

### 3. Timber Procurement

Timber is increasingly specified by architects, not just because it looks good, but often because it's better for the environment than other materials. So it is important for them to have confidence in timber procurement. What's also important to know is that most of the timber used by the UK construction industry is softwood sourced from Europe.

#### Europe's forests are in surplus production

Globally, forests are shrinking, with tropical and sub-tropical forests suffering as a result of illegal logging and clearance for subsistence crops and urban infrastructures.

Yet Europe's forests are growing. In fact just 64% of growth is harvested<sup>1</sup>. And Europe's 1,000 million ha of forest, spread over 44 countries, (amounting to 1.42 ha per capita) is growing annually by 510,000 ha<sup>1</sup>. This is not just because of the legal obligation to re-plant, but also because it is in the economic interest of forest owners to re-stock when forestry is economically viable. So using more wood in the UK encourages the increased growth of Europe's forests.

#### CPET – The Central Point of Expertise on Timber

The UK government has developed a timber procurement policy which requires central government to 'actively seek to buy timber from legal and sustainable sources. Local government is encouraged to comply'.

In order to provide information and advice on how public sector buyers and their suppliers can meet these requirements, the government has established the Central Point of Expertise on Timber (CPET). In addition to recognizing MTCC (Malaysian Timber Certification Scheme) as legal, CPET currently recognizes four certification schemes as both legal and sustainable:

- FSC (Forest Stewardship Council)
- PEFC (Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification)
- CSA (Canadian Standards Association)
- SFI (Sustainable Forest Initiative)

The website ([www.proforest.net/cpet](http://www.proforest.net/cpet)) provides step-by-step guidance and should be consulted when procuring timber for government or local government contracts.

wood for good Briefing Note 4 'CPET & UK Government Timber Procurement Policy' deals with this aspect of procurement in greater detail.

#### Certification

The simplest way to ensure timber is legal and produced with due regard to the environmental, ecological and community sensitivities, is to use certified wood.

The two main certification schemes operating in Europe are FSC and PEFC, and both will contribute to achieving BREEAM and EcoHomes ratings, while additional credits are available for FSC certified timber.

The soon-to-be-announced Code for Sustainable Homes will award additional code points based on the percentage of certified timber and timber products in accordance with CPET's rankings for schemes.

The European timber industry supports certification. No less than 35% of the world's certified forests - 87 million ha - are in Europe and over half of EU 25 forests - 80 million ha - are already certified, with certification continuing to grow. Although most European timber is softwood, there are also significant European supplies of many hardwood species.

While certification has, in many cases, led to improved practices, it is something of a paradox. It has been widely adopted in Europe, but has made little impact in the threatened areas it was intended to protect, with tropical low income countries accounting for just 8% of certified forests<sup>4</sup>.

It is also the case that, despite the progress made by the industry, there is not enough chain-of-custody certified timber in the marketplace to satisfy demand. It would be a perverse effect of a well-intentioned policy if a shortage of chain-of-custody certified timber were to encourage the use of alternative, less environmentally-friendly materials.

#### You can have confidence in softwood

Timber procurement is not so much of an issue when specifying softwood – and it's worth remembering that the great majority of timber used by the UK construction industry is sawn softwood or engineered softwood products – because over 97% of the softwood used in Europe (and in the UK) is sourced from Europe's forests which are 'generally stable, well-managed and in surplus production'<sup>2</sup>, where European forest owners are required by law to, as a minimum, replace the trees they harvest.



## Specifying hardwoods is more complex

Specifying hardwood is more complex, especially when it comes from tropical or sub-tropical forests. Again, it is sensible to put the problem in perspective. Not only is the UK hardwood market just a tenth of the size of the softwood market<sup>3</sup>, but 60% of the market is supplied by European forests, with the bulk of the remainder coming from North America (much of it certified, or from well-managed sources).

Only 9% of hardwood comes from tropical or sub-tropical forests<sup>2</sup>. However, it should be noted that, while Finnish spruce and birch plywood enjoy a significant share, more than 50% of the UK's plywood comes from Brazil, Malaysia and Indonesia (which are beginning to supply certified product) as well as China<sup>3</sup>.

## How to be sure of hardwood

To guarantee hardwood comes from a legal and sustainable source, ask for evidence of credible certification (FSC, PEFC, CSA, SFI). Other schemes, like MTCC and ATFS (American Tree Farm System) provide evidence of legality.

If you cannot find credibly certified supplies of the timber you want, ask a reputable specialist merchant to provide written guarantees of the legality of the forest source.

Timbmet Silverman, for example, is working with African, Malaysian, Indonesian and Latin American timber producers to develop supplies of a wide range of certified timbers, with FSC as the target, and has created a new interim label called 'Verified Progress'. Supplies of Verified Progress Sapele, Iroko, Idigbo, Utile and Greenheart are already available, shortly to be joined by Meranti. For more details visit [www.timbmet.com](http://www.timbmet.com).

Forest owners in the developing world need your support to move towards sustainability. A forest that pays is a forest that stays.

## The TTF Code of Conduct

All members of the Timber Trade Federation are required to comply with the Code of Conduct which provides a commitment to sourcing timber from legal and well-managed forests.

The Timber Trade Federation condemns illegal practices and works towards their complete elimination. It recognizes that the independent certification of forests and the process chain is the most useful tool available to provide assurances that the timber dealt in by members comes from legal and well-managed forests.

The TTF has set up the Responsible Purchasing Policy – a tool for members to help them meet the requirements of the Code of Conduct – which includes an on-line internet-based option, a joint venture between TTF and Trackrecord.

## Choosing wood wisely is the best choice for the environment

Wood is naturally renewable. Using wood from sustainably managed forests encourages further growth and an increase in the forest carbon sink. Wood is carbon-neutral; using wood instead of other less environmentally-friendly materials reduces the carbon dioxide emissions that contribute to Global Warming.

Wood is thermally efficient, reusable, recyclable, useful as a biomass fuel, and biodegradable.

<sup>1</sup> MCPFE, 2003, State of Europe's Forests, 2003

<sup>2</sup> IIED, Using Wood to Mitigate Climate Change, 2004

<sup>3</sup> TTF, Timber Statistics, September 2005

<sup>4</sup> H.C. Thang, Current Perspectives of Sustainable Forest and Timber Certification, 2003

## For more information

See wood for good Briefing Note 4 'CPET & UK Government Timber Procurement Policy'

See CPET information at [www.proforest.net/cpet](http://www.proforest.net/cpet)

See information about PEFC and FSC schemes at [www.pefc.org](http://www.pefc.org) and [www.fsc.org](http://www.fsc.org)

See information about the TTF Code of Conduct and a list of suppliers at [www.ttf.co.uk/buying/](http://www.ttf.co.uk/buying/)

