

# Practice profile

## Robert Bilbie Consultancy

With the recent introduction of the compulsory Energy Performance Certificate, **Adam Endacott**, Deputy Editor, visited Robert Bilbie MCIAT and his practice to discuss their specialism in energy and environmental issues.

From his offices in the centre of Norwich, Robert Bilbie MCIAT has been an Energy and Environmental Consultant for over fifteen years. 'Back in the early 1990s,' he explains, 'energy rating was unheard of but I successfully led the way with this specialism and have become a leader in the field, most certainly in the East Anglia region.'

It was in 1991 that Robert left the familiar world of architectural services, as most Architectural Technology professionals know it, behind him when he decided to establish his own practice as an energy and environmental consultancy service.

The practice's journey over the past decade has been an interesting one with the development of energy rating

and efficiency and the introduction of environmental assessments. 'The workload of the practice really took off in 1995 when energy rating was included within the Building Regulations.

'This also meant training for everyone! For a seven year period, I was training all disciplines in the construction field from architects right through to those in local authorities within the East of England.

'It has also only been in the last decade that we can now produce multi-residential energy assessments from site visits or drawings as a desktop exercise. This includes stock profiling, where we can now work out average ratings for over 25,000 houses without leaving the office.

'For environmental assessment, this has only really gathered pace over the past eight years, working together to improve performance by EcoHomes and to comply with the Code for Sustainable Homes.

'A number of elements combine together for environmental assessment including energy, waste use, transport links, ecological value, daylight — it is a wide range of assessment and includes domestic and multi-residential.'

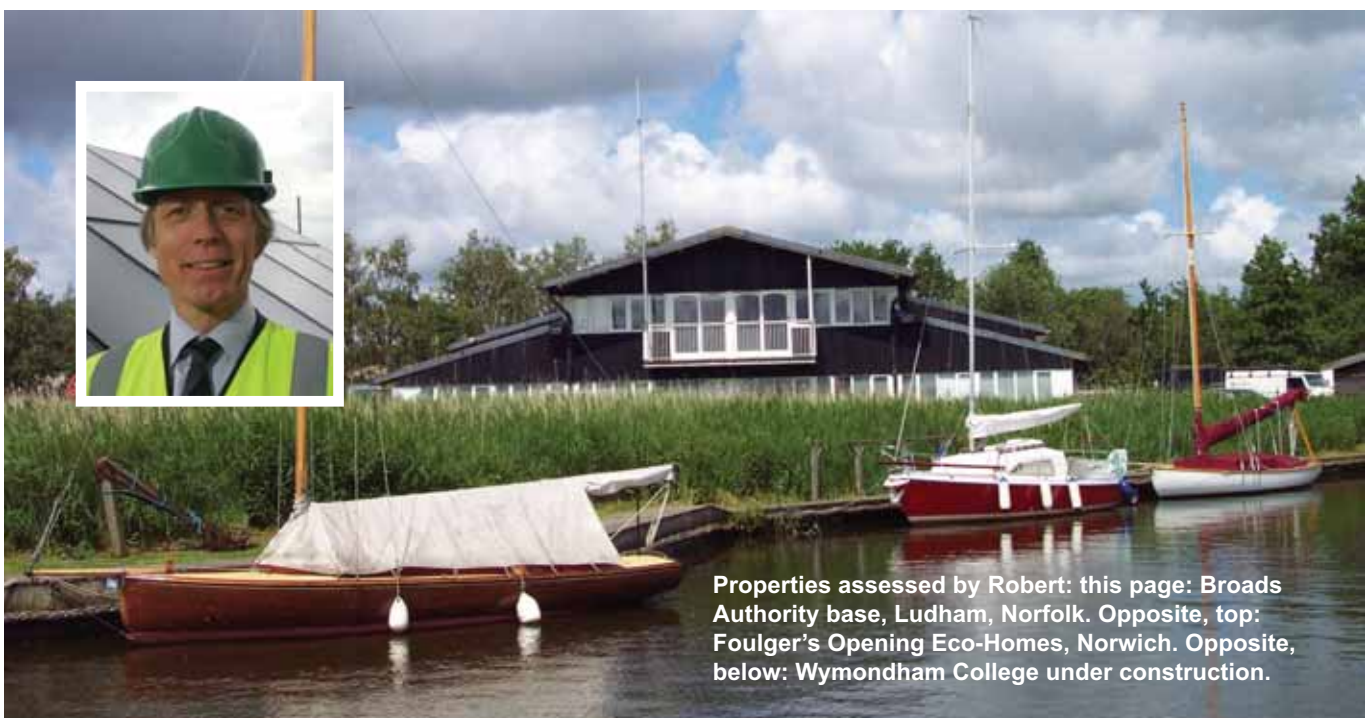
'Our work is to reduce carbon footprints and essentially we are assessing designs by others with influence on energy and environment performance.'

