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A POSITIVE ANGLE ON NET ZERO
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FEATURES

PRODUCTS

James Parker

FROM THE EDITOR

So the Future Homes Standard, or at least the full Government response to the consultation, is here, confirming that Option 1 is the way forward (i.e. greater airtightness plus a heat pump, PV, waste water heat recovery, and distributed mechanical ventilation). However, how exactly each home's design will best weigh up these ingredients in practice, to reach the currently mythical 75-80% reduction in emissions, won't be apparent until the industry has the Home Energy Model (HEM) software.

The replacement for SAP assessment software, now put back until 2027, is the mechanism that shows designers and builders the impacts of their chosen mix of fabric and renewables. Due to the delays to the Standard, as housebuilders haggled over key aspects like PV area, an 'interim' SAP 10.3 had to be launched. This will be used to comply with the FHS, and will also apparently run in parallel with HEM for a couple of years post the latter's release. Delegates at our recent round table on the heating and renewables aspects of FHS compliance (including housebuilders) were scratching their heads as to how this will pan out; you can see many choosing to stay with SAP until it's 'verboten.'

The other big change we are awaiting is the Government's response to the consultation on the revised NPPF – will it remove barriers to building, as hoped? Heat pumps are far from the only thing neighbours might choose to object to, as hundreds of thousands of homes start to appear in people's backyards.

We don't yet know how the Iran conflict will play out in the form of impacting gas prices; it could be the catalyst for a closing of the 'spark gap' between gas and electricity prices. More likely, sadly, is that both of those will go up.

Octopus Energy is an energy provider taking several proactive steps to drive energy efficiency, including 'zero bills' guarantees. It's also working with ground source heat pump firm Kensa, plus energy provider GTC, to scale up installations. The pump system manufacturer has welcomed the Future Homes Standard, which is agnostic on which heat pump type should be chosen, saying it is "helping unlock thousands of orders from Britain's largest housebuilders." Kensa says it also "provides the market certainty needed to scale manufacturing operations in the years to come," yet they admit the "contest is underway to decide which type of heat pumps will dominate for new homes."

Grid capacity will be a huge factor for electricity-based solutions in future, and firms like Kensa are putting a lot of stock in this leading to a shift toward the currently much more expensive and land-hungry ground source option. Kensa is working with Octopus on a "multi-utility" model to provide networked heat, and this a potential area that receives some focus in the Future Homes Standard, which supports the 'sleeving' approach to heat networks for developments. GTC/Kensa's solution was selected by Barratt Redrow to deliver utility infrastructure for the UK's largest net zero carbon housing development, in Penarth, Wales.

All solutions need investigating, and perhaps the possibility of heat networks using the earth's free resource is under-explored.

James Parker

ON THE COVER

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The Future Homes Standard is triggering a 'clean industrial revolution,' says Kensa

Octopus Energy Generation-backed ground source heat pump manufacturer, Kensa, and the UK's leading multi-utility provider, GTC, have welcomed the Future Homes Standard, saying it "helps unlock thousands of orders from Britain's largest housebuilders."

The new standard "kickstarts the race to install clean heating in Britain's new homes and provides the market certainty needed to scale manufacturing operations in the years to come and deliver high quality jobs in Cornwall," said Kensa.

With the Future Homes Standard requiring new homes to emit 75% less carbon against 2013 Building Regulations, housebuilders now need to choose the technologies to deliver this.

Kensa said: "While heat pumps will lead the way, a contest is underway to decide which type of heat pumps will dominate for new homes. Grid capacity is a critical factor in this, and GTC's partnership with Kensa to deliver networked ground source heat pumps as part of a multi-utility model is providing an answer.

"Because ground source heat pumps use consistent, year round, natural warmth from the ground, during peak heating periods they draw less electricity from the grid than air source heat pumps and offer low, stable bills for homeowners."

For housebuilders this technology "unlocks grid-constrained sites, meaning thousands more homes per year can be built," said Kensa. "Critically, the solution can provide heat, hot water, and cooling with the same power requirements as gas-heated homes."

GTC and Kensa's solution is "gathering significant market momentum as a heavyweight challenger to ASHPs," they added, with over 6,000 units already secured, contracts in place for major developments with the top five British housebuilders, and a further 23,000 units in advanced discussions.

GTC and Kensa's solution was selected by Barratt Redrow to deliver the energy and utility infrastructure for Cosmeston Farm in Penarth – thought to be the UK's largest net zero carbon housing development.

The ground source heat pump firm concluded: "Networked GSHPs remove procurement complexity on grid-constrained sites to deliver the homes the UK needs and the best solution for homebuyers delivering the lowest energy bills, the lowest carbon emissions, and peace of mind." Kensa stressed that servicing, maintenance and replacement was bundled into monthly subscriptions.

John Lewis Partnership pulls out of Build to Rent initiative, citing unstable market conditions

The John Lewis Partnership has announced it is pulling out of Build to Rent property investment, citing a "fundamental shift in the economic conditions" that underpinned the venture when it launched in 2020.

The move comes as part of a broader strategic decision to refocus on the Partnership's core retail brands, John Lewis and Waitrose, where significant investment programmes are underway.

The Partnership's spokesperson commented on the reasons behind the withdrawl of its Build to Rent offering: "Our rental property ambition was based on a very different financial environment: one with more stable investment returns, lower borrowing costs and more affordable costs to build homes. Unfortunately, the current climate – higher interest rates, inflationary pressures and a more cautious property market – has meant the model no longer meets the Partnership's investment criteria.

The spokesperson added: "We're proud of what we've achieved in terms of progress with three planning applications and managing third-party Build To Rent homes for residents to a high standard. We will fulfil our existing management contracts at four Build To Rent sites as part of a responsible transition out of the business."

Yorkshire housebuilding firm Honey signs £19m partnership with Bradford housing association Incommunities to deliver 85 homes

Housebuilder Honey has partnered with Bradford-based Incommunities to deliver 85 new homes for the housing association at its Heather development in Low Moor, Bradford.

The £19.3m deal is the first between the two businesses and will comprise 59 partnership plots and 26 section 106 properties. These will include a range of two-, three- and four-bedroom semi-detached, end terrace and terraced homes.

Supported by grant funding from Homes England, the development will provide a mix of tenures including social rent, affordable rent, Rent to Buy and Shared Ownership.

Work on the properties has already commenced, with the first residents expected to move in this September.

Sheffield and Leeds-based Honey's partnerships division was launched last year. Since then the business has agreed partnership deals on three sites, including Low Moor, to deliver 254 affordable homes, generating forward sales of £55m.

Honey is backed by private equity firm Alchemy Partners and its Alchemy Special Opportunities Fund IV which has £937m of fully committed capital.

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Bellway increases output but warns of volatility due to Iran conflict

Bellway has reported higher completions and revenue in the first half of its 2025/2026 financial year, but warned that geopolitical instability and cost pressures are continuing to cause challenges.

The housebuilder completed around 4,700 homes in the six months to 31 January, with revenues rising to approximately £1.5bn and average selling prices also moving higher.

The group now expects to deliver between 9,300 and 9,500 homes this year, up from its previous targets, reflecting "improved outlet performance and a more stable start to the spring selling season."

However, Bellway has trimmed its operating margin guidance to around 10.5%, as build cost inflation and the use of sales incentives continue to impact profitability.

The company highlighted increasing "macroeconomic" risks, with the ongoing conflict in the Middle East identified as a key concern for the sector going forward.

Jason Honeyman, Bellway chief executive, commented: "The ongoing conflict in the Middle East heightens the risk of both inflationary cost pressures and an impact to customer demand, and we have already seen volatility return to the mortgage market."

Bellway added that it is focusing on "capital efficiency and internal measures" to help offset these pressures and support cash generation and shareholder returns.

While trading improved in early 2026, following a "softer" autumn, the forward order book is "slightly below last year's level, pointing to a housing market that is stabilising but which remains highly sensitive to mortgage rates and affordability," said Bellway.

The results "underline a continuing trend across the sector, with housebuilders driving volumes while margins remain under pressure amid an uneven recovery."

Castle Green Homes appointed to Homes England DPS

Castle Green Homes has been named as a member of Homes England's Dynamic Purchasing System.

The appointment unlocks "potential to access public sector land," commented Castle Green.

The DPS is one of the Government's housing and regeneration agency's main routes for land disposal, and inclusion on the system "gives housebuilders the ability to bid for these sites," said Castle Green. They added that because other public bodies may also use the DPS to procure developers, it "broadens housebuilders' exposure to potential projects."

Castle Green is a rapidly growing business, with its head office in Preston Brook and a regional office in St Asaph.

Recently named Housebuilder of the Year at the Insider North West Residential Property Awards, the company is continuing to invest heavily in new land opportunities. The business expects to deliver around 600 homes across 16 developments in the current financial year, and aims to reach 1,000 by 2030.

Homes are currently being delivered across the North West and North Wales. "With exciting developments in the Liverpool City Region and Cheshire, Castle Green has plans to move into the Manchester City Region, Lancashire and Shropshire," said the firm.

New homes at Ysgol Pendref, Denbigh

Bellway North East division appoints Harris as new commercial director

Jordan Harris is Bellway North East's new commercial director

Bellway North East has appointed a new commercial director, Jordan Harris, to "support the division in delivering its targets in the coming years."

