

Focus on retrofit to get net zero back on track, says BESA

2 years ago



The government should accelerate plans to retrofit buildings to get faltering net zero progress back on target, according to the [Building Engineering Services Association](#) (BESA).

Responding to last week's damning report from the [Climate Change Committee](#) (CCC), the Association said the government still had several policy levers it could pull and that the built environment - as the UK's second largest carbon emitter behind transport - should be a priority.

The CCC, which is an independent statutory body set up under the Climate Change Act to advise the government, said confidence that the UK would meet its climate goals was "diminishing" and lack of detailed delivery plans in most sectors of the economy meant it would not hit its target of a 68% cut in emissions by the end of this decade.

Overall greenhouse gas emissions have fallen by 46% since 1990, but the CCC claimed that "credible plans" only exist for 25% of the future reductions needed and highlighted gaps in delivery strategies, funding, and timetables.

"Our confidence in the UK meeting its goals from 2030 onwards is now markedly less than it was in our previous assessment a year ago," the committee said.

The built environment was highlighted as a particular concern as it accounts for 17% of total UK emissions and needs to reduce them by 43% (33 MtCO₂e) by 2030 to stay on track for net zero by 2050.

The CCC's [2023 Progress Report to Parliament](#) said emissions from the sector fell by 15% in 2008, but progress had been minimal since, and although residential emissions fell by 16% last year, the CCC said

this was mainly due to mild winter weather and soaring energy costs forcing people to cut usage.

“This is a chastening report but also a useful one because it goes into the detail of where government needs to focus its efforts and where industries like ours can help,” said BESA chief executive officer David Frise. “None of the findings were surprising but the scale of the retreat from net zero targets is worrying.

Flaw

“A big flaw is the failure to put net zero at the heart of the planning process and ensure all the mechanisms are in place to make a comprehensive national building retrofit programme happen at pace,” he added. “Making buildings more energy efficient and climate change resilient can be done quickly, relatively cheaply and would also help to address the cost-of-living crisis.”

The CCC quoted “thousands of measures” in the government’s Heat and Buildings Strategy that could make a difference, but that policymakers were avoiding the “big, impactful decisions and action” that could get the sector closer to net zero by 2050.

The government has a target to reduce energy consumption in buildings by 15% by 2030, but the CCC said there were “no guidelines or mechanisms” for delivering this aim. It also said 20% would be a better target and was affordable.

It was particularly critical of the slow pace of heat decarbonisation with just 72,000 new heat pumps installed last year against a target of 130,000, which the CCC said should rise to 145,000 this year. However, it welcomed the extension of the Boiler Upgrade Scheme (BUS), which it estimated would deliver around 180,000 heat pump installations by 2028. It also noted that the cost of heat pump installations was falling.

Lack of clarity about the role to be played by hydrogen in heating was undermining confidence in that technology, according to the report, which also urged the government to unveil details of its Clean Heat Market Mechanism and to pass the Energy Security Bill as quickly as possible.

Frise conceded that sectors like building engineering services needed to step up their own efforts to upskill and invest in the technologies and modern methods of construction needed to deliver net zero but stressed that the government must provide the policy and funding frameworks to give companies confidence.

“That will only come when companies feel they can trust that policies will be more than just short term,” he said. “We know what needs to be done so now it is all about delivery and the truth is that no government is going to deliver net zero. Delivery will come down to individual industries and economic sectors with built environment engineering playing a pivotal role.

“Government needs to pull policy levers and raise public funds but ultimately our industry, like others, will have to step up and seize the opportunities – and the biggest is retrofitting and refurbishing thousands of buildings many of which are in dire need of an upgrade.”