

Retrofit failure could spark new energy crisis, warns BESA

2 years ago



A collective failure to retrofit commercial buildings to meet net zero targets threatens to ignite a new energy crisis, according to the [Building Engineering Services Association](#) (BESA).

Reacting to a [hard hitting new report](#) from the property and construction consultant [Ridge and Partners](#), BESA said both public and private sector organisations were “burying their heads in the sand” and failing to meet their energy efficiency and carbon reduction responsibilities.

The Ridge report: [‘The Role of Retrofitting our Non-Domestic Buildings in the Race to Net Zero’](#) found that just one in four public or private sector organisations had invested in making their buildings more sustainable and just one in ten had a retrofitting budget. Most had ambitious net zero plans, but few included the energy performance of their building.

Researchers spoke to 101 property and facilities bosses and concluded that the problem was at board level. Retrofitting to improve energy efficiency was seen as a low priority for 86% of building managers, according to the report, and 23% of the people managing buildings in the largest companies had not been involved in any form of net zero planning.

They also hugely underestimated the rate at which buildings were replaced in the UK. Over a third told researchers that fewer than 39% of the UK’s current building stock would still be in use by 2050, but it is likely to be more than 70%.

Sleep walking

Ridge partner Matt Richards said: “Vast swathes of UK organisations are sleep walking towards a building crisis. Too many organisations appear to assume that come 2050 our existing building stock will have been

replaced with more efficient new buildings, but this simply isn't the case. The bulk of buildings we see around us will still be in use."

BESA's technical director Graeme Fox said the report's findings were shocking as they revealed a huge lack of awareness among the people who had the power to make our built environment more sustainable and resilient.

"This shows that there is a lot of talk about net zero and corporate flannel about sustainability but when it comes to taking action many are not investing in the most obvious and straightforward measures," he said.

"Retrofitting existing buildings can be done at speed and more cost-effectively than some of the grandiose 'statement' measures being proposed by some organisations," added Fox. "If they are serious about energy security and protecting themselves from another price shock, they should be retrofitting now."

The Ridge report concluded that the government could do more to make retrofitting financially attractive with 52% of facilities managers calling for refurbishments to be VAT free. Almost half added that business rates discouraged investment in retrofit and a similar number called for financial incentives.

There were a few 'retrofit myths' exposed including a high number saying they would not need to do anything to improve their building if the grid was carbon neutral and 24% arguing that retrofitting would not make a significant difference to their carbon footprint.

"We clearly need to make a stronger business case for building retrofit," added Fox. "FMs are struggling to get the message through to board rooms that this is an area which could not only make a huge difference to their 'green' corporate credentials but also significantly reduce their running costs."