

Headlines

“Businesses declare sweeping support for tighter regulation and planning systems to achieve net zero goals”

Ahead of the crucial UN Climate Change Summit, COP26 next month, leading architectural, engineering, planning and construction companies are demanding the government introduce a carbon tax/law on ecocide to tackle the climate crisis and say VAT should also be reformed to promote refurbishment over new-build projects.

Uniting as the umbrella group “Built Environment Declares”, they say these changes are needed to meet the UK’s net zero carbon targets and the wider response to the climate crisis.

They are also pressing for changes to building regulations and planning systems such that:

- embodied carbon calculations and targets are mandatory at planning stage and planning authorities should have embodied carbon quotas
- embodied carbon regulated through building regulations
- post occupancy evaluation should be mandatory
- building regulations should regulate performance in-use and health and wellbeing metrics

“We are strongly committed to making changes in our own practices, but changes in regulation, taxation and legislation are essential to achieve the rapid and profound reduction in carbon emissions legislated by the UK Parliament.”

Background

The built environment, through construction and use, is responsible for over 40% of global CO2 emissions.

In the lead up to COP 26, a survey of attitudes across UK built environment professional firms has measured the level of their concern and commitment to change.

This survey was returned by over 200 UK businesses including architects, contractors, building services, civil, and structural engineers, interior designers, landscape architects and project managers. All surveyed firms are signatories to the Built Environment Declaration of Climate and Biodiversity Emergency launched in 2019. Within this declaration, they commit to *strive to “...meet the needs of our society without breaching the earth’s ecological boundaries will demand a paradigm shift in our behaviour”*.

The survey took the form of a questionnaire to discover the level of a signatory’s commitment to specific changes in their own practice, in regulation and in legislation.

In their own practices, over 95% of firms agreed they must:

- Commit to zero carbon targets in their own businesses
- Set targets for net positive social/environmental impacts
- Prioritise planetary health and human wellbeing in their projects.

Regarding regulations that prescribe good standards of practice, over 85% of firms agreed:

- Whole life carbon tracking of projects must be required as part of building regulations and that a high level of urban greening should be mandatory.

- Building Regulations should regulate energy performance in-use by mandating Post Occupancy Evaluations as well as regulating the CO2 emissions inherent in construction materials and processes (Embodied Carbon)
- Planning authorities should have budgets or quotas to limit the amount of embodied carbon they grant permission for in any given period
- Professional institutions should make an explicit shift in their missions and goals to prioritise planetary health which includes human wellbeing

Regarding government policy and legislation, over 85% of firms agreed:

On taxation:

- A high and rising carbon tax should be implemented to accelerate the shift to net zero.
- VAT should be reformed to promote refurbishment over new-build.
- Taxation should be shifted away from labour and towards the use of resources to incentivise resource efficiency and create jobs in the circular economy.

On setting higher standards:

- Publicly procured and/or funded projects should strive for regenerative design and development (net positive).
- All Local Authorities should prepare 100-year development visions as a basis for intermediate stage plans that are aligned with regenerative (net positive) development.
- Government should fund a nationwide programme to embed the principles of a regenerative and distributive society to maximise planetary health and human wellbeing.
- Government should join the 'Wellbeing Economy Governments Partnership'(WEGo) and develop policies and legislation consistent with scientific data on what is necessary to achieve one-planet thriving including Doughnut Economics.

On legislation:

- Government should implement a Future Generations Act.
- Government should implement a law of Ecocide.

THE RESULTS

Whole life carbon calculations (or informed estimates) and targets should be mandatory at planning stage and should be a factor in determining whether a project is granted planning permission.

Insights	
Strongly agree	164
Somewhat agree	49
Disagree	11
Don't know/ no comment	0



Building regulations should regulate embodied carbon of construction.

Insights

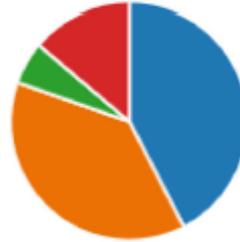
Strongly agree	177
Somewhat agree	40
Disagree	6
Don't know/ no comment	1



Planning permission should only be granted if an Urban Greening Factor (UGF) of 0.4 is achieved.

