



COP26 EAST HAMPSHIRE

Buildings Action Group October 2021 Report

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Context

Approximately 19 per cent of the UK's total emissions come from heating our buildings: homes comprise 77 per cent; commercial buildings 14 per cent; and public buildings 10 per cent. To meet net zero, the building stock needs to be nearly completely decarbonised by 2050.

The widespread deployment of energy efficiency measures across the UK's building stock will be a key component of a credible and cost-effective strategy to meeting 'net zero'. The UK's building stock remains one of the most energy inefficient in Europe.

The UK has a diverse building stock that will require different energy efficiency remedies. Only around 15 per cent of the existing stock was built after 1990, meaning that most homes were built before the introduction of any standards for insulation and energy performance. Policies that deliver "a one size fits all" approach to upgrading buildings will prove unsuccessful.

Currently, 78% of the energy to heat homes comes from gas.

Housing developers continue to build homes whose standards are insufficient to meet the requirement to decarbonise, including the installation of gas boilers, which are currently planned to be banned from use in new homes from 2025 (just over 3 years away). Without much more stringent standards imposed through the technical standards, these objectives will not be achieved.

This is all in the context of a period of declining financial and policy support for energy efficiency.

Our group comprises members from various organisations that are central to the subject of sustainability and energy. It was decided to split our discussions into three sections, reviewing 1) National Level Government Policy; 2) Local Government Policy and local plans; 3) Engaging with people in East Hampshire to build understanding and encouraging action by the individual. This was to help develop clear and achievable targets that can be from national policy through to the individual actions of local people.

The aim of the Buildings Action Group is to assist East Hampshire toward being a leader in national building energy performance. The focus has mostly been on domestic buildings, but the matters discussed apply to all building types, including schools, commercial properties, and community facilities.

National Level Policy

Our group set the task to shortlist three or four strong national points, reviewing those that would have the most impact and for credible and realistic adoption by national and local government. We also tasked ourselves to develop strong headlines to generate interest and debate. The delivery of the targets and promises needs to be as immediate as possible, and therefore globally the investment in averting catastrophic climate change must be an absolute priority.

New building and construction

1. Planning and technical instruments such as the building regulations and planning policy framework tools should empower local authorities to set exemplar parameters, enabling

flexibility to diverge and adopt higher standards than are currently possible through policy requirements. Local Authorities need to have the opportunity to be able to do this now and not have to wait for legislative changes, with some vehicle to free them from National Planning Framework constraints on energy efficiency. This should expect considerably higher standards within the building regulations and strong standards requiring exemplar development, thus empowering planning policy and local authorities to require the highest standards, and to generate opportunities for financial incentives. The building regulations need to be significantly improved as soon as possible. There are various opportunities, existing and emerging standards, but these need to be adopted as soon as possible to empower all parties to provide an integrated engagement between national and local agencies, energy providers, developers and building owners.

2. The useability of thermally high performing airtight buildings needs to be considered to avoid some issues arising from air quality within the buildings. The affect of Covid and rising temperatures needs to be factored into the design parameters so that sustainable natural ventilation is always available.
3. It was suggested that there should be developed a national spatial plan for the sustainable use of land. This should map out the assets contained within the given area and should arrange and develop these to achieve stated goals to enable sustainable use of land that focuses on climate change, sustainable development and transport, energy use, wellbeing and natural eco systems.

Existing buildings

1. There should be a national strategy for the retrofitting of existing buildings to enable them to become more efficient in terms of energy usage and for viable alternative means of heating that avoids the use of fossil fuels. This needs to be adopted by many, there is a need for trusted advice, the imparting of knowledge in a clear and understandable manner, and clear and viable financial incentives for people to adopt the necessary changes to their buildings to make them perform as well as is possible. The means of these incentives could involve VAT, grant funding and finance initiatives to incentivise people to spend money to save energy and carbon costs. The Government's Clean Heat Strategy is long overdue, and this should include stable subsidies and financial incentives committed for a long enough period and at high enough levels to enable clean heat to be financially viable for all building types. This also needs to address the increasing problem of fuel poverty.
2. The imposition of VAT on retrofit and refurbishment has the effect of making these 20% more expensive than it needs to be, making it often more cost effective to demolish buildings. Sustainable practices should avoid demolition and encourage and incentivise creative repurposing and retention of existing buildings to save their embodied carbon.
3. There are several initiatives and agencies, including HCLG for planning and BEIS for energy, that need to develop integrated approaches to ensure that retrofit becomes easier to deliver

Knowledge and training

1. The country must ensure that we have in place the necessary and exemplar national skills and knowledge to enable the full and proper integration of renewable technologies and sustainable construction. This skills base should relate to all forms of construction and development, including effective retrofit of the existing stock of buildings. These skills are lacking at present, and policy needs to extend to education and training with well-resourced learning and facilities, with the aim of resolving the shortcomings in the training system and greatly expanding the availability of training in retrofit and sustainable building techniques.

