# Leading environmental building organisation slams Government Zero Carbon Homes U-turn

The AECB, the Association for Environment Conscious Building, has added its voice to widespread criticism within the construction sector following the government’s announcement on Friday 10 July that it is scrapping the 2016 Zero Carbon Homes target - despite the subsequent ‘clarification’ by the UK energy secretary that “the decision has actually just been to ‘postpone’ the policy, rather than scrap it altogether”.

Andy Simmonds CEO of the AECB said:

*“We have always supported the Zero Carbon Homes target as providing a driver to improved energy efficiency standards. The target represents an important stepping stone towards best-practice fabric energy efficiency standards as practised by those currently building to AECB Silver & Passivhaus levels. It is also a vital step for the construction industry as it works towards the forthcoming EU's near zero energy buildings target coming into effect in 2021.*

*“We have therefore been extremely disappointed to see this unexpected U-turn on the UK’s Zero Carbon Homes ambition. Scrapping planned improvements in building fabric energy efficiency standards is an entirely retrograde step. The current UK building standards are relatively poor in comparison with most other north European countries. Furthermore they are clearly not adequate to meet the levels of carbon emissions reductions necessary to begin to address climate change and meet the requirements of the Climate Change Act.  Every building constructed now to these standards will continue to use more energy than it needs to and consequently emit more CO2 than it needs to for the rest of its lifetime. Moreover, the people using and living in those buildings will be locked into unnecessarily high energy bills, poor levels of comfort and wellbeing - and in many cases poor health - for decades to come.*

*“We are also concerned about the effect on our members’ business. The moving of this goalpost at such short notice will inevitably have negative consequences for our members as well as for the wider construction industry.  We are committed to promoting low energy best practice in the construction industry, but this sudden change in legislative framework will inevitably impact our members negatively. House builders, construction companies, housing associations and manufacturers, large and small, have been working towards this target for nearly 10 years and have invested many millions of pounds in putting advanced plans in place.”*

The AECB is also concerned about the impact of this decision on the implementation of the EU Energy Performance of Buildings Directive and requirement for all new buildings to be constructed at nearly zero-energy levels from January 2019 (public buildings) and 2021 (all buildings). The association is investigating the consequences – including economic risks - for the UK should it fail to transpose this directive as a result of the policy U-turn.

Andy Simmonds added: *“The abandonment at any attempt to improve standards in 2016 will inevitably lead to a legislative and industry scramble closer to the 2019/21 dates with the corresponding uncertainty and negative effect on businesses in the construction sector.”*

The AECB is calling on its members to contact and meet up with their local constituency MPs to urge the UK government to reconsider this decision and to lobby for radical and urgent action on energy efficiency and low energy building.

Find your local MP here: <http://www.parliament.uk/mps-lords-and-offices/mps/>

## Who we are

The **AECB** (the Association for Environment Conscious Building) with 1,200 members and its sister organisation the **Passivhaus Trust** with250 member companies focus on building performance, health, comfort and energy efficiency.

Our current focus is how to economically deliver both zero-carbon new build and large scale energy efficiency measures to existing homes, at the lowest cost to UK plc:

We promote *affordable* decarbonisation and argue that: extensive *Energy Efficiency* or ‘Negawatts’ are a compellingly attractive investment for the UK and; reducing the energy we use for heat and power give the nation far superior returns compared to those from investing in carbon capture and storage, or subsidy for nuclear generation.

AECB and Passivhaus Trust members are drawn from across the sector including manufactures, suppliers, housing developers, general and specialist contractors, tradespeople, architects, engineers, consultants, assessors, academics, students, designers, housing associations, LA Officers, property professionals, self-builders and property owners.

## Pointers for lobbying MPs on Zero Carbon Homes U-turn & energy efficient building fabric specifically

On Friday 10th July the government announced that the Zero Carbon 2016 target is to be abandoned (Fixing the Foundations: Creating a more prosperous nation).  The government does not intend to proceed with either the Allowable Solutions carbon offsetting scheme or the proposed increase in on-site energy efficiency measures.

Whilst we applaud Amber Rudd’s related statement that "energy efficiency is the most effective way to reduce carbon and reduce bills - it is the win-win," the AECB remains concerned that her use of the term may not in reality cover improving the energy efficiency of buildings’ fabric – walls, roofs, floors, windows – in order to reduce GHG emissions, air pollution, fuel poverty and the resulting impact on occupants’ health. Such improvements - properly carried out - will reduce homeowners’ heating bills whilst *improving* winter/summer comfort levels *and* occupants’ health and wellbeing.