Insights

Strongly agree	95
Somewhat agree	85
Disagree	13
Don't know/ no comment	31



Redirect development to previously degraded sites wherever possible and include the new Environment Bill Biodiversity Net Gain targets for "Nationally Significant Infrastructure" (currently excluded).

Insights

Strongly agree	147
Somewhat agree	58
Disagree	4
Don't know/ no comment	15



Commitment to Post Occupancy Evaluations (POE) should be mandatory for planning permission for all new buildings, major refurbishments and their associated land.

Strongly agree	130
Somewhat agree	78
Disagree	6
Don't know/ no comment	10



Building Regulations should regulate energy performance in-use (Post Occupancy), not merely predicted.

Insights

Strongly agree	127
Somewhat agree	77
Disagree	9
Don't know/ no comment	11



Building Regulations should include health and wellbeing metrics similar to the Living Building Challenge.

Insights

Strongly agree	124
Somewhat agree	77
Disagree	10
Don't know/ no comment	13



Planning authorities should have budgets or quotas to limit the amount of embodied carbon they grant permission for in any given period.

Insights

Strongly agree	101
Somewhat agree	84
Disagree	29
Don't know/ no comment	10



A high and rising carbon tax should be implemented to accelerate the shift to net zero.

Insights

Strongly agree	133
Somewhat agree	75
Disagree	12
Don't know/ no comment	4



VAT should be reformed to promote refurbishment over new-build.

Insights

Strongly agree	191
Somewhat agree	25
Disagree	4
Don't know/ no comment	4



Publicly procured and/or funded projects should strive for regenerative design and development (net positive).

Strongly agree	196
Somewhat agree	27
Disagree	1
Don't know/ no comment	0



All Local Authorities should prepare 100-year development visions as a basis for intermediate stage plans that are aligned with regenerative (net positive) development.

 Insights

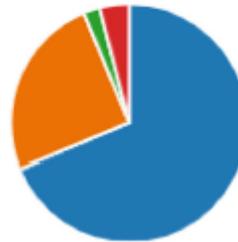
Strongly agree	121
Somewhat agree	82
Disagree	11
Don't know/ no comment	10



Government should fund a nationwide programme to embed the principles of a regenerative and distributive society to maximise planetary health and human wellbeing.

 Insights

Strongly agree	154
Somewhat agree	56
Disagree	5
Don't know/ no comment	9



Taxation should be shifted away from labour and towards the use of resources to incentivise resource efficiency and create jobs in the circular economy.

 Insights

Strongly agree	143
Somewhat agree	68
Disagree	1
Don't know/ no comment	12



Government should join the 'Wellbeing Economy Governments Partnership'(WEGo) and develop policies and legislation consistent with scientific data on what is necessary to achieve one-planet thriving including Doughnut Economics.

 Insights

Strongly agree	149
Somewhat agree	54
Disagree	2
Don't know/ no comment	19



Government should implement a Future Generations Act.

 Insights

Strongly agree	146
Somewhat agree	58
Disagree	7
Don't know/ no comment	13



1. Government should implement a law of Ecocide.

Insights

Strongly agree	129
Somewhat agree	64
Disagree	10
Don't know/ no comment	21



Professional practices should establish metrics for regenerative design (net positive social/environmental impacts) and publish project targets + achievements annually.

Insights

Strongly agree	139
Somewhat agree	74
Disagree	9
Don't know/ no comment	2



Practices should make an explicit shift in their missions and goals to prioritise the goal of planetary health including human wellbeing.

Insights

Strongly agree	185
Somewhat agree	37
Disagree	0
Don't know/ no comment	2



Professional institutions should make an explicit shift in their missions and goals to prioritise planetary health which includes human wellbeing.

Insights

Strongly agree	195
Somewhat agree	26
Disagree	0
Don't know/ no comment	3

