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Shaping the sustainable building of tomorrow: Joint building certification by HafenCity Hamburg and the German Sustainable Building Council unveiled

DGNB special award Ecolabel replaces HafenCity Ecolabel

HafenCity Hamburg GmbH and the German Sustainable Building Council (DGNB) unveiled their new joint building certification at the “Building Green” sustainability fair. In future, new projects in Hamburg’s four development zones of HafenCity, Billebogen, Grasbrook and Science City Hamburg Bahrenfeld will be able to seek certification with the DGNB special award Ecolabel. The special award incorporates key elements of the previous independently run HafenCity Ecolabel into the DGNB System. Building owners and developers in the four zones will be able to benefit from the advantages of the DGNB System within the location-specific award and profit from an internationally recognized, ambitious certificate that is compatible with national and international funding schemes and regulations.

As a sustainable urban development tool, the building certification has a significant impact – on designing high-quality, climate change-adapted cities and neighborhoods as well as on the overall societal challenge of responding to climate change. As well as the contribution it makes to important environmental aspects, certification increases the market value and value stability of a building, improves the health and well-being of users, builds reputations and generates improved competitiveness and innovative power.

HafenCity Hamburg GmbH recognized the potential of building certification for urban development very early on and in 2007 developed the HafenCity Ecolabel, Germany’s first system for certifying sustainable construction. Certification was made a condition for the award of planning options on building plots in 2010 and has since ensured high sustainability standards throughout the district. As the mark of a distinctive quality standard, the ecolabel has been continually developed and is still in use at its highest level of certification, platinum. HafenCity has taken on a pioneering role through this precedent-setting development, playing a key part in anchoring sustainability ideas in the real estate industry and supporting and promoting the transformation of the construction sector to embrace climate-friendly building solutions.

This success story continues now with the publication of jointly developed building certification by HafenCity Hamburg GmbH and DGNB. The DGNB special award Ecolabel was designed specifically for the four inner-city zones of HafenCity, Billebogen, Grasbrook and Science City Hamburg Bahrenfeld and gathers together the sustainability requirements for new projects on plots developed by HafenCity Hamburg GmbH and its subsidiaries. Here, the Special Label takes up central aspects from the previous independently run HafenCity Ecolabel, linking them with the DGNB System.

For many years, operating an independently run certification system was a necessary, effective and motivating tool to establish ecologically sustainable construction in HafenCity. In view of the high standard since reached by the DGNB certificate and its comprehensive integration with national and international funding schemes and regulations, maintaining local sustainability certification seemed less and less sensible.

HafenCity Hamburg GmbH contributed valuable impetus to the development of the DGNB System at an early stage. The system assesses the sustainability of buildings over their entire life cycle, integrating around 30 different criteria depending on building type. While it is intentionally broad in its spectrum of applications, the DGNB special award Ecolabel defines requirements that are future-oriented, uniform and particularly relevant

locally, also taking the environmental characteristics of the four zones into account – especially their inner-city location, marked in particular by high urban density, a large number of buildings to be constructed close to one another, and good connection to city-wide (transport) infrastructure.

The DGNB special award Ecolabel enables building owners and developers to benefit from the advantages of the established DGNB System within the location-specific award. Through an integrated verification process based on the criteria of the DGNB System, building owners and developers receive regular DGNB certification in addition to the special award, without any additional effort or costs. They not only benefit from a streamlined process that enables them to fall back on a large pool of skilled expert advisers coupled with established methodological and documentation standards, they also receive an internationally recognized, ambitious certificate that is compatible with national and international funding schemes and regulations such as BEG (federal funding for efficient buildings) or ESG verification within the EU Taxonomy.

The thematic focus of the DGNB special award Ecolabel is on the ecological aspects of building certification. Accordingly, it primarily addresses the active contribution to climate change mitigation and adaptation through the promotion of biodiversity, compatible microclimates and energy generation from renewable sources close to the building, as well as the avoidance of carbon emissions during building construction and operation. A further focus is on conservation of resources and circularity with regard to energy, water, and building materials achieved by circular construction methods. In addition, barrier-free accessibility and socially and environmentally compatible mobility lie at the heart of the special award.

