



MINUTES OF SUBSIDENCE FORUM CURRENT AFFAIRS MEETING

Thursday 1 September 2016 11am
Building Research Establishment, Garston

PRESENT:	Rob Withers	Subs Forum (<i>Chairman</i>)
	Leslie Calder	Clancy Consulting
	Alan Cripps	RICS
	Neil Curling	Lloyds Bank
	Geoff Davies	Ellipta
	Neil Foster	MA Assist
	Daniel Hadfield	Uretek
	Andrew Harrison	Uretek
	Patrick Isaacs	Cunningham Lindsey
	Tim Pither	Subtilis
	Andrea Plucknett	Welwyn Hatfield Council
	Mark Scobie	Oriel
	Lauren Fairley	Subs Forum (<i>Secretary</i>)

COMPETITION ACT DECLARATION

Members were reminded that they agree to conform to the Subsidence Forum policy to comply with the Competition Act 1998. The meeting was convened and held in accordance with the Forum's Constitution of Rules. The Forum has in place a code of conduct and procedures to ensure compliance with all relevant competition laws and the meeting is subject to those procedures.

INTRODUCTION

R Withers welcomed the meeting in M Millership's absence, and reminded members of the Competition Act, which is given above.

PRESENTATION

R Withers then proceeded with the attached presentation 'The Weather: Wetter Winters, Hotter Summers', a copy of which is attached below at Appendix 1.

Appendix 1

PLENARY

Subsequent to the presentation, the meeting was asked how these potential meteorological changes might affect the subsidence market. The meeting considered the impact of these changes in terms of technical issues, delivery and premiums.

Technical

Property Values

The meeting considered whether the public would become more nervous about claims and subsidence; were there a drop in the market, there would be significant knock-on effects, as an owner would be unable to sell a property with an outstanding claim.

It was reported that there had been a reasonable jump for private claims for subsidence damage. It was also noted that when a property is sold, subsidence repair must be declared as a matter of course, whether said repair has been dealt with privately, or through an insurer.

Flooding and Property Values

It was agreed that flooding was currently more of a 'hot topic' than subsidence. It was noted that there had been a new British Standard 85500:2015, 'Flood Resistance and Resilient Construction: A Guide to Improving Flood Performance of Buildings'.

It was felt that flood risk assessments should be compulsory, but there are not at present enough trained operatives to carry these out. The meeting was informed that there was a movement to establish a qualification in flood risk assessment, as this might help in the current situation where it is not mandatory to have a flood risk assessment on a property.

There existed at present the Flood Re Scheme, operating for those living in flooded areas, who were unable to obtain insurance through the usual channels. This enabled those property owners to insure their property, but by means of the government working with the insurers and also local authorities through flood resilience grants of up to £5,000 per household. It was, however, felt that home owners themselves might be unaware of the availability of this scheme, since it was arranged via the local authority rather than directly through insurers.

Trees and Soil Conditions

The meeting suggested that trees and the condition of sub-soils were significantly greater influences on subsidence than the actions of hotter, drier weather. It was also noted that local authorities did not undertake a great deal of preventative action to address subsidence caused by trees.

Location Hot Spots for Subsidence and Flooding

The meeting considered the definition of a 'hot spot', and what the radius of that might be, in terms of subsidence and flooding. Issues with this arose, since there is no generally accepted definition of what a 'hot spot' and its area might constitute.

Repair Methods

Ground rehydration was mentioned as a preventative measure in terms of subsidence; it was noted that although a couple of schemes had been attempted, this method was expensive, and only really considered where a tree could not be removed.

It was also noted that when considering what repair methods should be employed in an area of subsidence, the design of the build environment was very much a deciding factor. This could also affect the disposal of water in areas suffering from flooding and subsidence, as to whether the water is disposed of at source, or removed from site prior to disposal.

There was also mention of repair methods, which attempt to change the plasticity of the clay, but these are still largely experimental. Root barriers, which seek to allow the cohabitation of structures and plants, were still being used as a method to forestall subsidence.

In terms of figures, approximately 90% of claims are mitigation and repair claims, and approximately 2% of claims are underpinned. Reopened claims, where mitigation and repairs have not been successful, comprised only a very small percentage, but would jump if there was a drought. Heavy use of brick reinforcement, it was noted, will not eliminate subsidence, and stabilisation of the ground was the prime concern.

In summary, it was felt that subsidence was often perceived as a low priority, but that in the longer term it will become a more prominent, if not pressing, issue.

Delivery

It was perceived that in the subsidence industry, there was a skills shortage. A lot of the traditional trades were perceived as still being in high demand, with bricklaying especially noted as being in high demand.

Premiums

In terms of liability cover, rates are still the biggest challenge; additionally, because of the low number of subsidence claims, many insurance firms have reduced staff numbers accordingly. Owing to staff reductions, it was noted that overall quality of work had declined, and that there were often insufficient staff available to undertake the necessary site investigations and end-user interface. Claims were down on all perils, with the exception of flooding. Insurers, it was felt, require a clearer definition of subsidence, especially as subsidence, in terms of sinkholes and similar issues, takes a lot of resources within the industry.

CONCLUSION

It was concluded by the meeting that the trend of hotter summers and wetter winters would not produce more claims. Claims, it was suggested, were largely steady at the present time, and this was due to a number of factors including climate and the action of trees, rather than specifically being due to a climatic shift *per se*.

CONCLUDING PRESENTATION

There was subsequently a presentation to the meeting by Uretek, detailing the activities and projects undertaken by the company. A copy of this is included below at Appendix 2.

Appendix 2

This concluded the business of the meeting

Circulation: All members

Appendix 1: *'The Weather: Wetter Winters, Hotter Summers'*

Appendix 2: *Uretek Presentation*