Harris is 35 and from Yorkshire, and took up the role at Bellway at the start of February. Based at the North East' region's head office in Gateshead, he is part of the divisional board overseeing the delivery of new homes in Newcastle, Tyne and Wear, Northumberland and County Durham.

Harris began his career by studying for a National Diploma in Construction straight from school, and going on to complete a degree in Quantity Surveying and Commercial Management at the University of Bolton, graduating in 2012.

He started out as a quantity surveyor with Keith Walton Brickwork, followed by nine years at Keepmoat where he progressed to become commercial manager. He comes to his new appointment at Bellway from a role as commercial director at Gleeson Homes.

The commercial director role encompasses "budgeting, strategising and procurement at almost every stage of the creation of a new development from land acquisition to the final stages on site," commented Bellway.

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Patrick Mooney

COMMENT

Soggy start to 2026 brings greater risk of missing housing delivery targets

Patrick Mooney examines how rising flood risk and record winter rainfall are undermining housebuilding targets, amid growing concern that new homes are being built in vulnerable locations.

RECORD LEVELS OF RAINFALL THROUGHOUT JANUARY AND FEBRUARY SEVERELY HINDERED THE PROGRESS BEING MADE

The record breaking wet and windy start to the year was the last thing the construction sector needed as it attempts to recover from a housebuilding slump in 2025, during which completion rates barely hit 50% of the Government's target. In fact, only 175,290 new homes were completed in England in the 15 months after Labour came to power and just 31,420 housing starts were made in the three months to September 2025, according to figures from the ONS.

But record levels of rainfall throughout January and February severely hindered progress being made at building sites across the country (especially in southern and central England) and focused our minds on the threat posed by flooding to the achievement of the Government's 1.5 million new homes target despite a conveyor belt of planning reforms being introduced. The latest measures included default approval for building homes near train stations and looser environmental rules for smaller projects. At the same time, record levels of investment in new affordable homes have been promised.

Experts at the Met Office estimate that at current levels of global warming, wet winters like this year's have gone from being once in 80-year events to once in 20, and with further warming this could become even more frequent. They say that six of the 10 wettest winters since records began nearly 250 years ago have been this century. They are effectively telling us to get used to this sort of weather and the difficult conditions associated with it, to be more careful about where we build new houses, and to invest far more in flood mitigation measures.

WAKE UP CALL

As our news channels and screens were filled with pictures of flooded homes and communities, a report from one of the country's biggest insurance companies has provided a similar 'wake up call' by suggesting that we have not been particularly careful about where we have been building new homes in recent times, and perhaps site selection has been too driven by a desire to meet politically imposed targets rather than using local knowledge of what happens in spells of heavy rainfall.

Flood risk has become one of the fastest growing threats to our built environment, as a growing number of new homes are being built in areas at risk of flooding, according to the insurer Aviva. Their recently released analysis has revealed that one in nine new homes in England built between 2022 and 2024 were constructed in areas that could now be at risk of flooding, up from one in 13 new homes built between 2013 and 2022, and unfortunately the trend is set to continue.

Aviva's data shows that by 2050, one in seven of the homes built between 2022 and 2024 will be at medium or high risk of flooding, and almost a third (30%) will face some kind of flood risk, as more extreme rainfall is predicted as a result of climate change. Of the 396,602 new homes recorded by the Ordnance Survey in England between 2022 and 2024, some 43,937 of them are in areas of medium or high risk of flooding, while 26% of new homes have some risk of flooding. Emma Howard Boyd, former chair of the Environment Agency, who advises Aviva on climate policy, said the Government's

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housebuilding target could create pressure to build in areas at a high risk of flooding. She said: "We don't want to be building today's houses in places where they will become ever more at risk of flooding. Defra and the Ministry for Housing need to be working closer together to make sure our housing targets aren't preventing what we know is needed to protect future and existing homes from future levels of flooding."

However, effective flood prevention measures do not come cheap and it may already be too late or too expensive to build the flood protection needed to save some areas. Boyd says some areas may have to be abandoned as it becomes too costly to protect houses and businesses. "I think particularly when money and resources are constrained, some of those very difficult decisions are going to have to be made by Government to make sure that the money that is available for flood prevention is having the most impact, but that is a very difficult political decision for our leaders to make," she said.

AREAS AT RISK

Aviva's analysis, which draws on the new homes address data and cross-references it with the Environment Agency's latest assessment of flood risk at constituency level, found that Greater London and Essex have the highest proportion (32%) of new at-risk properties. Lincolnshire, East Yorkshire, the west and north-west follow at 13%. The east of England has the lowest proportion of new at-risk homes at 2%. In England, it found the total number of properties at risk from flooding was expected to increase by more than a quarter (27%), from 6.3 million to 8 million, with the number of properties in high-risk areas for flash flooding, which are harder to predict and protect against, likely to increase by up to 66% by mid-century.

What is clear is that it is no longer just housing in coastal areas or in the traditional floodplains that are at risk. In December, the Environment Agency estimated that by 2050 one in four properties across the whole country would be at risk from flooding. It is inevitable that a percentage of the homes being built now in 2026 are adding to the total number of homes already at risk of flooding. There is no sign that recently awarded planning permissions are being methodically re-checked for their flooding risks to ensure that housing developments are safe to proceed with, although this would seem a very pragmatic and sensible course of action to take.

Some parts of the UK are already at risk of being abandoned because of flood risk, with the occupants of a terrace in Ynysybwl, south Wales, having their

© Ibrahim Rifath

homes bought by the local council due to constant flooding with the residents relocated. It is also claimed that the town of Tenbury Wells in Worcestershire is slowly being abandoned by its occupants as they cannot get flood insurance on their homes, offices and businesses. The town has suffered seven floods in the last four years, and plans for new flood defences around the town were abandoned after costs rose to £30m.

Looking to the future, any prospective solution must surely include a closer alignment of policies on housebuilding and flood mitigation, while at the same time greatly increasing the money spent on flood defences, including nature friendly schemes like tree planting, attenuation ponds, and the creation of small dams and wetlands. This cannot simply mean putting pressure on developers to follow rules that will not function in practice. Instead, the Government must think about how to help local authorities source flood-risk data to speed up information-gathering for planning decisions, and how low- or medium-risk sites can be mitigated by developers to allow for building without compromising our obligations towards future residents, who want to own or rent a home without the fear of it flooding.

MORE REALISM NEEDED

A recent survey of public sector workers at the frontline of housing delivery has revealed deep pessimism about the Government's ambition to deliver 1.5 million new homes by 2029. Less than 1% of those surveyed believe the target can be achieved through current policy measures, with 60% saying the availability of funding for housing projects is insufficient. Land availability and developer expectations were identified as the biggest barriers to delivering more homes, in the survey report and analysis from public sector procurement body, Pagabo. The survey sample is quite small, involving 84 individuals from 69 local authorities and housing associations, but the organisation says the report represents a "sobering reality" for the Government.

Jonathan Parker, Pagabo's development director, said: "Our report includes findings that suggest the Government's housebuilding target is more optimistic than realistic, but this is tinged with a clear appetite to be able to deliver more homes. Without a greater understanding of the views and challenges being faced around the country by those tasked with delivery, no changes can be made. Having these insights means that the Government and wider delivery collaborators can now come together to find the solutions that breed confidence and progress against local targets – not see them dwindle further."

The report, 'Building 1.5 Million Homes: Is It Achievable?' claims the most critical factor holding back housing delivery is a lack of sufficient, flexible, and long-term funding. Meanwhile, a trio of interconnected issues surrounding land cost, site availability and developer profit expectations present widespread barriers to delivering more homes, with planning restrictions, community opposition, and infrastructure constraints also cited as obstacles to overcome.

Parker added: "The structure of traditional contracts involving land sales followed by developer delivery is widely seen as misaligned with public objectives – which is likely feeding that barrier cited around community opposition. This reinforces the need for a more collaborative delivery model in which the public sector and developers share responsibility from the outset to accelerate delivery and maximise public value – but also ensuring that communities are taken on that journey as well, in order to truly be involved in shaping their own futures."

Combining this feedback with the flooding data from Aviva shows just how difficult it will be to deliver the Government's new homes target and a reassessment is surely required to ensure that properties are built in safe locations with long term futures. We cannot afford to be developing communities which are then abandoned due to a lack of insight of risks, investment in flood mitigation or the availability of insurance. Being safe from flooding should be an integral part of how we measure sustainability and give confidence to existing and future residents.

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Martin Sandall of Jenner Group

COMMENT

Building on 150 years' experience

Marking 150 years in business, Jenner Group managing director Martin Sandall reflects on its evolution from local builder to a regional housebuilder tackling new challenges.

MANY OF THE SITES WE ARE NOW ASKED TO BUILD ON – URBAN INFILL, BROWNFIELD, LOGISTICAL CHALLENGES, WOULD HAVE BEEN UNVIABLE

Reaching 150 years in business is a rare achievement in construction and for Jenner Group this milestone is far more than a marker of longevity. It represents a century and a half spent shaping homes, neighbourhoods and communities across Kent and the south east.

Founded in 1875 as decorators and builders, Jenner's early commitment to quality, value and service laid the foundations for what would become the region's largest and longest-standing contractor. Today, with a 160-strong team and a group structure spanning multiple specialist disciplines, the company's evolution has been driven by one constant: a deep-rooted dedication to delivering exceptional housing.

Although the company's early years included moments of diversification – even at one point, coffin-making – Jenner's true legacy has always been in creating places for people to live, grow and thrive. Its appreciation of craftsmanship now lives on through its joinery and glazing divisions, supporting the delivery of high-quality homes across the region.

