

BlueBox Newsletter

Technical briefing for property professionals

Issue 36 January 2015

Happy New Year for 2015 and book your place on our conference in March

Although we are never sure when to stop saying '*happy new year*' we thought we would take a chance and wish you all a happy and prosperous 2015. How well the year will treat the residential sector is not certain as the General Election is only 100 days away. Whatever the outcome, it is certain 2015 is going to be a year of change.

However, the BlueBox annual conference is certain and this year we have added an extra event in Milton Keynes. The dates and locations are:

- **10th March 2015 in Swindon. Holiday Inn Express just off J16 M4.**
- **19th March 2015 in Brighouse. Holiday Inn Hotel just of J25 M62.**
- **24th March 2015 in Milton Keynes. The National Energy Centre.**

The content of the day is still developing but the sessions will include

- BCIS rebuild costs on-line - what is required to undertake reinstatement assessments for more unusual residential buildings not covered by BCIS;
- Legal matters and value - an update on recent changes with particular reference to terms of engagement and what can be expected in your conflict of interest checks;
- Improving the energy efficiency of existing dwellings and assessing their effectiveness - the practical problems of super-insulating a typical house and how the strategy can bring benefits to owners;
- Risk management;
- Reporting on novel and unusual problems.

The day will commence with registration from **9.00AM** with the course commencing promptly at **9.30AM** and will finish by **4.30PM**. Refreshments will be provided on arrival and throughout the day including lunch.

Once you have booked onto the course we will send you the course details. The day will qualify for 6 hours formal CPD and this year we will be offering the event with a £30 discount at £145+VAT. Students (including those mature students undertaking the Diploma in Residential Surveying and Valuation) will be charged £99+VAT and to receive the student price please call 01904 442240 to book your place.

For more information and to book your place, click [HERE](#).

New Surveyor Comparable Tool from 'Rightmove' for SMEs

BlueBox *partners* has obtained a unique agreement with the country's leading property portal, 'Rightmove'. 'Rightmove Plus' has now been improved through the development of the **Surveyor Comparable Tool (SCT)** so that finding comparable information is much easier. The **SCT** combines access to the Land Registry data with '*Birds eye*' and '*Street view*' all in the same place and much more efficiently. In line with RICS requirements, the reports now provide an audit trail for complete transparency. For more info, please email info@blueboxpartners.com

We are now able to offer a subscription service combined with '*pay-as-you-click*' access to archived property sales data at a price that is unbeatable anywhere else. We can offer Rightmove Plus (which includes the **Surveyor Comparable Tool**, access to the Rightmove AVM, and Rental comparables) at £70 plus VAT a month, which includes 20 free clicks for the **Surveyor Comparable tool**. This offer is only available through BlueBox *partners* to small/medium sized firms and sole practitioners. We think this a "must have" for any valuer undertaking residential valuations.

Please contact Chris Rispin on 0845 260 3500, option 2 for more information.

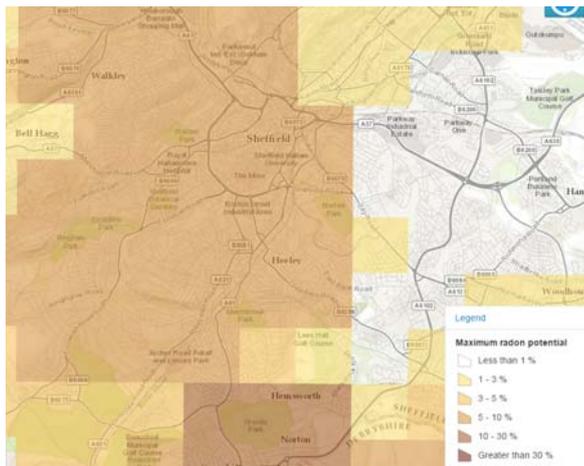
What's in this issue:

- BlueBox Conference March 2015
- Radon maps update
- Aircraft noise
- Inspecting for knotweed

Detailed radon maps available

Warning clients their future home may be in an area affected by radon is a long established role of a survey report (especially HomeBuyer Reports and Building Surveys). Although radon remedial work can be straightforward and relatively inexpensive, the potential health risks are widely known and clients need to be informed.

The main source of information is provided by Public Health England under its UKradon website where small scale maps can be downloaded from the 'Indicative atlas of radon'. As many readers will know, the darker the colour of the various squares, the greater the chance of a higher level of radon. In white areas on the map, the chance is less than one home in a hundred and greater than one in three in the areas shaded darkest brown.



These maps are helpful but as Sheffield map area shows (see above), the affected areas are imprecise. However, we have recently noticed a more detailed search function has been added and this allows a better definition. On the home page of UKradon website (<http://www.ukradon.org/>), click on the heading 'UK radon maps'. Select the map for the appropriate country, and then click on the 'explore the interactive map' button.