Working alongside Robert in his practice are a team of six players; three technical assessors and three administrative staff. 'It was always an ambition of mine to be self-employed; previously I had either worked for architectural practices or the local city council.

'My role with the council had been as the Energy Efficiency Officer, so I have always had a keen interest in this field. Actually when I began my career, in 1969, I worked with Chris Pike PPBIAT MCIAT and it was he who introduced me to CIAT (SAAT as it was then).'

Robert continues. 'When I began my own practice, nobody else was involved with energy and I was the first to achieve a SAP rating of 100 with a new build scheme to the north of Norwich. I still have ambition and would like to do BREEAM calculations for schools, offices and supermarkets.'

Robert qualified with an ONC in Construction and HNC in Building, joining CIAT in 1971. He has always been based in Norwich, and explains 'it is a nice place to live but for business it



Properties assessed by Robert: this page: Broads Authority base, Ludham, Norfolk. Opposite, top: Foulger's Opening Eco-Homes, Norwich. Opposite, below: Wymondham College under construction.



With the practice's specialism in energy and the environment, sustainability is an important issue for Robert as he explains, 'we need to think more about how buildings are procured and what happens to all the waste — we have to be self efficient and ask ourselves is there enough energy to survive? How do we reduce energy consumption in the built environment? We need to get this attitude instilled in people. Pre-1900 buildings are all solid wall so there is no easy fix and we need to look at other ways of generating energy.'

A typical day for Robert begins at 7:30 am, which allows him time to settle into a project before the office comes to life at 9.00 am when the day continues with phone calls, emails, managing the staff and attending project meetings and assessments. Robert's key role as a Chartered Architectural Technologist is to lead the team and he is very much 'hands on' with everything – most importantly understanding how the calculations and software works.

Something that frustrates Robert in his day-to-day work is that energy consultants often brought into a project too late; 'the initial concept designs and an energy strategy have to be right otherwise there will be a struggle throughout the project.'

Robert continues; 'the attention to energy should not just be an add-on or an afterthought. My view on the construction industry' reflects Robert, 'is that as a whole, it needs to calm down and not rush to get things built — the mistakes made today will come to light in future years, for example estates from the 1960s are having to be replaced.'

A highlight of Robert's career was receiving the CIAT Gold Award for dedicated service to the construction industry for energy efficient building design, 'I was honoured, proud and surprised to receive it and most importantly it was for energy efficiency' he says.

'I am very pleased to serve the Institute and my voluntary work has ranged from Regional Councillor to serving on various committees. It is difficult at times to do voluntary duties and run a practice at the same time!'

*With thanks to Robert Bilbie MCIAT  
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can be remote as there are no motorways — London or Milton Keynes would probably be better!

'However, the location hasn't affected my workload — the practice has become well respected in East Anglia with repeat orders from clients and recommendations from Building Control. Clients range from private individuals to professional designers and from house developers to builders. I pride myself on providing a first class service along with clear and easy to read documentation.'

Robert goes on, 'although we have a strong client base, I am also very aware of promotion and advertise the practice in directories and other mediums. I have a website in development and we are currently rebranding to refresh the practice and we now have a logo!'

When it comes to defining best practice, Robert believes that it is 'doing the job promptly and accurately,

and assisting the client to meet targets along with providing a professionally produced end product — it is all about being professional and friendly.' With continual changes in the industry, there are two things that have made the biggest impact on Robert's work: 'computers and the red pen!'

'Computers have played a large part with calculation software and assisting with desktop exercises and then the red pen — this is used to mark up drawings for energy efficiency and I have continued to use it thereafter for everything!'

So is there anything that Robert misses from providing the run of the mill architectural services?

'I do miss creating the project and involvement within the building process and ultimately seeing the end product! However, I am very proud of creating my practice and have become more proud of the work which I am doing today.'