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PRESS RELEASE

A look at what's going on at Benfield ATT

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Give homebuyers "Free Trees for Life" urges Professor

Professor Michael Benfield urges the timber industry to dig deep.

"China is reported to be increasing its forest area by 1.2% each year" Professor Michael Benfield told an audience of timber and construction professionals at the *Wood Futures Conference* today. *"Although widely regarded as having a major negative effect on global sustainability, it seems China is bucking world trends and beginning to set a very positive example."* he added.

Held at London's Royal Festival Hall, the outspoken Professor stated that, while forests world-wide continue to be lost at an increasingly alarming rate *"Quietly and inscrutably China may be doing more than the rest of the world put together to address global sustainability"*

With Gordon Brown asking house-builders to deliver 3 million carbon neutral homes by 2020, Professor Benfield cited the un-replaced loss of over 10 million hectares of forest during the nineties alone, as a *"wake up call"* for the timber supply industry. *"Since the start of the Industrial Revolution humankind has made exorbitant demands for land inhabited by trees. Now, the science of Human Ecology is showing how global ecosystems provide a free 'maintenance service' to support the balance of nature"*, he explained. *"As the intricate relationships between natural, human, social and created environments are uncovered, so is the need to 'tread lightly on the earth' becoming better understood"*

According to *'American Forests'*, to ensure ecological, economic and social sustainability, healthy cities need 40% average tree canopy cover, while 50% is the minimum rural area goal. One reason for this is that trees 'clean up' manmade pollution. They absorb carbon dioxide, seen by governments and others as the major 'greenhouse gas' responsible for global warming, and put oxygen back into the atmosphere. Against this background, Washington's Emily Mathews of the World Resources Institute, believes that 'the whole sustainability world is (now) thinking about tradeoffs'. She wonders what humans will give up to have something else and keep the environmental goods and services we need.

Asking *"How can we be smarter about developing in the future"*, Professor Benfield suggested that a new 'ethical partnership' was required between the timber supply chain, construction and property developers. Working with them, their architects and planners this should aim to restore the urban and rural tree cover required for global environmental sustainability. To do so, it should also take an active interest in planning and property development and intensify efforts to be part of a related educational process for everyone involved. *"Promote a culture of 'tree consciousness. Create a charitable movement that will ensure each new home, road and highway makes a positive statement to demonstrate the importance of trees for life."* the controversial Professor advised his audience.

"The international timber industry has a massive responsibility. This goes far beyond merely re-planting the trees felled and processed each year", he argued. Seeing this as both an obligation and a fantastic opportunity to help address climate change issues and promote sustainability, he urged the sector to *"Provide house-builders with unlimited fruit, nut, blossom and shade trees free of charge. Persuade them to plant these with each new home they build."* warning that, *"If the timber and development industries do not respond positively, this could soon become a regulatory requirement"*.

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Editors Notes

Born in Coventry, Dr Michael Benfield PhD was educated at Warwick School, Loughborough, Coventry and Newcastle Universities. He is visiting Professor of Civil & Construction engineering research with the University of Wales, Newport and Managing Director of the Benfield ATT Group, specialist timber frame engineers, based in Caldicot South Wales. A member of the national New Homes Marketing Board, he also sits on the executive of the Home Builders Federation, Wales, and the WAG / FCW sponsored Wales Forest Business Partnership, for which he chairs Wood Knowledge Wales. This research and information dissemination body is charged with helping the Welsh timber sector achieve World Class status. A Chartered Environmentalist, Chartered Builder, Chartered Surveyor and member of the Institute of Wood Science, he is also one of the four co-founders of the International Green Party movement. Having researched Town & Country Planning and housing issues across Europe and the former Soviet bloc, he speaks internationally on environmental, timber, housing, construction and related issues. As a developer he built the first timber frame houses for sale in the Midlands and promoted the £60k affordable house idea, subsequently taken up by government, through the Birmingham Bull Ring 'House Race' reality TV programmes with ITV Central.

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