This should reveal an interactive map of the UK and entering the postcode of the property will bring up a larger scale map of the neighbourhood. Click on the 'show radon data' and much more useful information is shown as the adjacent map of Sheffield shows.

What advice do we give?

According to an explanatory video on the UK (<http://www.ukradon.org/information/differencesearchmap>), if the property is in a white area, it means that there is less than a 0 - 1% risk and no further action needs to be taken. However, if there is a property higher than 0-1% risk, this probability level will be allocated to the whole square even though many of the neighbouring properties may be much less. In these cases, UKradon recommends an on-line 'UKradon search'. This is easily arranged and only costs £3.90. In our reports, we pass this information on to the client and signpost the website.

Airports - noise contours, vortex repair schemes and live flight tracking

Living under a flight path can be an annoying nuisance and will impact on value and saleability of a property. Additionally, according to research published in the online British Medical Journal (<http://www.bmj.com/cgi/doi/10.1136/bmj.f5432>), people living in the vicinity of Heathrow airport with the highest exposure to noise were 10-20% more likely to be admitted to hospital for stroke, coronary heart disease and cardiovascular disease. Therefore, if there is an airport in your region, you should know about it.

General information about flight paths and 'noise' contours are available from government websites (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/noise-contours-on-os-maps>) for most major airports. You should also look on the airport's own website for more detailed local information. For example, Manchester Airport has a 'relocation scheme' and a 'vortex repair scheme' for property owners in the worst affected areas. Clearly this is important information for local surveyors

There are also a number of other 'airport noise' websites that can waste your time. For example, the Heathrow website (<http://www.heathrowairport.com/noise/>) allows you to track actual aircraft in real time. But be careful, we ended up mindlessly watching the progress of several planes for 20 minutes before a telephone call broke the spell!

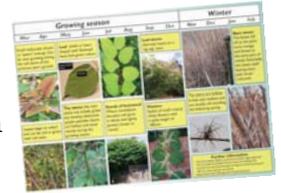


Are you missing Japanese Knotweed

At a recent residential conference, an experienced practitioner said ‘In my 42 years as a Chartered Surveyor, I have never come across Japanese Knotweed’. When I suggested this is because he may not recognise the plant and has probably missed it a number of times, our conversation became a little ‘frosty’.

This exchange is not an isolated example. Although there is no accurate data, in our experience the numbers of claims against surveyors for allegedly missing Japanese Knotweed (JK) are increasing. In some cases, the surveyors missed the plant even when it was in plain sight. In an effort to stem this growth (see what we did there), we thought we would review what a ‘reasonable’ surveyor should be doing during an inspection. For advice on what to do about JK once discovered, please see the publications described below.

Knowledge - as a minimum, you should have a copy of the RICS Information paper ‘Japanese Knotweed and residential property’ (IP 27/2012) and be familiar with its contents especially the identification chart at the back.



The inspection - this will vary with the type of instruction but even a valuation for lending purposes covers ‘*all of the property that is visible when standing at ground level within the boundaries of the site, and adjacent public/communal areas, and when standing at the various floor levels*’ (red Book UK appendix 10). Together with other RICS practice notes, we think this translates to:

- **Valuation** - a cursory visual inspection of enough of the grounds from easily accessible parts of the garden and upper rooms. This is to include a quick look over boundary walls and fences where possible;
- **HomeBuyer Report** - a similar approach but a more extensive ‘walk around’ in the accessible areas of the garden/grounds;
- **Building survey** - this is a more detailed inspection and you should ‘walk the boundaries’ more thoroughly. This could include inspections of heavily planted areas as long as this does not cause damage and is safe to do (in other words, get your wellies on!).

Whatever the circumstances, we think you **MUST** take photographs of the grounds so you have some record of what could be seen at the time of inspection (and potentially help you resist claims in the future). Ideally, these photos should be at reasonably high definition so there is a chance of distinguishing between different types of plants.

Follow the trail - in our view, the need to ‘follow a trail of suspicion’ is stronger with building surveys than valuations. The triggers for this ‘trail following’ includes:

- Known JK outbreaks in the area;
- local water sources, such as culverts, ponds, canals and lakes;
- public and private paths, cycle-paths, roads, railway or underground railway embankments and so on;
- large open spaces, car parks, cleared sites as well as overgrown areas.

TOP TIP: Get to know what a JK ‘stand’ looks like in the winter. Although it would have lost its leaves, we think it can still be recognisable from the stems. For further information see:

<http://www.nonnativespecies.org/home/index.cfm>

http://www.property-care.org/Homeowners.Invasive_Weed_Control.asp



Last year's growth of JK has overwintered and can still be seen amongst the current season's lush growth.

Contact

This newsletter is published by BlueBox *partners*. For more information you can contact us at Westgate Chambers, 3 High Street, Chipping Sodbury, Bristol, BS37 6BA.

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