Even in the 1930s, Jenner was taking on ambitious projects that shaped local communities, such as the Folkestone Rotunda development with its pioneering clear-span concrete roof – a European first. But it is in modern housing where this appetite for technical challenges has truly flourished.

The recently completed Shoreline development – 60 apartments, 20 interconnecting townhouses and four duplexes – stands as a flagship example of Jenner's capability in contemporary housing delivery. As the first phase of a 1,000-home masterplan for Folkestone seafront, Shoreline represents both a homecoming and a bold step forward. Built on the site of the demolished Rotunda scheme, the project demanded engineering precision, from over 200 piles driven 27 metres deep, to the complex curved forms exposed to the full force of the English Channel. The result is a triumph of craftsmanship and design, providing much needed homes while elevating the standard of coastal living.

Today, Jenner's commitment to housing is visible across a diverse portfolio of live schemes. At Seasalter, the company is delivering 220 affordable homes for Hyde Housing in a major phased development running until 2028. The scheme will provide

a carefully balanced mix of one and two bedroom apartments and two, three and four-bedroom houses, with 120 homes offered for shared ownership and 100 for social rent.

While very different projects, they both come with their challenges. The UK housing construction sector continues to navigate one of the most complex and fast-moving periods in recent memory, and at Jenner we are experiencing these pressures first-hand across our portfolio. While demand for high-quality homes remains strong, the path to delivering them has become increasingly challenging, shaped by planning constraints, evolving design expectations, skills shortages and volatile material markets.

One of the most significant barriers to progress is the ever more complicated planning process. Securing consent has become slower, more unpredictable and more resource intensive, with local authorities under immense pressure and policy frameworks shifting frequently. The result is extended pre-construction periods and greater uncertainty for clients and contractors alike. Projects that would once have moved swiftly from concept to site now require far more upfront coordination, consultation and technical justification. Add to this the ever evolving regulatory and compliance framework and it is easy to understand why projects are being delayed getting on to site.

At the same time, the nature of available development land has changed dramatically. A decade ago, many of the sites we are now asked to build on – tight urban infill plots, constrained brownfield land, or locations with significant topographical or logistical challenges – would have been considered commercially unviable. Today, they are increasingly the norm.

This demands a higher level of ingenuity in design, sequencing and construction methodology, as well as closer collaboration between all parties from the earliest stages.

Another notable shift is the transformation of social and affordable housing design expectations. Gone are the days when such schemes were associated with purely functional, uninspired architecture. Clients are now far more astute in seeking developments that are architecturally driven, sustainable, and designed for longevity. This is a hugely positive evolution, but it also raises the bar in terms of technical detailing, material specification and quality assurance. Delivering homes that are both cost-effective and future proof requires a careful balance of innovation and pragmatism.

The industry-wide push towards offsite construction is another area where ambition and reality do not always align. While whole-house modular solutions continue to attract interest, we are finding that they remain complex to procure, integrate and deliver at scale. Traditional construction methods still tend to win out in terms of flexibility and risk management. However, hybrid approaches are proving invaluable. Prefabricated roof sections, bathroom pods, bay windows, M&E modules and other component-based offsite solutions are increasingly embedded in our projects, offering genuine programme, quality and safety benefits without the constraints of full modularisation.

Overlaying all of this is the ongoing skills shortage, which affects every trade and every region. Recruiting and retaining experienced operatives is an escalating challenge and the industry must continue investing in apprenticeships, training pathways and long-term workforce development to safeguard future capacity.

Unpredictable material demand and pricing volatility also continue to complicate tendering and cost planning. With lead times fluctuating and prices difficult to forecast 12 months ahead, contractors are being asked to commit to programmes and budgets in an environment where certainty is increasingly elusive.

Despite these pressures, Jenner remains committed to delivering high-quality homes through collaboration, transparency and a solutions focused approach. The challenges are real, but so too is the opportunity to build better, smarter and more sustainably for the communities we serve and we are proving that across the many sites we are currently working on.

For example, in Aylesham, Jenner is progressing a development of 39 affordable homes for Moat, supporting the continued growth of the village. Meanwhile, groundworks have commenced on Oakleigh House in Ashford, where Jenner is creating 59 specialist residential units for older people and adults with learning disabilities on the site of a former sheltered housing scheme.

The company has also recently begun work at in the village of Seal, delivering 13 affordable homes for West Kent Housing, and continues to advance a mixed-tenure scheme at Station Road in Rainham, where 75 homes for shared ownership and rent are taking shape for Moat.

Alongside these live projects, Jenner has recently completed several significant residential schemes. In Chatham, the company successfully completed Hallwood House for MHS Homes, delivering 46 high-quality independent living units, having been appointed part way through the build. Other notable recent project completions include Canterbury Riverside Square, the award-winning William Muge & Snelgrove regeneration for Dover District Council and the 65 homes delivered at Canterbury Road West in Cliffsend for Monson Homes. These projects continue to serve as an example of thoughtful, well-executed housing development, with potential future phases still under consideration.

To support this expanding residential portfolio, Jenner has strategically strengthened its in-house capabilities. The rebrand of its General Works division to Park Farm Construction, alongside Park Farm Glazing and Park Farm Joinery, has enhanced the company's ability to deliver homes with greater control and efficiency. The acquisition of Reina, a plumbing and heating contractor, and the creation of Park Farm Civils, focused on groundworks, further reinforce Jenner's capacity to deliver large scale housing projects with integrated expertise from the ground up.

We've come a long way over the past 150 years. It's definitely more complex now but some things haven't changed. The importance of relationships and reputation remains central to the way Jenner builds homes and communities. The company's family ethos and people first culture have carried it from one generation of leadership to the next, shaping a business that continues to evolve while staying true to its founding principles.

As Jenner looks ahead, its commitment to professionalism, integrity and innovation remains unwavering. The next housing project will no doubt bring new challenges but after 150 years, Jenner has learned more than a thing or two about rising to meet them.

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BUILDING INSIGHTS LIVE

Round table chair, James Parker

Solutions for Low Energy Domestic Retrofit at Scale

A round table we staged in late February 2026, as the Government launched its £15bn Warm Homes Plan, brought architects, sustainability consultants, retrofit experts, industry bodies and suppliers together to confront the challenges – and propose solutions – for achieving home retrofit at an unprecedented scale. With £5bn of retrofit funding up for grabs, the event held at the Institute of Directors was a crucial opportunity to share practical insights and address obstacles, as occupier affordability and fuel poverty becomes a greater UK challenge by the day.

The discussion was sponsored by NIBE Energy Systems and IDSystems, who both posed practical retrofit-at-scale questions as well as solutions to the group. Questions included how low carbon heating solutions fitted into the context of holistic retrofits alongside fabric improvements, and the changes in window and glass design spec that would be needed. The group also reviewed recommendations made by our 2024 round table (our first looking in-depth at the retrofit challenge).

The delegates discussed whether the new Warm Homes Plan would fill a yawning gap left by the sudden cancellation of the Energy Company Obligation (ECO4) scheme in late 2025, and highlighted the potential shortcomings of the Plan, which the Government would do well to take account of. Delegates agreed there was a need to maintain a focus on fabric improvements alongside renewables, but some believed it was important to not "make the perfect the enemy of the good," in pursuing retrofit at scale, given the urgent need to achieve large numbers of completed schemes quickly.

The panel made recommendations for supporting retrofit, for both industry and government, from intervening to close the 'spark gap' between electricity and gas prices, to introducing 'building passports' which would help a building's resale value to be increased, based on the transparency of its retrofit measures. And there was an overarching focus on the need to increase the credibility and quality of retrofits, in the wake of controversies around ECO projects, and thereby build trust among end users. This was an open and candid discussion about the fundamental shifts required in not only the construction industry but the wider property sector in order to deliver the regulatory 'sticks' as well as the incentivising 'carrots' that are going to be needed to achieve good quality retrofits at an unprecedented scale. The recommendations made by delegates are featured at the end of this report.

WARM SUPPORT FOR RETROFIT AT SCALE
Our expert group, including event sponsors NIBE, looked in-depth at the existing and needed 'sticks' and 'carrots' for pursuing low energy retrofits across the housing sector

The debate: challenges

Anna Scothern, chief executive of the National Home Improvement Council (NHIC), was sadly unable to attend in person, but contributed a comprehensive set of viewpoints around retrofit challenges to the session. She said the principal constraint on achieving domestic retrofit at scale "is not installer willingness or technological capability – it is structural instability in the policy and delivery environment."

Scothern said that the market remains challenged by short funding cycles and "stop-start programmes," but responsibility for delivering most of the retrofits required would rest on SMEs. At the same time, they were facing "rapid regulatory shifts without transition periods, fragmented standards, and high administrative and compliance burdens, set against "thin margins and limited working capital."

She said that major changes needed to deliver scale were: "multi-year funding certainty, predictable regulatory pathways, simplified compliance interfaces, and payment structures that do not penalise small firms."

