

Carbon budget plan 'halfway there' on whole life carbon says BCIS

2 months ago



A new plan to put the UK back on track with net zero targets is welcome, but regrettably overlooks immediate action on whole life carbon according to the [Building Cost Information Service](#) (BCIS).

Responding to the government's Carbon Budget and Growth Delivery Plan (CBGDP), executive director James Fiske, who is also chair of the pan-industry Built Environment Carbon Database steering group, said the plan was a missed opportunity to mandate whole life carbon reporting in new building projects.

Fiske said: "We are quickly running out of chances to reverse emissions in the built environment. There's a big focus on reducing operational carbon in the carbon budget plan, which is great, as is the push to increase visibility of the embodied emissions linked to industrial products like steel and cement.

"However, mentions of whole life carbon reporting in buildings are limited to "encouraging" progress, rather than enforcing it.

"To be clear, we as a sector are more than capable of whole life carbon reporting with a best practice approach – i.e. trained professionals, using reliable data and the right tools, with a standardised methodology, to track carbon accurately. What's needed to drive this is full buy-in from the government, not a policy that's halfway there."

The UK Green Building Council estimates around 25% of UK emissions are directly attributable to the built environment.

Analysis conducted as part of UK research project, BuildZero, has further shown that the national adoption of regulatory limits on projected embodied carbon emissions in English buildings would be more effective

than if delivered at a local authority level.

On a national scale, it's estimated such regulatory limits could cut projected emissions by up to 31%.

The CBGDP confirms government intentions to promote the use of WLCA to evaluate carbon emissions across all stages of a building or structure's life.

Adoption will be encouraged from the fifth carbon budget onwards, suggesting government input will take effect from 2028 at the earliest.

Other measures relevant to the built environment include incentivising the use and lifetime extension of existing buildings and further exploration of deploying carbon negative building materials on a large scale.

The CBGDP also confirms the government will continue developing policies that help create a large, resilient market for low-carbon industrial products.

A technical consultation on a policy framework for this closed in September.

Plans to publish the Circular Economy Strategy in the coming months were also highlighted in the CBGDP.

This is intended to reduce industrial waste, increase reuse, recycling and remanufacture efforts, and encourage the uptake of low-carbon materials.

The Future Homes Standard and Future Buildings Standard will be published in the next few months too.

The plan arrived after a milestone [impact assessment on measuring and reducing embodied carbon](#) in new buildings was published by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government in July.

The assessment, which was delivered by engineering consultancy AECOM, made several recommendations to improve the adoption and effectiveness of whole life carbon assessments.

These included the development of a national carbon dataset, government subsidies for Environmental Product Declarations, and upskilling professionals on undertaking whole life carbon assessments and alternative design and construction methods.

Fisk added: "2028 is simply far too late to begin taking whole life carbon reporting more seriously. AECOM's report was the first of its kind and presented the government with an evidence-backed argument for introducing both a carbon mandate and the measures needed to streamline its application.

"Given recent pledges to backpedal on climate change legislation from various political corners, I cannot stress enough the gravity of standardising how we assess all emissions in our built environment. It's likely to be a matter of hitting or missing the net zero deadline."

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