

## **Blog – Addressing the retrofit challenge**

In 2019, the UK became the first major economy to pass net zero emissions law, requiring the UK to bring greenhouse gas emissions to net zero by 2050.

The UK Green Building Council (UKGBC) estimates that the built environment contributes around 40% of the UK's total carbon footprint and with a current housing stock of around 29 million homes, the energy performance of the UK's existing housing stock must be improved if we are to achieve our long-term emissions reductions target.

The private housing stock also has the highest concentration of buildings deemed below the Decent Homes Standard and are more likely to be rated below the EPC target Band C. Older homes were prevalent amongst this group, with 34% of homes built before 1919 classed as non-decent. These were estimated in the 2017 English Housing Survey to need an average investment of £10,000 to bring them up to the standard. This compared with just 2% of homes built after 1990 classed as non-decent.

Repairing, maintaining and improving (RMI) the existing housing stock therefore presents one of the most significant barriers to decarbonising the UK's built environment, and without doing so, the net zero target will remain out of reach. This monumental task will require significant Government intervention, private sector investment and, most importantly, long-term political will and cross-party commitment.

Historically, a lack of confidence in long-term policy direction has impeded the built environment sector's ability to invest in low carbon technologies and skills, thereby weakening the resilience of the construction supply chain. This has been exacerbated by stop-start policy and eroded consumer and industry trust following to the failure of past initiatives such as the Green Deal and most recently, the Green Homes Grant.

From a policy perspective there is no single silver bullet solution that will help to prepare the built environment for a low-carbon, digital- economy. A concerted effort is required - one that will involve multiple policies and careful coordination to ensure that the individual initiatives within the mix complement each other rather than create conflict or confusion.

This is why the Construction Leadership Council's (CLC) Domestic Repair, Maintenance and Improvement working group has published its National Retrofit Strategy – a twenty-year blueprint which sets out how the construction industry can work with the Government to retrofit the UK's existing homes.

The strategy has been modelled over a programme period from 2021 to 2024, and cycles through four phases – firstly underpinning capability, then educating households and training industry, before an intensive period of work, and then a ramp down of pace to focus on hard-to-treat properties and the phased redeployment of resources to other sectors.

The strategy calls on the Government to invest an initial £5.3 billion over the next four years to stimulate the retrofit market, which will have positive effects not only on the environment but also on job creation, healthier homes and a reduction in consumer spending.

Over 50 organisations in the built environment have already backed the strategy and I encourage others to join the cause.