Sustainability consultant Naomi Sadler of SEES highlighted a range

CHAIR

James Parker, Managing Editor, Architects Datafile and Housebuilder & Developer

ATTENDEES

- **Simon Kemp,** Growth & Innovation Director, Warmworks
- **Greg Mathers,** Co-Founder, Studio CMA
- **Brian Berry,** CEO, Federation of Master Builders
- **Naomi Sadler,** Director, SEES (Sadler Energy & Environmental Services)
- **Laura Morgan-Forster,** Innovation Lead, Innovate UK
- **Andrew Tod,** Head of Net Zero, Sureserve
- **Ben Whiterod,** Head of Decarbonisation, Social Infrastructure
- **Cypren Edmunds,** Project Coordinator, Sustainable Traditional Buildings Alliance
- **Trevor Wilkins,** Managing Director, PAH Building & Construction

SPONSORS' ATTENDEES

- **Rick Clarke,** Product Manager, NIBE Energy Systems

of retrofit issues, including the concern that in the private rented sector, tenants were not yet protected from the potential adverse consequences to properties' interiors from low energy upgrades, despite Awaab's Law having been introduced to mandate tackling damp and mould in social housing. "There are all these condensation issues, where you're creating these thermal bridges, because you're not measuring where you're creating a problem," said Sadler.

Current practice & driving consumer confidence

Several delegates raised the issue of a lack of consumer demand for low energy retrofit, citing a range of issues from finance to trust, and this needed addressing. Simon Kemp of retrofit joint venture Warmworks, which has a network of 42 contractors operating in Scotland and is expanding southwards, stressed that demand-led retrofit there, at least among social tenants for tackling fuel poverty, had been very strong versus more proactive retrofit. He mentioned that interest-free and low cost loans were being administered by the Energy Saving Trust (which is part of Warmworks), enabling heat pump installations or similar larger upgrades. However, he advocated that in England, something more "demand led," outside the "able to pay" loans-based scenario was needed to drive demand at scale – "which is community driven, local authority led, proactive."

Sadler drew attention to issues in RDSAP software, and asserted there wasn't "much of a demand for fuel poverty-based retrofit until MEES (the Minimum Energy Efficiency Standard) comes in." Simon Kemp pushed back on this, saying 15% of people in England were living in fuel poor homes, but accepted that "if the measure was the same as it was in Scotland, it would be greater, because you've got this somewhat arbitrary SAP level attached to fuel poverty (under £36,000 household income for the Home Energy Grant eligibility)."

Sadler said "a lot of people are in the private rented sector, and until MEES is a mandatory requirement, they are waiting until they "suddenly need to deal with this; there's no driver, no push." She suggested using "in-use readings" on performance; "it doesn't form part of EPC, but it should."

Speaking as a contractor, Trevor Wilkins expressed concern about the current lack of a "fabric first approach," saying "I think homeowners could be very disappointed in the short term." Consumer understanding of renewables was also an issue: "Unless you use batteries correctly, drawing input overnight, I think people will be inundated with rather large bills over and above what their gas bill was, and you'll instantly get that negative impact, and that will spread very quickly amongst the public." He added: "I think people don't realise electricity is currently five times the cost of gas."

He echoed Laura Morgan-Forster's comments from Innovate UK, saying consumer education was now imperative, and without this plus good quality installation, retrofit targets were "pie in the sky." It "has to not be another Government scheme that falls off the tracks."

Brian Berry of the Federation of Master Builders said that endless political shifts at the Ministry of Housing had caused sustained uncertainty, plus failed schemes like the Green Deal and Green Homes Grant. He said that FMB members' focus was that "we need to go back to basics," and added that they "really wanted to see the results of the EPC consultations." He supported the theory proposed of every home having an "energy passport" enabling homeowners to "understand the performance of their home and the [retrofit] measures that best suit the needs of that home."

Naomi Sadler gave the forthright view that the Government "rushed out the Warm Homes Plan" when they cancelled ECO4, to avoid "mass unemployment; we've basically trained all these people that are going to leave the industry, and we're not going to have anyone to do the assessments." She added: "I think it needs to be mandatory that every house assessed is by a competent person," which thereby "creates a plan for that house of all the work that needs to be done, including condensation risks, and the ventilation assessment."

Sadler said this needed to be done before a heat pump was considered, and while she endorsed the technology, they were being "oversized and undersized," and further criticised RDSAP for "not assessing the things it needs to assess," again potentially resulting in tenants in the private rented sector being on the receiving end of poorly-performing retrofits.

She also said the EPC consultation was a "massive missed opportunity" to drive retrofit in the private rented sector by making retrofit "automatically trigger a requirement for a new EPC, and instead allowing existing EPC C properties to essentially be immune from upgrades for 10 years." She added: "There's nothing to make the landlord improve that house, regardless of how poor the quality or the cost to the resident." Simon Kemp said, candidly: "Get a friendly assessor, and they'll get you a C."

The delegates were keen to stress the importance of focusing on consumer preferences in retrofit decisions, including aesthetics as well as functionality. Sadler agreed that consumer education in understanding the benefits of retrofit measures was key. Anna Scothern warned that the consumer side was challenging as "demand remains inconsistent, due to confusion about schemes and eligibility, lack of trusted intermediaries, perceived disruption and complexity, and uncertainty about return on investment." She said that in order to sustain demand at scale, messaging "must be simplified and consistent, and trusted sector bodies should be leveraged as confidence anchors."

TRADITIONAL VALUES
Cypren Edmunds of the Sustainable Traditional Buildings Alliance (second from left, with Ben Whiterod of Social Infrastructure to his right, and RIck Clarke of NIBE and Brian Berry of the Federation of Master Builders to his left), puts the case for developing skills in retrofitting historic buildings

Laura Morgan-Forster said that it was problematic to expect simple answers regarding the impact of retrofit technologies in each setting, but data was increasingly being used to help inform consumers. She said she had recently been involved in the new CIBSE Technical Memorandum around heat pump performance, and it's "actually incredibly complicated." She added:"Getting one very precise figure is not easy, but it offers an opportunity to understand a building, but not necessarily what you're going to do." One number isn't going to tell you how to improve your heat transfer coefficient, but it's still part of a picture of creating more data and better understanding."

Standards, quality & regulation

PAS2035, the new British Standard covering retrofit, including retrofit assessments air-tightness, and ventilation plus a new Retrofit Coordinator role, has been a further missed opportunity, said delegates. Simon Kemp said it's "kind of perverse that they didn't mandate it, because the thing was designed to protect individual consumers, and the Government's adopted it where you actually had pretty reasonable controls across many of the programmes already."

Brian Berry complained that there was a "two tier" system where PAS2025 was mandated in social housing, but "didn't exist in the owner occupier market." Kemp countered that it "can be offered, but you have to pay for it; if you look at an organisation like Furbnow, it'll cost them £6000 to go through the whole process. So if you can afford it, fill your boots. But for a lot of people who are perhaps above that fuel poverty threshold – the squeezed middle – they're not going to pay for that."

Rick Clarke of NIBE supported the idea of a 'passport,' but asked who would pay for this in the social housing sector. Naomi Sadler said "it should be part of the assessment," and outlined the structure of governance in the design team to oversee this. "You've got retrofit coordinators, retrofit designers, and then you've got retrofit assessors, and the designers and coordinator can technically be the same person." She continued: "These houses should then come with a home information pack, and if we're talking scale, it needs to be obviously put in as a function of selling a house."

Anna Scothern of NHIC commented that this could be another challenge for SMEs: "As well as overlapping accreditation requirements, the cost of compliance could be prohibitive for SMEs, and first-time entrants into retrofit frameworks have insufficient support, clear routes to competence, or practical guidance."

Skills & funding

SMEs lacked confidence to employ and invest in key retrofit skills, due to an uncertain pipeline of work currently, according to Anna Scothern. However, she said retrofit competence "cannot be treated as a separate industry. It must integrate into mainstream RMI delivery." In Scotland, retrofit skill levels in local authorities were variable, said Simon Kemp of Warmworks, but that was where his firm comes in to plug the gap at to fulfil the demand.

Cypren Edmonds of the Sustainable Traditional Buildings Alliance said skills development "needed to be focused on older, traditional buildings, reflecting the reality of UK housing stock."

Current funding models for retrofit "often distorted the market rather than strengthening it," according to Anna Scothern of NHIC. Also, over-centralised procurement models were excluding SMEs, she said, and came with "administrative friction" that added cost. Scothern continued, on finance challenges: "Opaque eligibility criteria for homeowners, and audit regimes create retrospective financial risk. Long-term confidence requires funding mechanisms that reward sustained quality and relationship-based delivery."

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COLLECTIVE APPROACH
Simon Kemp of Warmworks explained how the joint venture (between Energy Saving Trust, Changeworks and Sureserve) was maximising the opportunities to upgrade at scale

Solutions & sponsor questions

Heat pumps

Heat pump specialist manufacturer NIBE's attendee, product manager Rick Clarke, prompted some in-depth and frank discussions about the practical application of heat pumps in different retrofit contexts with his question to the group. He asked where the pinch-points currently were across policy, design, installation and homeowner engagement that were holding back a widespread rollout of heat pumps in UK retrofits, i.e. "where the heat pump rollout breaks down."

Andrew Tod of Sureserve said this disconnect was occurring around "communicating to the homeowner about the costs and the benefits, the disruption, what's really needed to make it successful in a retrofit context." There were challenges around consumer awareness of heat pumps in use, he said, and the need for better awareness campaigns had to be confronted.

Tod added that while there's been "huge ambition and drive by Government, there's a huge gap [between that and installation]". He said the recent "warm and fuzzy" public awareness campaign "fell a bit flat, and outside of LinkedIn I didn't see it anywhere." He said that due to a lack of a concerted information campaign, "what you hear about heat pumps is negative, from the press, probably because it's been delivered to homes that aren't suitable, or to homeowners that don't understand them."

