

# Zero carbon failure on old buildings

What steps can be taken to tackle the huge energy wastage in existing properties?



## OPINION

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When it comes to cutting carbon emissions from the UK building stock, we need a three-pronged approach. The first priority is de-carbonising the grid.

The second is all about promoting low and zero carbon new build. And the third requires a co-ordinated national strategy to radically improve the performance of existing buildings.

Last week's Renewable Energy Strategy announced by the Department of Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform is great news for the first priority - it takes us an exciting next step towards a truly low-carbon UK.

Previously announced initiatives such as the Code for Sustainable Homes are already going some way towards addressing the second priority.

But what about the third part of the package? Sadly we still do not have a coherent and effective strategy to deal with the huge energy wastage in the existing building stock.

Why does this matter so much? Well, consider that more than 80 per cent of the 2025 building stock has already been built. Looking at just housing, there are about 23.7 million dwellings in Britain. Half of them are more than 50 years old.

A fifth are more than 100 years old. This means a major part of our building stock lacks sufficient insulation, heating controls or other measures to

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save energy - and that puts us among the worst performing countries in Europe.

This issue has already been identified time and again as the single most important and potentially effective area where UK carbon emissions could be slashed.

There is even considerable consensus on what needs to be done, especially now that we are just months away from a fully operational energy rating and certification scheme in place that includes identification of cost-effective energy efficiency measures for all buildings.

First we need to coordinate and boost the various fragmented initiatives such as Warm Front, CERT and other programmes.

### Incentives to take-up

Then, crucially, we need some effective fiscal instruments or tax incentives to drive the take-up of energy-saving improvements.

If you want to see an example of how it can all be done at a national level, look no further than Germany and its initiative to upgrade all existing buildings by 2020.

But for now, the UK's Renewable Energy Strategy has promised another consultation by Defra to be published this autumn - the latest in more than eight years of consultation on this topic.

Like the rotating blades of a wind turbine, it looks like we are going around in circles again.

The fact is nobody wants to wait another 18 months for the results of another consultation. We already know exactly what needs to be done, and the construction industry is ready to go.

Now is the time for the Government's strong aspirational leadership to become strong implementation leadership.

Dr David Strong is chief executive of inBuilt and the founder of the UK Green Building Council