Too often the term ‘energy efficiency’ is used to describe heat and power *demand reduction* and *generation* measures. This unrelentingly confuses an important debate and prevents sufficient clarity in media coverage or when announcing policy decisions. The AECB would welcome more informed, intelligent and nuanced use of the term to aid public and private understanding of this crucial national issue.

## Action

The AECB is calling on its members to write to and meet up with their local constituency MPs to urge the UK government to reconsider this decision – specifically the energy efficiency measures - and to lobby for radical and urgent action on energy efficiency and low energy building.

* **Ask your MP to write to the Treasury on your behalf calling upon them to reconsider the U-turn on the Zero Carbon Homes target.**

### Suggested points to raise with your MP:

* As an AECB member you are supportive of the fabric efficiency element of the Zero Carbon Homes target as a driver to improved energy efficiency standards, believing that a step further would need to be taken in due course to the best practice of the AECB Silver and Passivhaus standards.  It is important to differentiate between measures which improve energy efficiency (the Fabric Energy Efficiency Standard), requirement for onsite renewables, and offsite carbon offsetting (Allowable Solutions) which many in the AECB may not support.
* Emphasise the effect of the decision on your business.  The moving of this goalpost at such short notice will inevitably have negative consequences.  UK companies have been working with this legislative framework for nearly 10 years, and have invested many millions of pounds in putting advanced plans in place.
* The energy efficiency requirements of the current UK building standards are relatively poor in comparison with most other north European countries, and furthermore they are clearly not adequate to meet the levels of carbon emission reductions necessary to begin to address climate change and meet the requirements of the Climate Change Act. The AECB Silver and Passivhaus route may offer a robust, complimentary and cost effective package for achieving future proofed energy efficient homes.
* Every building constructed now to these current standards will continue to use more energy than it needs to, and consequently emit more CO2 than it needs to for rest of its lifetime.  It also means that decarbonising the heat supply becomes very expensive (more heat demand = more expensive decarbonisation and distribution investment) AECB believes a minimum of 50% reduction in space heating energy across the domestic buildings stock is a sensible target, leaving 50% of UK heat supply to be decarbonised. For more on this particularly in relation to existing buildings see <https://www.aecb.net/the-cost-effective-energy-measures-bill/>
* If the Zero Carbon Homes energy efficiency targets are dropped, how will the UK be able to meet its emission reduction targets required by Climate Change Act?
* If the Zero Carbon Homes energy efficiency targets are dropped how will the UK now be able to comply with EU Energy Performance of Buildings Directive, and requirement for all new buildings to be constructed at nearly zero-energy from January 2019 (public buildings) and 2021 (all buildings)?
* What does the Government mean by the statement (in the ‘Fixing the Foundations’ report) that it *“will keep energy efficiency standards under review, recognising that existing measures to increase energy efficiency of new buildings should be allowed time to become established’.*
* *Seek clarification as to what the term ‘energy efficiency’ actually means to your MP.*

The AECB and sister organisation, the Passivhaus Trust, are experts in this field and its members are leading thinkers and practitioners – members tend to be pragmatic, yet knowledgeable and ambitious. The government should make far more use of the unique AECB/PHT expertise and network.

## For Local Authorities

Neil Cutland raises 2 additional important questions (from his blog: accessed 22 July 2015):

*“One week ago today the Government cancelled the UK’s ten-year journey towards introducing zero-carbon homes by 2016.  At the same time it announced that there will be no uplift in Part L of the Building Regulations for the foreseeable future.  A few months before this, the Planning and Energy Act was amended so that Local Authorities could no longer set local energy efficiency standards higher than Building Regs.  The amendment was due to take effect when the national zero-carbon standard kicked in in 2016.  So the two questions which Local Authorities need answers to are:*

**Q1.**Now that zero-carbon 2016 will not happen at all, can LAs in fact continue to specify higher local standards indefinitely?  (That would be nice - but we suspect that it wasn’t Government’s intent.)

**Q2.**Either way, can LAs carry on using the surviving clauses of the Planning and Energy Act to specify that a certain proportion of a development’s energy be supplied from renewable or low-carbon sources?  Without this ability there would be very little left to drive innovation at the local planning level.

## For more information please contact:

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