

An Association for Earth Building in the U.K.

We write to you as someone with a noted interest in the renaissance of earth construction that has occurred in Britain over the last 10 years. This is a period that has seen the revival of regional vernacular earth building as living traditions, increased conservation and documentation of historic earth structures, the growth of skills training and employment of specialist craftspeople and contractors, the developing use of earthen materials in contemporary 'green' construction, considerable academic research to enhance our understanding of materials properties and increasing industrial research from commercial clay-based manufacturing companies.

The diversity of these developments has been brought about by a wide range of groups and individuals across the country and in many different walks of life, often influenced by developments in other countries. This work has been supported by regional organisations such as the Devon Earth Building Association and Eartha, created academic centres of expertise at Plymouth and Bath Universities and been the base for successful one-off events, such as TERRA 2000, an internationally significant conference organised by the ICOMOS UK Earth Structures Committee.

This variety has one thing in common; an interest in earth as a building material, but communication within this special interest group has been hampered by the diversity of its participants and the lack of an overall organisation representing all concerned. We feel that the time is now right for establishing a national organisation to bring together these diverse activities, so that each might be strengthened by an increased awareness of each others work and by creating a nationally recognised expert body that could promote its interests at a national and international level. Many other countries have such organisations, often based on a much smaller level of activity than is current in the U.K.

We therefore invite you to attend a meeting to discuss the establishment of an earth building association for the U.K. on the 23rd October 2007 at the training room at Upkeep, on the second floor at the Building Centre, Store Street, (off Tottenham Court Road), London. The purpose of this meeting will be to discuss the aims and organisational practices of such an association and to elect and authorise a steering group to draft the appropriate constitution documents to establish such an association. The organisation might then look to have an inaugural meeting in the Spring of 2008.

This organisation is not seen as a weighty organisation, burdened by a lot of beaurocracy, but as a big umbrella under which people with an interest in earth building can come together. Its aims would broadly be to promote the conservation, understanding and development or building with earth in the U.K., though the term 'earth construction' would need to be carefully defined.

There might have a one-day conference each year and an electronic newsletter, as well as a website that acts as something of a hub for members and the wider world. The special position of the existing regional groups should be recognised and there has been some discussion over the status of the ICOMOS UK Earth Structure Committee, which has not been particularly active in the last few years. There may be merit in re-casting this as an advisory subcommittee of the new association, but such a development would depend on there being sufficient active interest from potential participants, as well as on the views of the member of the current committee.

Membership fees would hopefully be modest to encourage a wide base and resources could potentially be sought for start-up costs from a number of places.

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At this stage it would be great to know whether you support this idea and have any comments, and to know whether you intend attending the meeting in October or whether you would like to be kept informed of developments. We would be grateful if you could communicate by email, if possible, and direct any correspondence to Tom Morton at Arc, whose contact details are given at the foot of this letter. Please also copy this invitation to anyone else you think may be interested.

Yours sincerely,

Dirk Bouwens, chair EARTHA
Peter Child, chair DEBA
Rowland Keable, In Situ Rammed Earth Co.
Tom Morton, Arc Architects
Peter Trotman, BRE Associate
Peter Walker, Bath University
Linda Watson, University of Plymouth, chair ICOMOS UK Earth Structures Comm.

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