Dear Dr Thurlery,

I am responding on behalf of the British Plastics Federation (BPF) regarding misleading comments that appeared in the online House & Home section of the Financial Times, entitled ‘A window on energy efficiency’.

The unfortunate article has been online for some days and was still there on April 24th.

The BPF is the trade association representing UK companies from the complete supply chain, including manufacturers of PVC-U windows.

The purpose of this letter is certainly not to convince you of the benefits of installing PVC-U windows, as given your career as an architectural historian, we understand and assume that an agreement on those terms is unlikely.

Similarly, we agree the installation of poorly specified windows, especially within heritage areas, does not help the reputation of the fenestration industry at large. Moreover, there have been cases where PVC-U windows have been fitted which have proven to be against the Planning Acts for the house or area – a practise that is not supported by the BPF. This has caused both a loss of our common architectural heritage and often substantial cost to the consumer and installer.

However, it is also true that PVC-U windows have been successfully approved and installed by Local Authorities where heritage designs were required. That is the case with Hartlepool Borough Council, where PVC-U windows are allowed in conservation areas.

We appreciate the time spent defending conservation areas, but for this article it seems accuracy has been prejudiced. Modern PVC-U windows not only benefit from greatly improved energy efficiency, but they are also able to replicate heritage aesthetics.
PVC-U windows play an essential role in modern day sustainable construction. There are studies that support this fact. By replacing single glazed timber windows with ‘A’ or ‘A+’ graded PVC-U windows, you could be saving up to £325.36 a year, in addition to savings of 2.20 tonnes of Carbon (these results have been generated by the GGF’s Energy Savings Calculator). And that is without the use of ‘thick curtains’ to prevent heat loss, as you mention in your article.

BRE gives a lifespan of at least 35 years and recyclability of up to ten times to PVC-U windows, which suggest that energy savings generated will cover their capital cost by far.

A new study funded by The European Council of Vinyl Manufacturers (ECVM) and conducted by Prof. Marangoni at Althesys has examined the ‘Total Cost of Ownership’ (TCO) for PVC products, and the most popular functional alternatives in some key applications. The results are robust and highly favourable for PVC products. For good thermal performance windows the payback period for PVC-U windows are significantly shorter than for equivalent performance timber or aluminium windows.

As the Financial Times is one of the most influential publications in the UK, we are anxious the information you provide is unbiased and fair. As it stands, the article could damage an important sector of the industry.

Therefore, please regard the British Plastics Federation as a source of reliable information on PVC-U windows in the future and do not hesitate to contact me for further information.

We will be most grateful for your response.

Yours faithfully

Francisco Morcillo
Industrial Issues Executive
The British Plastics Federation