these as areas where common cause could be founded.

In the event, Charles spoke about climate change very briefly, saying, 'Your current president has encouraged your institute to take an active role in addressing climate change in the run-up to the Copenhagen conference, and if there is a compelling reason for my own foundation to co-operate with you in future it surely has to be around causes such as this. Along with many others I look forward to seeing a binding and fair treaty to emerge from the Copenhagen conference.'

In fact for several years now, under first Jack Pringle and then Sunand Prasad, the RIBA has championed a global concept to shape the response to climate change called contraction and convergence (C&C). Winning friends for C&C all over the world since 2005/6, the RIBA has made an effective contribution at the UN to help establish C&C as the methodological basis of achieving the Climate Treaty's objective, a safe and stable concentration of greenhouse gas in the atmosphere.

An effective outcome in Copenhagen this year is inexorably tied to C&C. By 2004, with the Kyoto Protocol already seen as too little too late, the UN said C&C was inevitably required to achieve its objective. Charles' long-time advisor Sir Jonathon Porritt also said: 'The most serious policy contender for



the next phase of climate change diplomacy is contract and converge', saying 'at some stage, still to be defined, but a lot closer than many politicians think, we must move toward a situation where every human being has an equal allocation of the atmosphere's net capacity to absorb CO₂.'

In the run-up to Copenhagen Lord Adair Turner, chairman of the government's Climate Change Committee, has told MPs C&C is the basis of the UK Climate Act. Many argue the UK claim to global leadership on this issue rests on that.

Charles could have walked into a warm welcome on this. Before his speech, Clarence House wrote and asked for news of progress with the C&C campaign and this was supplied. Publicly, *RIBA Journal* editor Hugh Pearman asked Hank Dittmar, director of the Prince's Foundation, whether it was 'fully signed up

to the C&C methodology for reducing global carbon emissions, as the RIBA is'. Dittmar replied: 'We're signed up to the concept, though not formally to those words.' That seemed promising but may help to explain why Charles' speech was so short on the substance of responding to climate change, sustainability and the RIBA's role in the C&C campaign. They just don't get it.

While Charles sensibly argued for 'joined-up and integrative thinking', and said elsewhere that we have 'less than 100 months to save the

The Prince's Foundation has designed this exemplar low energy house. Is it enough?

planet', he apparently fails to see in C&C what the eminent economist to the Australian government and a diligent worker for the global deal – Ross Garnaut – described as 'a global standard, now widely recognised as an outstanding and essential contribution to the global debate on what to do to avoid dangerous rates of climate change. The integrity of the argument is that C&C is mathematically rooted in the science of climate change while marrying the limit to future human emissions that avoids dangerous rates of climate change to the requirement of equal shares in the use of the atmosphere – subject to that limit. It embodies the economic political reality, that adjustment to equal per capita emissions entitlements will take time.' He said: 'It adds up to its stated outcome.'

As economists go, that sounds to me just like a good architect speaking.

Without an effective deal on climate change, the Chelsea Barracks ends up under water and the quarrel over style goes with it. No royal intervention on style or anything else can afford to ignore the political imperative of effective climate change mitigation or the emerging consensus for C&C.

C&C is not about words. Reflecting the natural order, it is logical, structured and provides a truthful, numerate basis on which to organise the global limits and reconciliation that we so urgently need, if doing enough soon enough is not to be further thwarted by doing too little to late. ■

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