

Industry unites for election

Construction leaders meet over dinner to plot first joint campaign since late 1970s.

BY ADRIAN BARRICK

CONSTRUCTION leaders are planning their biggest co-ordinated lobbying campaign since the late 1970s to convince politicians of the importance of construction in the lead-up to the general election.

Last Thursday, contractors', subcontractors', materials producers' and consultants' representatives held an initial dinner to discuss the plan at the Dukes Hotel in London's St James's.

Instigated by Alliance of Construction Product Suppliers chairman Robert Napier, the plan will require industry groups to put up to £250 000 in an election "fighting fund". This will pay for the employment of lobbyists and production of briefing documents.

The campaign, uniting the industry for the first time since the Campaign against Building Industry Nationalisation in 1978, is likely to be announced next

month and start in earnest early next year.

Industry leaders will emphasise that they are not pleading for more money to be spent on construction, but for politicians to start to invest in Britain's failing infrastructure.

One source at the meeting said: "The campaign will emphasise that we are not just doing this for the construction industry. To live in the next century, we need to drastically improve our

infrastructure. If we don't, there will be chaos. Look what's happening to the M25. Look what's happening to our schools. We decided it would be a waste of time for all the bodies to produce their own manifestos. We need to co-ordinate our efforts."

One idea being explored is for a network of companies to be formed to organise invitations to MPs to visit construction sites.

Construction Industry Employers Council chairman

Martin Laing, Construction Industry Council chairman Chris Vickers and Constructors' Liaison Group chairman Allan McDougall attended the meeting.

Alliance of Product Suppliers chief executive Nigel Chaldecott, Construction Industry Board chairman Sir Ian Dixon, CIB deputy chairmen Roger Squire and Tony Merricks also attended, as well as Hammerson director Geoff Wright, representing clients.

Contractors propose PFI hospital remedy

CONTRACTORS' leaders due to meet health secretary Stephen Dorrell this month to discuss the PFI health crisis will make three suggestions to ease procurement of hospitals.

The Major Contractors Group is to present Dorrell with a paper suggesting:

- That health authorities should have clear clinical strategies, so that when they examine NHS trusts' business cases for PFI hospitals they know the facility is needed.
- A revision of the "public sector comparator"

used to assess whether a PFI bid to build a hospital is better value for money than a public sector plan. Contractors believe the savings they offer are often underestimated.

A team of PFI experts that can be "parachuted" in to trusts to help close deals.

Taylor Woodrow chief executive Tony Palmer, Kier chairman Colin Busby and Sir Robert McAlpine director Malcolm McAlpine are expected to be among six contractors due to meet Dorrell.

Costain's shares suspended raising questions over future