

# Marks and Spencer's Richard Gillies: "There is no plan B..."

An aerial photo of a burning rainforest. A graph of rising energy prices through 2015. Charts showing spikes in world energy demand. These images might not seem like typical slides for a construction industry seminar, but the relationship between climate change and property was top of the agenda at the 3rd November breakfast briefing hosted by Mace Plus, the contracting arm of Mace Group.

Richard Gillies, director of Plan A, CSR and sustainable business for Marks and Spencer, gave an engaging presentation on the business strategy behind Plan A, the retailer's pioneering sustainability and CSR agenda. Mace Group has worked with M&S for almost five years, and with Copenhagen's energy summit just around the corner, it was timely to hear from the director responsible for leading such a groundbreaking project.

Plan A is now at the very heart of the M&S brand and operations. While the outside world might catch a glimpse in graphics dotted throughout its stores, the agenda now permeates every aspect of the business. Richard opened by sharing his belief that a sustainable revolution is now imminent and his conviction that as with the industrial and technological revolutions, there will be abundant opportunities for businesses willing to seek out and develop innovative ways to meet the challenges.

## NO TIME TO WASTE

Why Plan A? Simply put, "because there's no plan B" for saving the planet from the disastrous effects of climate change, a realisation that is gradually dawning on the world's governments as they prepare to attend the forthcoming global climate change summit in Copenhagen next month.

Richard's approach reflects big environmental goals, but also acknowledges business drivers: *"This is about risk management, it's about finding motivations for change and innovation in your business and it's about protecting your company's bottom line, long-term."*

The M&S approach is focused on five strands: climate change, waste, raw materials, ethics (being a fair partner) and the health of its employees. Richard started by outlining how M&S will achieve the aim of making its UK operation carbon neutral within five years, a target that puts M&S way ahead of its competitors and allows it to carve out an advantage as the first truly 'green' retailer in the marketplace.

## HARD FACTS, BUT SIMPLE CHOICES

The company has already forecast that with likely increases in demand for diminishing reserves of oil, soaring energy prices will hit retail hard in the next five to ten years as the cost burden of sourcing and transporting goods around the world and lighting and heating thousands of stores becomes untenable. Richard knows that switching to green energy production and significantly reducing energy requirements is no longer about fad or fashion, it's the only way to maintain a profitable business long term.

M&S is also taking the message out to its extensive and complex supply chain by ensuring the facilities of its clothing suppliers are environmentally scored at LEED 'Platinum', achieved through the use of

up to 100% renewable energy, halving overall energy use and sending nothing to landfill. This is what is now expected of companies operating in the 21st century world, where brands' activities are scrutinised for ethical and business consistency.

## SAVE THE PLANET, SAVE THE FIRM

Richard closed his compelling presentation with a word of comfort for his audience: while Plan A has involved investment, the overall programme is projected to become cost neutral within just two years and will actually start saving the company money over the following three years. Viewed simply, as a connected set of cost optimisation and business streamlining objectives, Plan A would make perfect business sense even without its overarching environmental and ethical goals. And that should make sense for any business.

Time is short to solve the problems of global climate change so there needs to be a relentless focus on innovation. As Richard put it: "I have a challenge for everyone in the construction industry: don't just supply green solutions to the letter of the contract and add your fee. Look for ways to outperform your clients' goals, be ambitious for them."

For Mace Group, these messages resonate well with our existing initiatives and our teams across the company are already looking for opportunities to innovate as they go about helping organisations to meet the government's energy reduction targets. Mace Group is already leading on the non-use of landfill for construction waste and monitors energy use on every construction site, but there is clearly more to do. Mace Plus managing director Mark Castle commented: "There is a real sense of pace behind the sustainability agenda and for the construction industry, it's time to step up to the challenge. As businesses and individuals, we all have a massive role to play in creating a better environment for future generations."

Find out more about M&S Plan A on its dedicated website:  
<http://plana.marksandspencer.com/>

Find out more about Mace Plus:  
<http://www.maceplus.co.uk>

YOUR M&S

mace  
plus