

EFFECTIVE RETROFITTING FOR AFFORDABLE HOMES

The urgent case for scaling up sustainable retrofit to improve and increase UK housing

Joint paper from [The Green Register](#) and [Habitat for Humanity Great Britain](#).

This paper is being distributed at our [COP26 side event](#) in Glasgow on 11th November 2021.

THE CRITICAL NEED:

In August 2021, the Intergovernmental Committee on Climate Change (IPCC) published their Sixth Assessment report stating that the effects of climate change are being experienced across all parts of the globe and that we are effectively in the **Code Red** stage. In other words, we need to act decisively, effectively and act right now in order to mitigate against the worst effects of the climate crisis. We agree and believe that retrofit of existing homes and sustainable conversion of unused property provides a meaningful contribution to the acute need for good quality, affordable homes.

Habitat for Humanity GB have carried out [research](#) in partnership with the [Empty Homes Network](#) that looks at the UK-wide potential for converting unused, or under-used, commercial space into affordable homes for vulnerable groups facing homelessness. For many years the traditional ‘High Street’ has been undergoing seismic shifts, with the pandemic serving to accelerate this and bring it into sharp focus.

In terms of environmental benefits to this approach, they are multi-layered, primarily with converting the embedded carbon in existing buildings to repurpose it for community good, and subsequently in a far more efficient energy performance with the new home created. In partnership with The Green Register and [Agile City](#), and sponsored by [M&G](#), Habitat for Humanity GB are hosting a [side-event at COP26](#) on 11th November exploring the ‘real world’ challenges of retrofitting and refurbishing buildings for use as affordable homes, and promoting routes to achieving this in ways that are environmentally-conscious.

THE CARBON CONTEXT:

Policies in this country to address the climate crisis to date have had varying degrees of success, often comprising more words than meaningful action. The hope is that as Summit Hosts at COP26, this will galvanise the UK government to act on a scale that is needed.

Today 38% of global energy related greenhouse gas emissions are attributable to the built environment. One of the bigger contributors to UK carbon emissions is from the domestic sector - approximately 15% of the UK’s total carbon emissions come directly from homes - and most of our existing housing stock would not meet our current, not-so-stringent building standards. If we improve the conditions of our existing homes, we not only reduce the environmental impact on our planet by bringing down carbon emissions from housing, we also make our homes more comfortable and affordable to run. This is of particular importance in light of the recent steep rise in fuel costs.



Just before COP26, the UK government published their long-awaited Heat and Building Strategy which states that ‘...addressing the carbon emissions produced in heating and powering our homes...can support up to 240,000 skilled green jobs by 2035, boosting the economic recovery, levelling up across the country and ensuring we build back better.’ In this document the government stated they will invest in skills and training to the value of £3.8bn over this Parliament.

The good news is that most people want positive change and we already have many practical solutions to improve the performance of our housing. We know that the public appetite to act to protect our environment has never been higher, thanks to the activities of Greta Thunberg, Extinction Rebellion and Insulate Britain, amongst many others.

We also know how to improve the performance of existing buildings - the technical solutions have been available for some time. The Green Register has spent the last 21 years providing unbiased training to everyone in the construction industry to help them address the impact buildings have on the environment.

The Green Register has produced a video overview of the key aspects of sustainable retrofit, which is being used at the COP26 side-event in Glasgow. This is available via the following link: https://youtu.be/ngdU_Yh3CK8

THE OPPORTUNITY TO ACT NOW:

Many construction professionals are stepping up to the plate by designing and building sustainable and affordable homes fit for the future. The Green Register is also providing training to contractors to meet the increasing demand for good quality retrofit.

HFHGB are piloting an approach in [East London](#) where homes are being created from redundant commercially-let property for young people leaving statutory care. Other opportunities are provided on these projects, with the local unemployed learning new skills on site. Corporate partners also support these renovations to happen with grant and volunteers to help build.

HFHGB are looking to expand this approach to other areas of the UK, and have [formed a Coalition](#) to achieve this. This is a golden opportunity for the construction industry to step up, skill up and create better, sustainable, affordable homes that are fit for our future.

Further reading/references:

- Further information on Habitat for Humanity GB's 'Empty Spaces to Homes' Coalition: <https://www.habitatforhumanity.org.uk/partners/thecoalition/>
- More information on sustainable retrofit and construction training: www.greenregister.org.uk
- The Green Register/Habitat for Humanity COP26 video on retrofit https://youtu.be/ngdU_Yh3CK8
- Habitat for Humanity International's COP26 commitments/recommendations: https://www.habitat.org/sites/default/files/documents/Habitat_COP26_commitments-recommendations.pdf
- Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) Sixth Assessment Report: <https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/wg1/>
- Heat and Buildings Strategy: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/heat-and-buildings-strategy>
- Code Red: <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2021/aug/15/its-now-or-never-scientists-warn-time-of-reckoning-has-come-for-the-planet>
- Facts and Figures about the scale of retrofit: <https://theconversation.com/five-numbers-that-lay-bare-the-mammoth-effort-needed-to-insulate-britains-homes-162540>
- The Growing Case for Retrofit and Conversion over New Build: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/science-environment-58667328>
- Retrofit Design Guidance: <https://www.leti.london/retrofit>
<https://www.trustmark.org.uk/homeowners/whole-house-retrofit>