2. Local skills in sustainable construction and retrofit and the use of local firms to undertake this work is essential for this sustainable process. Government schemes – such as the GHG – should incentivise this. The government should plan for the development of a well-trained and high-quality workforce, working with schools and young people to give the options post-16 that are relevant to this field. This should include a full acknowledgement of the importance of T levels and technical qualifications. The need is also for gas fitters to be retrained as heat pump engineers. Funding for training and teaching, and incentives for people to teach these skills is desperately needed.

Infrastructure

1. It is essential that the country has in place the full infrastructure to provide and support the availability of zero carbon energy and the means to serve new development and retrofit of existing property. This will require both national and local power networks to be able to provide sufficient energy, and energy standards to support the increasing demand for zero carbon energy. This needs to include for sufficient levels of power from zero carbon sources to serve heat pumps, alternative energy, electric vehicle charging, to replace the current networks distributing fossil fuels and carbon energy sources. This will require the power connections to new and existing buildings to be sufficient and in retrofit upgraded to meet the demands for zero carbon energy sources.

Local Policy Recommendations

Local Policy is probably the level at which most people will become engaged in these matters, through engagement with County, District, Town, and Parish councils. In this area this group reviewed the actions that could and should be undertaken by Hampshire County Council, East Hampshire District Council, South Downs National Park Authority, and the Town Councils and Parish Councils within East Hampshire. This is where National policies and instruments filter into the local arena.

There exist in East Hampshire several local organisations with the green agenda at heart. These local climate action networks include ACAN and PECAN. They are a trusted resource in East Hampshire, with scope for the Local Authorities to work with and support the work they are already doing.

Local Plans and Neighbourhood Plans should be revised to require the highest energy efficiency and sustainability standards for new build and renovations. This should include life cycle assessments of the construction materials to ensure a low environmental impact and embodied carbon. There should be a process that enables Local Authorities to improve the energy efficiency parts of their local plans much more quickly than the usual long process.

The Emerging Local Plan should incorporate the correct environmental planning policies regarding new build and should require:

- Insulation levels equivalent to at least the old Code 5
- A requirement to install solar PV
- Designs to respond to orientation for solar gain yet avoiding overheating, maximising natural light and ventilation, and shading from cold winds
- Use of non-carbon heating, such as heat pumps, district heating, or other low carbon technologies

Whole house retrofit plans

1. Local Authorities have a role in mobilising and supporting trusted existing and new local groups and organisations that provide information and knowledge to people about sustainability, climate change and renewable energy, enabling people to understand and invest in the most effective modifications to their homes.
2. Local Authorities to support exemplars at neighbourhood level to make sure that the knowledge and resources are available to secure the skills and suppliers needed locally for retrofit projects. This could enable EHDC to build on the work of the Super Homes initiative.
3. Local Authorities could underwrite a programme of commercial lending, to enable lower interest rates for works to homes involving sustainable and green agenda proposals thus enabling people to source cheaper finance for sustainable retrofit projects. Sustainable retrofit should be viewed as a means to increase comfort and to reduce the environmental and financial costs of the property, thus balancing the financial benefit of undertaking retrofit works.
4. EHDC could support a grants clinic to help householders navigate the grants landscape, helping them make the correct decisions about the work that they can do to their homes.
5. Data on the energy efficiency of the local housing stock is a key resource that needs to be significantly developed. There are various organisations that collect data, and key to this is bringing together these sources. At present there is limited data sharing from initiatives such as the GHG programme, which hampers EHDC's ability to, for example, data-match. EHDC may consider running a local data repository which could be on a parish basis, such as has happened with broadband installations. Difficulties may arise from collecting some of this data, with the monitoring of gas and oil consumption being harder. The hosting of data gathering through vehicles such as MyEHDC could be a useful voluntary data gathering exercise.
6. Fuel poverty and fuel costs need to be factored into the processes, and the monitoring of energy consumption could be a resource that EHDC could make available to households.

Local power networks and generation

1. There should be an engagement between local authorities and the area energy providers to proactively investigate opportunities for local renewable energy generation. Local authority engagement at the planning stages is necessary to ensure suitable and sufficient renewable energy is available for new development.
2. Local authorities need to make sure that energy networks are responding to the environmental and renewable agenda, and the distribution of this to local areas. Local Plans should support maximisation of opportunities to create local energy.
3. Community energy generation: there should be an aim that all communities of a reasonable size should be able to develop a local energy co-op if they so choose. Local authorities could help facilitate this with advice and guidance.

The rural agenda

1. Supporting homes in small villages to decarbonise is more challenging in terms of outreach and engagement. Particularly where the power networks are limited in terms of capacity or availability.

2. There is a need for Local Authorities to produce and provide material to support parishes and Parish Councils to lead the local populations in the decarbonisation of rural properties. Encouragement to local people to help them understand the benefits of investment in sustainable and renewable enhancements, not only in financial terms, but also in terms of comfort, wellbeing, and carbon reduction. Local Surgeries with solutions and funding options could assist this process.
3. Grant funding to help the retrofitting of village halls and community buildings into sustainable, model buildings could help generate interest in the local population.
4. Leveraging of Parish Plans & Village design statements will have an important role in developing interest and engagement.