Cypren Edmonds answered Clarke, saying that it "most commonly breaks down at the assessment and design stage; if heat loss isn't properly understood, and if the systems are wrongly sized, and expectations are mismanaged." He added: "Homeowners don't know how to ask the questions." Ben Whiterod from Social Infrastructure said "a lot of it comes down to the enabling work required for it to be an efficient install," for example "they might need to upgrade the fabric which isn't in their budget."

Noise, space and aesthetics improvements were also discussed, and Whiterod admitted: "Quieter models are starting to come, but at a cost."

Simon Kemp said that "there was a sense of fear around the cost [of heat pump installs], which is quite reasonable." He said that a 2020 Department of Business and Energy (BEIS) Warmworks project installed heat pumps for free across homes in South East Scotland. In Scotland, said Kemp, "we can still fit gas boilers, if it's the most economically advantageous thing to do for the homeowner, while to get the funding in England, "it's either a heat pump or storage heaters, you can't have a gas boiler, so you're having to do more creative around that heating system to make sure you get the additional efficiencies."

He said that in the private sector, the £7,500 grant for owners might still mean they'd still have to pay the same amount on an installation in a larger house, "more than potentially replacing the gas boiler." Kemp added: "there's no real stick to say they have to get to a decarbonised position." Currently, it was "motivated by the able to pay part, people buying into the green issue."

Naomi Sadler also offered the insight from her experience that "some manufacturers say they can't size up a heat pump until they have received my SAP calculation." She said that a scheme that her firm SEES had surveyed and air-tested for EPC in 2012 (which only required a sample to be tested), around 150 units had to have all heat pumps removed because they were "substantially undersized, because the client didn't pay attention to the fact there were lots of rooms over garages."

Delegates added that the potential benefits of heat pumps for comfort and health, beyond just energy savings, were not being fully appreciated by customers or being used to sell the concept at scale. It was also important to harness performance data to help specifiers and customers make informed decisions.

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TRIPLE THREAT
Sustainability consultant Naomi Sadler of SEES stressed the challenges around moving to triple glazing, from the added weight on frames to possible overheating

Window views

Co-sponsor IDSystems posed the question "how much consideration is given to thermal efficiency when it comes to the choice of glazing solutions for retrofit, and how much is the choice of systems decided by other factors, including cost, aesthetics and functionality?"

Simon Kemp offered the view that windows in large-scale retrofit "were in large part viewed as a commodity," while Naomi Sadler said all developers she was working with "were going to triple glazing as a marketing thing; it's the new double glazing, but replacing double with triple can create other problems." She explained this further challenge for consumer acceptance towards the aim of using glazing to achieve higher thermal values, saying the g-values of triple glazing "aren't understood." Having a "much lower g value," would mean the inevitable consequence of "not benefitting from the solar gains [to the same degree]."

She added that a further issue "which is not really considered," is that a triple-glazed window weighs "substantially more," so they "have to be adjusted every couple of years because of the weight on the frame." And finally, she said that if windows' opening areas are reduced, there is a clearly more risk of overheating.

Anna Scothern of the National Home Improvement Council said that the benefits of innovative approaches were not a given, and "should focus not only on technology but on system integration." She said while digital tools could simplify compliance and data capture, "aggregation platforms" were needed that "enable SME participation without removing local identity." Innovation needed to dovetail into existing ways of working, she said, and "must reduce friction, not introduce new complexity."

Conclusion: innovating the wider retrofit market

The round table delegates agreed that stability in the market was needed to see retrofit at scale getting fully underway, but part of this was, in the words of Anna Scothern, about "long-term policy clarity over short-term interventions." Also, SMEs including housebuilders had to be supported in their transition away from new build to retrofit, but were currently excluded while still expected to comply.

The scale asked for will only be achieved "if ambition is matched by delivery realism; she added. The Government "needs to unlock and enable the capacity that already exists within the RMI and SME community, but this meant changing the market environment so SMEs can "invest with confidence."

And pluralism in the market was needed, to move "from centralised control to distributed capability," and the scale required would result "from policy aligning with how the RMI sector actually functions — relationship-led, SME-dominated, and risk-sensitive." Most tellingly, retrofit "must be normalised as part of mainstream home improvement," concluded Scothern.

As Laura Morgan-Forster of the Government-affiliated Innovate UK asserted, the insights from our round table further proved, domestic retrofit and decarbonisation is a "massive opportunity." However, the discussion also revealed that there are a host of issues to fix, beyond giving the sector a solid pipeline of work, to achieving the consistency and quality that is needed to help homeowners and tenants buy in.

ROUND TABLE RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Simon Kemp, Warmworks:** When it comes to the fuel poverty agenda, consideration needs to be paid to demand-led reactive retrofits.
- **Greg Mathers, Studio CMA:** It's about balance; we need to recognise that nothing in a building happens in isolation. And we need the checks early on before we implement things, because it's only going to work if we can build trust through successful delivery.
- **Andrew Tod, Sureserve:** There's a danger we're going to be moving too slowly, because we have been waiting for the Warm Homes Plan, now we just need to get on with it, otherwise all the issues about the cost of living are not going to be addressed soon enough.
- **Ben Whiterod, Social Infrastructure:** The sector needs consistency. Stop changing the goal posts and the way we work; we need to make our minds up, and roll our sleeves up.
- **Cypren Edmunds, Sustainable Traditional Buildings Alliance:** Support skills development focused on older traditional buildings. Much of UK housing stock requires risk aware treatment so policy must reflect that.
- **Rick Clarke, NIBE Energy Systems:** Government needs to reduce the cost of electricity, that's the only way forward.
- **Brian Berry, Federation of Master Builders:** Every home needs to have an improved EPC, as the passport which is the starting point for everything.
- **Trevor Wilkins, PAH Building & Construction:** The cost of electricity is the biggest deal here, it's an impact for everybody. None of us know what the roadmap looks like, and it worries the hell out of me that we are relying on the Government to get it right.
- **Naomi Sadler, SEES (Sadler Energy & Environmental Services):** Retrofit Assessment works for maybe one to three dwellings, but anything above that should come under BREEAM Refurbishment.
- **Laura Morgan-Forster, Innovate UK:** Retrofit is a massive opportunity for the UK economy, and investors know that decarbonisation of heat is a big opportunity for them. Consistency of outcomes is very important, and there needs to be a pipeline of work that exists because people want retrofit.

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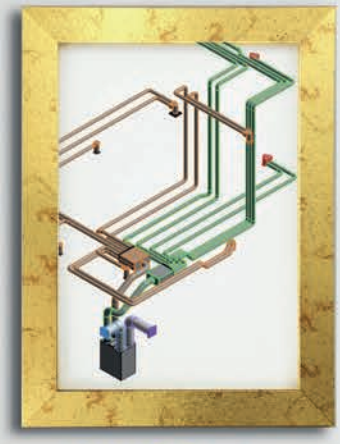

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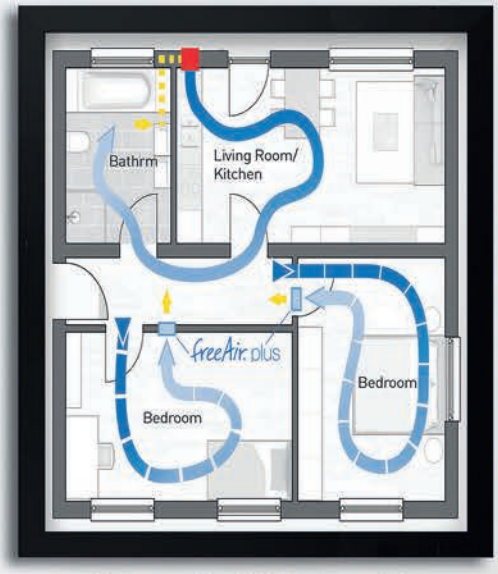

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SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENTS PROJECT REPORT

A positive angle on net zero

Sustainable housebuilder Greencore Homes' latest development – The Canopies in Oxfordshire – sets the bar high for industry peers, providing a carbon-positive collection of homes that align with Passivhaus performance levels to go 'better than net zero.' Roseanne Field reports.

Sustainability and low carbon building is at the forefront of any good development, to a greater degree than ever before. With the Future Homes Standard now launched, the Government is mandating that from 2028 all new homes will have to be fitted with solar panels and heat pumps as standard.

Under the standard, the emphasis with, any new development to build in a 'fabric first' and eco-friendly way, homes will be created in future that will serve not only their residents, but the wider environment, for years to come by cutting carbon emissions drastically. While most developers are making a broad effort to improve sustainability – whether through their own internal policies or driven by regulations, Greencore Homes are taking it to the next level.

As their name suggests, Greencore Homes is a firm built on the principle of sustainability. Their homes offer residents future-ready energy performance and healthier, more sustainable living as well as being better for them financially, mentally and physically, and healthier for the planet. They assert that "sustainability isn't a tick box," and are passionate about proving exactly what is possible in new house construction. This is embodied in Greencore's B Corp certification, which sets a legal obligation to put long term environmental impact at the centre of operations and projects.

