

# The right tender specification texts for sustainable architectural projects

*Anyone who wants to build sustainably needs to use sustainable building materials. This means using products consisting of renewable, easily recyclable raw materials. But that's not enough: the materials need to be manufactured in an environmentally friendly way and the processes in which they are used must also be sustainable. It is the responsibility of building contractors and planners to formulate these requirements when the tender specification documents are drawn up. Otherwise, planning the project in line with sustainable architecture is unrealistic. Until now, this was easier said than done. Legally applicable criteria which could be used as a default position for tenders were not available. This is precisely what natureplus's new text templates are addressing: they offer legally verified formulations for tender documentation for sustainable architectural projects.*

## **Sustainable architecture is on the agenda**

Sustainable architecture and healthy living environments: that's what many consumers want. This is what politicians are looking for too, at least since September 2015, when the world community set new goals for increased sustainable development in the next decade and a half with "Agenda 2030", which was agreed at the UN sustainability summit in New York. The German federal government also wants Germany's existing building assets to be practically climate-neutral by 2050. In order that that sustainable building becomes the norm, the federal government provides annually updated advice in the form of the Guidelines for Sustainable Construction to both individual and institutional decision-makers on construction projects.

## **Whilst there is a will to achieve healthy living environments, there is not yet a way**

The will is there, both amongst private building contractors and public contracting entities. Until now, it was only the practical implementation which was difficult. This is because sustainable building products must be legally entrenched in practice at the tendering stage of construction planning. Since 2012, the legal framework has been provided by European procurement law. In a landmark judgement, the decision was taken that construction projects open to public tender could stipulate sustainable construction products in the tender specification documents. Private building contractors are in any case free to choose which materials are used in their projects.

## **Difficulties in laying the foundations: tender specification documents**

Until now, it has been difficult to implement these requirements in practice. They usually failed as a result of their environmental properties, which should have been stipulated in the specification of services within the tender documents. In other words: there was an awareness of what was desired from the end result – namely, sustainable building materials and building methods. However, there were no clearly defined and comparable criteria which made building materials into sustainable building materials. Nor was there a system for assessment. This is necessary, however, if specifications are to be comparable with one another. Or put more crudely: it was unclear what should be included in a tender specification in order to allow sustainable building materials and procedures to be proposed and then weighed up against one another.

## **Criteria are the be-all and end-all**

But what are the criteria for sustainable construction products and procedures which need to be defined in the tender specification? These have now been determined by the International Association for Future-Oriented Building and Accommodation - natureplus e.V. 21 environmental certification labels have been researched and the fundamental sustainability characteristics have been compared for six construction product groups:

- Surface coatings (varnishes, oils)
- Wall paints
- Coatings and structural boards (floor coverings)
- Insulating materials
- Wooden materials
- and plasters/screeds

As part of an elaborate process, natureplus has identified a total of 62 relevant sustainability criteria. By relevant, it is meant that the criteria can be meaningfully utilised in tender specifications, are easy to inspect and are accordingly valid in relation to EU standards. These criteria can be split into three categories:

- Restrictions on substances which are damaging to the environment and to the health
- Preservation of resources, the environment and the climate
- Consideration for social norms and safety at work

## **The natureplus service for sustainable tender specification documents**

natureplus has gone even further: using these sustainability criteria and in collaboration with lawyers, natureplus has formulated text templates for tender specification documents using these sustainability criteria. Planners and contracting entities – both public and private – can use these aids for tender specifications free of charge either in their entirety or in part. These aids can be used at any stage of the tender process: from the specification of services to the determination of additional criteria through to the specification of the conditions of execution, by means of which the contracting entity can ensure sustainable construction methods. To date, tender specification documentation has included the requirements for five of the six product groups. These include surface coatings, wall paints, insulating materials, wooden materials and plasters. Sample texts for coatings and construction boards should follow shortly.

### **Simple documentation using environmental labels**

The quality marks which are included are updated on an ongoing basis and are designed as an option to provide evidence of the desired qualities. In aids to tender specifications, the requirements are precisely and scientifically formulated in accordance with the Construction Tendering and Contract Regulations (VOB/A-EU). At the same time they list the label for each individual criterion which construction products are permitted to bear in accordance with VOB/A-EU in order to fulfil the respective requirement. This is how natureplus handles issues with European procurement law. Such issues could arise if only products which bear a certain label were included in the specification.

Insofar as the standard tender specification documentation can only be used a textual element, it is possible to seek out the precise characteristics which are important from the perspective of the issuer of the tender or for their purposes. The texts are then listed in the tender specification documents as part of the contractual object or as technical stipulations in the preliminary remarks to the specifications of service. All parties involved in the construction project know what is required and what needs to be fulfilled.

### **Encouraging prospects**

In future it will therefore be much simpler for building contractors and planners to entrench requirements for sustainable building materials in their tender specification documentation – and to fulfil their desire for a healthier living environment by means of sustainable architecture.

natureplus updates the tender specification texts on a regular basis, enhances them to include additional product groups and also offers a consultancy service.