Engaging with non-domestic premises, (including schools and businesses)

1. Businesses and schools, focusing on their core purposes, should be provided with specific assistance and knowledge to help them engage in improving their facilities.
2. Local authorities could identify the businesses who will be remaining in their premises for the greatest period, using the Carbon Trust model. These will be the businesses who could benefit most from retrofit.
3. Engaging businesses on the transition to low/no carbon operation is vital. There is a need to demonstrate value-return from projects, and projects that have taken place in Hampshire can be used as examples.
4. Non-domestic premises should be encouraged to make use of footprint calculator apps. There is a need to raise awareness of the fact they exist and how they can help.
5. Petersfield Climate Action Network would like to set up an office in the library in Petersfield town square. This could be supported by the local authority providing personnel to be available in the office to offer advice at certain times. Similar facilities should be made possible for other local groups.
6. There is a need to support SDNPA and EHDC collaboration, for example on issues like development gain and standards.
7. EHDC could survey its existing non-domestic property stock and look at retrofit options. Buildings such as leisure centres are large emitters of Carbon Dioxide, and the commercial arrangements with the operators need to require investment in significantly reducing the carbon emissions from the facilities. EHDC need to develop a long-term strategy that addresses these matters and incorporate this into their outsourcing arrangements.

Individual Action Recommendations

Knowledge for the individual (the person in the street) is where people are most likely to think about the climate and what they can individually do about it. Helping them become engaged, enthusiastic and to give them a strong understanding is key to moving the zero-carbon agenda forward.

Educating – The key impacts of doing things differently and making small changes, and the benefits of doing so.

1. Encourage community level networks to support behaviour change at a neighbourhood level. Local Authorities could help to facilitate this.
2. To develop a strong voice for young people and schools.
3. To engage with businesses – making it clear to them the financial incentives, the challenge being to impart the information to local businesses. Business opportunities arise from the climate agenda and therefore they need to exploit new markets and the changes in consumer behaviour. Local trade bodies, MP, EHDC/SDNP, talking to local businesses, advertising. EHDC have higher levels of engagement with businesses now because of their role administering COVID grants and could leverage this to impart information.
4. EHDC could hold an online forum for businesses, with a headline ‘transition from the pandemic’.
5. EHDC could become involved in projects to help people to better understand energy and sustainability ratings such as Energy Performance Certificates, how the rating system works, and how they can improve their own rating. This could involve referring people towards trusted cost/payback and carbon footprint calculators (an example being the Energy Saving Trust).

Practicalities – Strategy plans for businesses, schools, and homeowners. Helping people access the information they need in their specific contexts to help set them on a trajectory, and so that they are informed about which elements will make the biggest impact. Trusted sources of information are the key matters.

1. There is a need to sustain the behaviour change that educating people can prompt, and to sustain the enthusiasm for the process.
2. To create lists of local organisations, specialists and businesses that offer trusted services relating to climate, renewables, and sustainability, and to develop a trusted process for this to be imparted to as many people as possible. Could EHDC support the creation of a support data resource?
3. EHDC used to have forums for community groups to come together to develop strategies – is this something that could be reinstated to respond to the challenges of climate change?

Engagement with local networks

1. Local authorities to engage with climate groups and organisations, educational establishments, and local groups to help make people aware of the climate agenda and what is happening locally and to enthuse them to interact with the process. These initiatives need to be underpinned with adequate funding from central government.
2. Local Authorities to underpin this engagement with a local communications strategy, in which governmental and non-governmental actors can take part. To make sure the information sources are appropriate for a diverse population and differing demographics – using all possible information mediums, from social media to the parish magazine, to engage with as many people as possible. Local WhatsApp groups have flourished in the pandemic and therefore may be an effective engagement with certain sectors of the population. A strategy is necessary to encompass all the various mediums operating locally through which the communication can be imparted.

Follow-Up Actions

To Government

1. **Planning** – ensure that Local Authorities have the freedom to adopt higher energy efficiency and climate-related standards in their planning policies than those in current national frameworks.
2. **Clean Heat** – ensure that new clean heat subsidies (including the replacement for RHI) are generous enough to outcompete fossil fuel options and to ensure the regime stays in place for the long term.
3. **VAT** – urgently investigate the zero-rating of retrofit and refurbishment costs.
4. **Education** – invest heavily in technical and further education infrastructure to create a skilled retrofit workforce and redeploy local jobs in the gas fitting sector.
5. **Infrastructure** – engage with power networks to ensure that the infrastructure can support the availability of zero carbon energy.

To Local Authorities

1. Revisit the draft Local Plan, with the aim of bringing its policies on sustainability, energy efficiency, environment, climate, and nature in line with best practice.
2. Investigate funding through grants and loan facilities for domestic retrofits.
3. Set targets for and encourage the construction of local renewable energy assets.
4. Create a grant fund for retrofitting of community buildings, churches etc. to serve as local exemplars.
5. Provide financial and other support for community energy and sustainability groups.
6. Develop a data resource on the energy efficiency of the local housing stock.
7. Produce and provide trusted information on decarbonisation for parish councils and individuals.