Located just outside the village of Milton in Oxfordshire, less than 10 minutes from the well-connected commuter town of Didcot, is The Canopies, a moderately-scaled development designed to Passivhaus levels of performance, thereby showcasing what Greencore


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BETTER THAN NET ZERO

Greencore Homes has a stated company goal to provide homes that are "Better Than Net Zero." It's thought the average UK home accounts for 60-100 tonnes of embodied carbon during construction, (and emits three to five tonnes per year when occupied). Bucking the trend, Greencore designs and builds their homes to go 'below' zero embodied carbon during construction, and offer net zero emissions each year of occupation.

The Canopies comprises 42 homes, conceived as a "flagship scheme to demonstrate what 'Better Than Net Zero' housing can deliver at scale," explains Greencore Homes COO, Laura Stone. "From the outset, our ambition was to go beyond standard regulations and create homes that surpass energy performance standards while raising the benchmark for responsible housing."

The project, which received £8m of funding from Homes England, "brings together aligned partners with a shared commitment to accelerating the delivery of high quality, sustainable and affordable homes, while raising the benchmark for responsible housing," Stone says.

The masterplan – developed by HTA Design – was very much landscape-led, integrating green infrastructure and enhancing biodiversity. It also focused on improving both walking and cycling connections to fully integrate the development within the local community.

The 42 homes comprise 27 for private sale and 15 affordable – a mixture of shared ownership and 'first homes.' The houses span a range of one, two, three and four bedroom options, "designed to support flexible living and adapt to changing household needs," says Stone.

This range was largely shaped by local demand, alongside viability considerations and Greencore Homes' sustainability objectives. Despite the mix of sizes and tenures, they have been designed to be tenure blind, with the same architectural approach and high quality specification applied to all 42 properties. "This ensures a cohesive neighbourhood and reflects our commitment to delivering a genuinely mixed-tenure community," explains Stone.

There was strong demand in the local area for a highly sustainable scheme such as this, says Greencore. Oxfordshire County Council has committed to achieving carbon neutrality across its estate and operations by 2030, meaning low carbon was the goal on new developments. This meant Greencore Homes' offering was an ideal solution, with the joint Local Plan 2041 identifying a need for 16,530 new homes across South Oxfordshire. "The Canopies responds directly to both pressures by delivering high quality homes that meet pressing housing needs while aligning with the county's ambitious environmental targets, offering residents future-ready energy performance and healthier, more sustainable living," Stone says.

The team still faced some planning challenges. Although it is a brownfield site just a few minutes from Didcot railway station, gaining approval required detailed discussions about the development's design, landscape integration, access and environmental performance.

There was a Tree Preservation Order around the site's perimeter, which needed "careful management" and close engagement with the local authority. The trees that were retained – as well as the surrounding countryside – were ultimately used to shape the final layout of the development. "We adopted a landscape-led approach, orientating homes around green corridors and existing features rather than imposing a standard housing pattern," Stone says.

Although there were challenges, Stone says the outcomes of the discussions were "extremely positive," adding: "The development responds sensitively to its context, protects and enhances its natural assets, including mature trees, and ultimately delivers a stronger, more environmentally responsible scheme."

Planning consent was secured in

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November 2024, followed by the Homes England funding which was secured in 2025. Construction onsite began in March 2025, with the development launching to market in Autumn 2025 and the show home opening in November 2025. The scheme is "progressing well," says Stone, with full completion currently on track for later in 2026.

There were several derelict homes and commercial buildings on the site which were demolished to make way for the new homes, with 99% of the materials from these reused onsite. The existing access was also carefully designed into the scheme to prevent having to remove mature trees and create a new access point.

The overall layout of the site was designed to integrate with the existing landscape. The homes have been carefully arranged to "sit comfortably within a green framework of retained trees, wildflower meadows, hedgerows and green corridors, creating a strong connection between buildings and nature while supporting wildlife," explains Stone. This approach has contributed to the 10% biodiversity net gain requirement being met onsite.

A new public play trail and a nature walk link the development with the wider area, as well as providing accessible green spaces for both residents and visitors. There are ample pedestrian routes to connect the homes to the natural elements, encouraging outdoor activity and social interaction. Stone explains further: "The site layout prioritises wellbeing and community."

Beyond the boundaries of the site, the development also benefits from surrounding countryside, nature trails, lakes and fields, "reinforcing its balance of sustainable living, accessibility and a strong relationship with the natural environment," explains Stone. It also links to nearby amenities, with Didcot Parkway Station just over three miles away and Europe's largest science and technology park (Milton Park) a 15 minute walk away.

THOUGHTFUL DESIGN SUPPORTS GREENER LIVING AT THE CANOPIES

When it came to designing how the homes would perform, maximising sustainability was front of mind for the team: "It's the golden thread that runs through everything we do," Stone says. "It was the clear inspiration behind the design of these homes."

The ultimate aim was to achieve the company's 'better than net zero' principle, but also building homes that would make low-carbon living "effortless" for customers, says Stone. "Combining exceptional energy efficiency with strong architectural character to deliver a genuinely futureproofed place to live."

The orientation, form and detailing of the homes was shaped by a Passivhaus-informed fabric-first approach, to "minimise energy demand naturally," explains Stone. "Every design decision was guided by our commitment to reducing carbon without compromising on quality, durability or aesthetics."

Materials were an important part of the overall design process, from both aesthetic and performance perspectives. The homes were built utilising Greencore Homes' own BIOND closed panel timber system which it manufactures at its factory in Bicester. Panels are fully insulated with natural materials, which means they "lock up" more carbon than they emit. And, the company is ultimately in control of the manufacturing from day one.

This offsite manufacturing process allows "precision engineering" to within a +/-1 mm tolerance, which means homes are airtight and watertight within approximately two weeks of the first panel being erected. It allows the company to reduce waste while simultaneously shortening programme times, improving quality control and reducing onsite risk and variability. "By replacing carbon-intensive materials such as concrete and steel with timber-based systems, we materially reduce embodied carbon while maintaining structural integrity," says Stone.

To help reinforce the low carbon credentials of the scheme externally, the homes have been finished chiefly with timber cladding, alongside other natural materials, which also "creates warmth and visual character," says Stone. The cladding was chosen to add visual warmth as well as "reinforce the environmental credentials," says Stone, "ensuring sustainability is expressed not only in how they perform, but in how they look and feel."

Sustainability features have been integrated carefully into the design of the homes, "ensuring environmental performance is embedded rather than applied," Stone explains. Renewable technologies were also integrated within the homes to ensure they can maintain optimal energy performance and comfort all year round.

Every house includes triple glazed timber windows, highly insulated envelopes and "optimised building forms" in order to minimise heat loss, says Stone. Homes also have MVHR, air source heat pumps, wastewater heat recovery and integrated roof-mounted solar PV systems.

The combined benefits of all these features is, says Stone, "speed of construction, reduced embodied and operational carbon, improved build quality and lower running costs for residents." "That discipline is ultimately what enables us to deliver scalable, future-ready low

THE ULTIMATE AIM WAS TO BUILD HOMES THAT WOULD MAKE LOW-CARBON LIVING "EFFORTLESS" FOR CUSTOMERS

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carbon homes without compromising on design quality."

PASSIVHAUS PRINCIPLES

Every home on the development is built to "Passivhaus standards," with a design driven by performance. This begins with the highly insulated building envelope alongside rigorous airtightness detailing to "dramatically reduce heat loss and overall energy demand," explains Stone.

The MVHR system ensures a continuous supply of fresh filtered air, and captures and reuses heat that would otherwise be lost, creating a consistent level of comfort and indoor air quality. The remaining energy demand is met with low carbon technologies, such as the air source heat pump and wastewater heat recovery systems. The integrated solar PV panels generate renewable electricity onsite. "Together, these elements enable ultra-low energy use intensity and support a net zero energy balance across the development significantly reducing both carbon emissions and residents' energy bills," Stone explains.

While the high standards are admirable, Stone admits that setting ambitious targets inevitably "raises the bar" across every step of the development process. "It requires rigorous design discipline, early decision making and close coordination between teams, particular when aiming to outperform regulation rather than simply meet it," she says.

Close collaboration between the designers, onsite contractors and the factory team was essential, says Stone, alongside "repeatable details and established construction processes refined over many years." She adds: "This approach mitigated common risks associated with traditional construction and enabled high performance standards to be delivered reliably."

For residents, the impact is purely positive, with benefits including lower energy bills and a healthier indoor air environment. Stone cites KPMG research which shows almost half of UK adults would prefer to buy a low carbon home, and that 63% believe households should reduce emissions, and JLL data reporting 70% of people rate energy efficiency as more important than a year ago. "It highlights the growing expectation that homes deliver not just design quality but tangible environmental and wellbeing performance," she says.

LANDSCAPING & BIODIVERSITY

The emphasis on sustainability meant landscaping was a "fundamental component" of the overall design at The Canopies, "treated as a primary driver rather than an add-on," explains Stone. "The layout responds to the site's existing ecology, retaining mature trees and shaping the scheme around established natural features, rather than imposing a rigid housing pattern."

The ecological strategy was designed to go hand in hand with the natural materials and low-impact construction. "The result is a neighbourhood where


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built form and landscape work together – supporting wildlife, enhancing wellbeing and reinforcing our commitment to low-carbon living," says Stone.

As well as enhancing the site's biodiversity, the woodland walks encourage residents to get outdoors and be active, and interact socially with neighbours. The outdoor spaces are all accessible not only for residents but to the wider community – an intentional choice to help connect the development to the local community rather than it being a "closed residential enclave," says Stone. "The result is a development where green infrastructure supports wellbeing, ecology and placemaking while also helping to manage drainage, microclimate and long-term environmental resilience."