Dr Andreas Kleinau, CEO of HafenCity Hamburg GmbH:

“In order to counteract climate change and make our contribution towards climate neutrality, we see it as our task to continue to drive forward the transformation of sustainable construction in the real estate sector consistently and decisively. I am pleased that, in the DGNB, we can count on a well-connected partner who has been working on this issue just as ambitiously as we have for many years. The publication of our joint special award future proofs the already very high sustainability standards in our four urban development initiatives of HafenCity, Billebogen, Grasbrook and Science City. At the same time, we are using the cooperation as an opportunity to make our role as an innovation partner in the maintenance and further development of the DGNB System even more effective.”

Dr Christine Lemaitre, CEO of DGNB e.V.:

“Instead of always reinventing the wheel, we should put more of our energy into achieving uniformity in the standards. The cooperation between DGNB and HafenCity Hamburg is an important signal here that something like this is possible. It is just not comprehensible in this day and age that new working groups are continually being funded with public money to develop things that have long since been adequately researched and tested in practice.”

Pooling the expertise and long years of experience of HafenCity Hamburg GmbH and DGNB creates valuable synergies that will systematically continue and reinforce the transformation of sustainable building already successfully embarked on in the four development zones. In the DGNB special award Ecolabel, the cooperation partners have developed a powerful tool able to respond flexibly to new and changed demands. In view of the challenges of climate change, climate-adapted, resource-saving building solutions will gain steadily in importance. The DGNB special award Ecolabel stimulates the development of such innovative solutions and is already setting standards that are indispensable when it comes to forward-looking urban development. Due to their special qualities, certified buildings not only deliver long-term advantages in marketing, letting and sales, they also make a significant contribution as role models and pointers to paving the way for a climate-neutral future in the building sector.

About the cooperation

HafenCity Hamburg GmbH and the German Sustainable Building Council (DGNB) share the common goal of demanding and promoting sustainability in the construction and real estate industry and firmly establishing it in society. In the HafenCity Ecolabel and the DGNB System, they have developed effective, dependable and similar tools that have been regularly updated and adapted to new situations and opportunities in recent years. This process of development has always been accompanied by a close sharing of expertise and a trusting, productive collaboration. On October 5, 2022, at the Expo Real real estate trade fair, both partners signed a comprehensive cooperation agreement in which, among other things, the development of a joint special award was decided. This will now replace the existing independent HafenCity Ecolabel.

HafenCity Hamburg GmbH

Implementing major urban development initiatives and creating whole new city districts is a major responsibility. In the past two decades, HafenCity Hamburg GmbH has comprehensively demonstrated that it has a command of all facets of urban development criteria, and the complex process of planning, negotiation and implementation. This is also true of creating sustainable buildings, which HafenCity Hamburg GmbH has advanced for many years, not only through its own Ecolabel, but also by promoting innovative, forward-looking concepts. In recent years, HafenCity has become a test bed for sustainable building, and the management company's own future headquarters, the "zero-emissions building", is setting new standards in carbon neutrality and circular construction. With HafenCity, Grasbrook, Billebogen and Science City Hamburg Bahrenfeld, HafenCity Hamburg GmbH and its subsidiaries are now responsible for four major urban development initiatives in Hamburg, each with specific environmental and development characteristics. Consistent with a special sense of ecological and social responsibility, these developments are united by a high degree of exemplary quality and make a significant contribution to Hamburg's path towards becoming a livable city for tomorrow.

German Sustainable Building Council – DGNB e.V.

Founded 2007, the DGNB today has more than 2,000 member organizations and more than 10,000 certified projects in around 30 countries, making it Europe's biggest network for sustainable building. In the DGNB Certification System, the independent non-profit organization has developed a tool for planning, optimizing and assessing sustainable buildings, indoor environments and neighborhoods that helps to raise the tangible sustainability of building projects. DGNB Certification assesses the sustainability of buildings over their entire life cycle. Depending on building type, around 30 different sustainability criteria are included in the assessment. These are continuously updated by independent panels that include experts from HafenCity Hamburg GmbH.

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