

Call to action from Mace to ramp up efforts to retrofit UK commercial and public building stock

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Mace, the international consultancy and construction company, is calling on the UK construction industry and government to ramp up efforts to retrofit non-domestic buildings through a series of recommendations; including adopting the principle of 'retrofit first' – a presumption in favour of redevelopment in UK planning policy.

The policy recommendation, included in its report 'Transform & Renew – Making non-domestic buildings fit for a low carbon future' published today, aims to promote the re-use and repurposing of existing non-domestic buildings – which represent 13% of UK building stock but account for 23% of carbon emissions from buildings, with more than 3.5m non-residential buildings requiring retrofit in the next ten years.

Identifying the lack of focus on non-domestic retrofit as a 'grave oversight', Mace outlines 12 recommendations to the UK government and the wider built environment industry to turbocharge commercial and public sector building retrofitting. These include providing more clarity on energy efficiency regulations for commercial buildings, reviewing retrofit funding allocations for the public sector and exploring new fiscal incentives around the reuse or recycling of materials in the built environment.

Government officials recently paused a high-profile mixed-use development project requiring demolition due to concerns about embodied carbon. Introducing a 'consideration of retrofit' for every major planning application that involves demolition, would result in fewer schemes being suddenly halted in the future – providing more certainty for developers and the wider industry.

The report notes that demolition may be the best decision for a building, such as when the existing

building was poorly designed or if it did not meet modern building safety standards. However, by explaining the need to demolish there would be greater assurance for stakeholders that sustainability has been considered.

The company hopes this report will bring non-domestic buildings into the public and political consciousness alongside housing when it comes to debates around retrofit.

Jason Millett, CEO, Mace Consult, said: “Focus on retrofit in the UK by policymakers, quite rightly, has often been on the UK’s housing stock – but this has meant public and commercial buildings have often been overlooked. With over 1.75m non-domestic buildings in the UK, the vast majority of which were built before 1970, it is critical that this imbalance is addressed to pursue positive, sustainable change.

“From our work delivering decarbonisation and retrofit services around the world, we know that both public and private sector organisations face significant hurdles in delivering retrofit projects. Through the recommendations put forward in our paper, we want to support the government to take the steps required to empower the built environment to decarbonise existing estates with confidence and at pace.”

Gareth Lewis, CEO, Mace Construct, said: “If construction is to reduce its impact on the environment, we must aim to re-use and repurpose as much of our existing building stock as possible. Many buildings may not require demolition and can be transformed and renewed through retrofit into fantastic new assets, savings tonnes of embodied carbon in the process. We are therefore urging the government to mandate consideration of retrofit at the planning stage to avoid unnecessary demolition.

“However, demolition can sometimes be necessary because of poor design or critical safety reasons, and it’s therefore important we avoid binary debates on new build versus retrofit. If demolition is required, then the reasons for this should be made clear from the onset. Developers should also consider how elements of the building can be retained, reused or recycled – adopting a circular mindset to construction.”

See Mace’s Transform & Renew report [here](#).