THE FUTURE OF HOUSEBUILDING

Targeting low energy use isn't decided on a per-development basis for Greencore Homes: "It was made at the very inception of the business," says Stone. "Greencore was founded with a clear mission: to create climate-positive places and prove that housebuilding can and must be part of the solution to the climate crisis."

It's Stone's belief that perceived high cost and delivery confidence is the "wider challenge" for the industry to address. "They can be viewed as higher risk or more complex, particularly where supply chains and processes are not aligned around performance outcomes," she says.

Greencore Homes has omitted this risk by embedding the principles in its business strategy since inception, with an approach that "ensures environmental performance and financial viability are considered together, not in conflict." Independent analysis by Savills Earth has indicated that an average Greencore home generates around £50,000 of added 'social value.' "That evidence reinforces our belief that ambitious sustainability targets are not a burden to overcome, but a long term value driver for residents, communities and investors alike."

Despite the reservations many developers have to pursuing the higher reaches of sustainability, Greencore has found the impact for their residents to be "overwhelmingly positive." Stone says the homes are "intuitive" for residents, with their sustainability features largely "working in the background." It also means homes are futureproofed against changing regulations and rising energy costs. "Buyers are increasingly looking beyond aesthetics alone," says Stone. "They want homes that are quieter, warmer in winter, cooler in summer and cheaper to run; the combination of comfort, cost certainty and environmental responsibility makes sustainable homes not only attractive, but increasingly expected."

The reaction to The Canopies has been very positive from both the local community and stakeholders, it having understandably garnered a strong local interest. Abingdon's Mayor Rawda Jehanli praised Greencore's commitment to addressing local housing needs but also environmental priorities. "That endorsement reflected the broader sentiment we've seen – recognition that sustainable development can support growth while responsibly responding to climate and community objectives," says Stone.

Greencore has plans to deliver 10,000 homes by 2035, a challenging goal for high performing sustainability. The company intends to continually refine its designs, material choices and push performance standards in order to "show that high quality, low carbon housing is not niche or experimental – it's practical, and scalable; the future of responsible housebuilding." ■

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THE CLIMATE CHALLENGE

HEM – the dawn of a new era

As the industry adjusts to the Future Homes Standard, Jon Ponting of AES Sustainability Consultants examines why the long-delayed Home Energy Model will be a transformative break from the long-established SAP method.

For almost two decades, the Standard Assessment Procedure (SAP) has served as the foundation for measuring the energy performance of new homes in the UK. Introduced in the 1990s and made mandatory from 2006, SAP has been refreshed several times as each new Part L update has arrived. Yet despite these periodic revisions, its core structure remains rooted in assumptions and methodologies that are now significantly outdated. As energy efficiency has grown from a peripheral consideration into a central component of modern construction, SAP's limitations have become increasingly apparent, prompting the need for a more sophisticated and transparent system – cue the Home Energy Model (HEM).

HEM is not simply another iteration of SAP, nor a rebranding exercise. It represents a complete redesign, one that fundamentally rethinks how we model, track and interpret the energy performance of homes. The Government has consciously avoided the label 'new SAP' because the underlying differences are so substantial. While both SAP and HEM produce results related to energy use and efficiency, almost everything about how HEM calculates those results is new. Its level of detail, level of accuracy and capacity to incorporate modern and emerging technologies mark a dramatic advance beyond anything SAP can currently offer.

HEM REPRESENTS A COMPLETE REDESIGN, WHICH FUNDAMENTALLY RETHINKS HOW WE MODEL, TRACK AND INTERPRET ENERGY PERFORMANCE

Perhaps the most transformative change is the shift from monthly modelling to half-hourly modelling. SAP analyses homes' performance using 12 month averages, meaning it can only approximate conditions such as how solar panels generate across a typical month or how energy demand shifts throughout the day. HEM, by contrast, operates using 30-minute intervals, resulting in roughly 17,520 data points over the course of a year. This dramatic increase in resolution enables HEM to account for daily variation in sunlight, cloud cover, peak-hour electricity use, overnight demand, battery storage behaviours and how energy systems interact with one another in real time.

Equally important is HEM's transparency. Many of SAP's assumptions and equations date back decades, often without clear documentation on their original rationale. Over time, this has led to a model that behaves in ways that can feel opaque, even to experienced assessors. HEM, however, is built on a fully traceable, research linked methodology. Every calculation and variable maps back to defined evidence or modelling work, enabling

users to understand precisely why results appear as they do. This clarity not only improves confidence but also makes it possible to interrogate results in ways SAP cannot support. It also positions HEM to incorporate new technologies more effectively. For example, thermal batteries, which are now increasingly common, are not supported by SAP at all, leaving assessors with no meaningful way to model them. HEM, built with modern energy systems in mind, can integrate these technologies and evolve with future innovations far more readily.

The timeline for HEM's introduction has shifted several times. The original intention was for HEM to launch at the same time as the new Future Homes Standard and updated Part L Building Regulations. However, the Government ultimately chose to delay HEM to avoid the risks associated with a simultaneous, sector-wide changeover. The current expectation is that the first version will be released in summer 2026, with the new Part L taking effect in 2027. From that point, there will be a two-year period of dual running during which housebuilders and developers can choose whether to use SAP or HEM for new projects. After this period, Government is expected to announce a six-month notice window ahead of SAP's withdrawal for new sites, likely placing full adoption of HEM around 2029 or 2030.

It is also important to recognise that HEM will not be fully complete at launch. The first release will not include EPC calculations or running cost assessments. These will be introduced in HEM Version Two, anticipated for late 2026 or early 2027.

This staged rollout reflects the model's scale and complexity, as well as the need to build the training, accreditation and auditing frameworks that will surround it. Although the HEM technical engine is largely ready, it cannot be deployed until these industry-wide processes are established. Assessors will require training, conventions must be developed, and accreditation pathways need to be put in place. Unlike previous SAP updates, where most assessors could adapt with minimal effort, HEM involves a fundamentally different way of working and will therefore require dedicated upskilling.

Another factor accelerating the relevance of HEM is the upcoming reform of Energy Performance Certificates (EPCs) planned for 2030. Under new rules, all privately rented and social housing will be required to meet revised EPC standards. Crucially, SAP will not be capable of producing EPCs that comply with the 2030 framework. Any new EPCs which are generated after the reforms come into force will require HEM.

Although existing EPCs produced under SAP will remain valid, landlords and housing providers undertaking new assessments will need to ensure they are using HEM. This long-term shift makes early familiarisation with HEM particularly valuable for organisations with large or evolving portfolios.

Overall, the Home Energy Model represents a long-awaited modernisation of how the UK models energy use in new homes. By offering far greater accuracy, full transparency and the flexibility to accommodate new and emerging technologies, it brings energy assessment into line with contemporary building practices and net zero ambitions.

While the transition will require adjustment, including training, dual running and new accreditation processes, the benefits are substantial. With HEM expected to be fully integrated into regulation by the end of the decade, now is the moment for housebuilders, developers, assessors and landlords to begin preparing for a system which is designed for the future, not the past.

Jon Ponting is Future Homes Standard policy lead at AES Sustainability Consultants

Vent-Axia welcomes the Future Homes Standard

Vent-Axia has welcomed the Future Homes Standard, alongside the publication of new Approved Document Part F (Means of Ventilation) of the Building Regulations, and Part L (Conservation of Fuel and Power), as "a significant step on the road to Net Zero." Joe Brawn, product and marketing director at Vent-Axia said: "We welcome the Future Homes Standard and the clarity it provides housebuilders, and how we can help them on the Net-Zero journey. At Vent-Axia we are committed to both a low-carbon future and the health and well-being of people. We therefore welcome the new focus on competency, the drive for better system design, and improvements in specific fan power within Part F."

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Visit the SFA Saniflo and Kinedo stand at the NEC

There's no doubt that for many brands in the plumbing, bathroom and kitchen sectors, the Installer Show has been one of the key events of the past few years. And that is certainly the case for **Saniflo**. With 40,000 plus visitors over 3 days in 2025 – and more anticipated this year - it provides a perfect showcase to a highly relevant and engaged audience. As such, the company is pleased to confirm its presence for the 2026 event. Saniflo will be located on stand 4F22 right in the heart of Hall 4 at the NEC near to the Bathroom Association theatre. As with previous years, the stand will showcase Saniflo's growing range of products on one side with the Kinedo shower products on the other.

020 8842 0033 www.sfasaniflo.co.uk **INSTALLER SHOW** STAND NO 4F22

Exciting times ahead for the Proctor Group

We are delighted to announce that a new Commercial Director joined the **Proctor Group** on the 13th April 2026, marking another important step in the company's continued growth across the construction and building materials sectors. Barbara Massie brings a wealth of experience, a strong commercial skillset, and a proven track record of driving growth. She will work closely with the Board to deliver sustainable commercial growth, strengthen customer and supply chain relationships, and support the ongoing development of the Proctor Group's people, products, and market presence. Barbara joins us from Kirkwood Timber Frame, where she held the position of Business Development Director for over two years. Prior to this, she held senior Director-level roles with Travis Perkins and NorDan. Her appointment reflects the Proctor Group's commitment to investing in experienced leadership to support customers, partners, and projects across the UK construction industry.

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SHOW PREVIEW

NEC Birmingham
23-25 June

NOT JUST FOR INSTALLERS

The UK's built environment is entering a period of rapid change. With new building safety regulations, ambitious decarbonisation targets and the urgent need to upgrade existing housing stock, developers, housing providers and contractors face increasing pressure to deliver buildings that are safer, more efficient and more sustainable.

Against this backdrop, InstallerSHOW 2026 returns to the NEC Birmingham from 23-25 June, with a renewed focus through InstallerBUILD, the show's dedicated theme for the building sector.

InstallerSHOW has grown into the UK's largest event for the installation and built environment industries, bringing together more than 40,000 visitors and 900 exhibitors across three days of networking, innovation and industry insight. The event connects installers, manufacturers, developers, specifiers and housing professionals, creating a unique environment where the entire supply chain can come together.

InstallerBUILD provides a hub for professionals looking to explore the latest products, materials and techniques shaping modern building projects. Designed for builders, contractors, developers and specifiers, it focuses on the practical realities of delivering high quality buildings across both new build and retrofit environments.

Visitors will be able to discover innovations covering roofing, cladding, flooring, insulation and renewable technologies, alongside systems designed to improve performance, durability and sustainability. With the industry increasingly focused on energy efficiency and building safety, InstallerBUILD highlights solutions that help meet evolving regulatory and environmental demands.

A major highlight within InstallerBUILD is The HAUS, a full scale two storey house constructed inside the exhibition halls. Designed by award-winning architects IF_DO and built using regenerative materials by Natural Building Systems, the project explores modern methods of construction and demonstrates how sustainable design, circular building principles and integrated technologies could shape the homes of the future.

InstallerBUILD will also host a range of live demonstrations and competitions that bring craftsmanship and best practice to life on the show floor. The Flooring Demo, delivered in partnership with FITA and the Contract Flooring Association (CFA), will feature live installation demonstrations showcasing professional techniques and highlighting the importance of training and standards.

Meanwhile, the National Institute of Carpet and Floorlayers (NICF) will host the prestigious NICF Fitter of the Year competition, where leading flooring professionals will compete in front of a live audience, demonstrating the skill and precision required to deliver high quality installations.

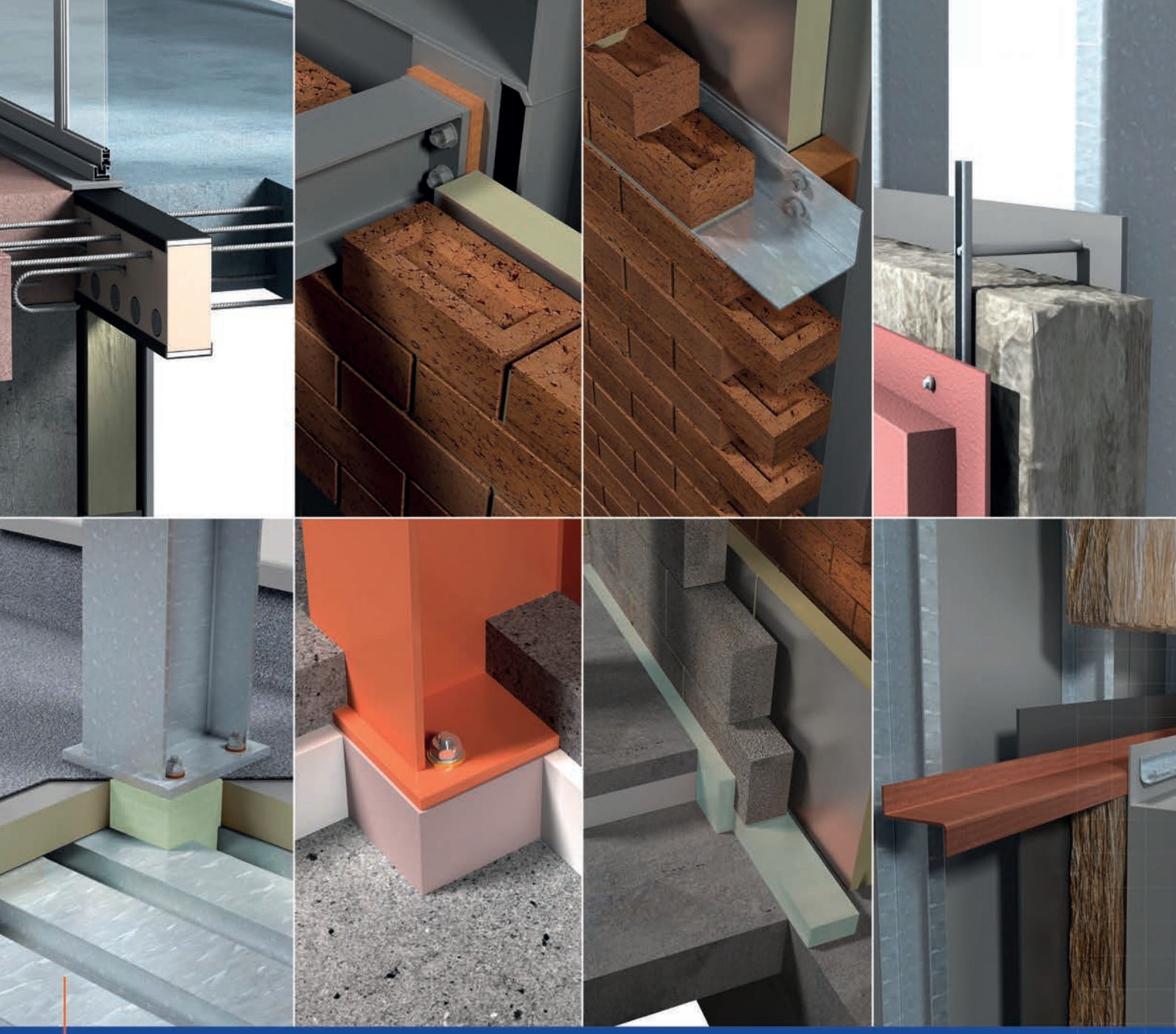
Roofing professionals will also have their moment in the spotlight with the National Federation of Roofing Contractors (NFRC) and SIG Roofing hosting The Great British Slate Off, a live roofing competition celebrating craftsmanship and the next generation of roofing talent.

Beyond InstallerBUILD, InstallerSHOW offers a wider installation 'ecosystem,' structured around four key show themes covering HVAC, plumbing and renewables, electrical technologies, construction and interiors.

For 2026, InstallerSHOW will also be co-located with the Professional Woodworking Expo and The Painting and Decorating Show, creating an expanded multi-trade environment with even more products, expertise and demonstrations from across the construction and finishing sectors.

Article supplied by InstallerSHOW

To register for your ticket, please scan the QR Code



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SHOW PREVIEW

12-14 May
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WHERE KNOWLEDGE MEETS DELIVERY

Futurebuild event director, Martin Hurn

Futurebuild's acclaimed Knowledge Programme is now live as we enter the lead-up to the 2026 event at Excel, London on 12-14 May.

While the main conference arena, sponsored by Mitsubishi Electric, tackles 'the 3Rs' of resilience, reuse and regenerative design, further details have also been announced on the content and collaborators; shaping another series of must attend seminars.

Spanning three dedicated stages – Materials and Buildings, Energy and Placemaking – the programme is less about aspiration and more about application, bringing together policy, practice and innovation in a way that feels grounded in delivery. This connection between policy and practice is underscored by the presence of national leadership within the wider programme.

WARM HOMES PLAN & HEALTHY BUILDINGS

At the National Retrofit Conference, sponsored by the Guildmore Group, Martin McCluskey MP, the UK's Minister for Energy Consumers, will deliver a keynote address focused on the Government's Warm Homes agenda. With Futurebuild 2026 offering a timely platform for industry professionals to address the implications together for the first time.

While on the Buildings and Materials stage, sponsored by Holcim, The Passivhaus Trust and Good Homes Alliance place occupant wellbeing and building performance at the centre of design thinking. The programme also addresses the challenge of scaling these approaches, asking how solutions that have traditionally been seen as specialist can become more mainstream.

ENERGY, AFFORDABILITY & THE DECARBONISATION DILEMMA

The Energy stage, sponsored by Allume, provides a complementary thread, focusing on the systems and infrastructure required to support the transition. John Allison, deputy director of heat networks at the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero, will contribute to discussions on the future of energy policy, with additional sessions examining how regulatory frameworks translate into practical delivery.

Talks will also tackle embedding carbon into procurement and managing energy demand, alongside practical discussions on heat pumps, retrofit and rooftop solar. Alongside representatives from the Energy Saving Trust and National Energy Action, bringing a critical social perspective that highlights the links between decarbonisation, affordability and fuel poverty.

PLACEMAKING & THE ROADMAP TO RESILIENCE

The Placemaking stage broadens the conversation further examining frameworks for regenerative places, green infrastructure and climate resilience. Contributors include Anna Hollyman, co-head of policy and places at UKGBC and Asha Tomlin-Kent, senior policy and programme officer at the Greater London Authority, who seek to align environmental performance with social value and long term resilience.

The role of biophilic design to help cities and communities combat growing climate, nature and social pressures is also being highlighted by a panel setting out practical strategies, governance and placemaking approaches that embed nature at the heart of urban life.

A STAND-OUT YEAR

As ever, the value of the Futurebuild 2026 Knowledge Programme is how the curators connect strategic thinking to application. Offering insight into the ideas being tested and delivered in real projects.

This year's co-location with UK Construction Week London and The Stone & Surfaces Show only amplifies the opportunities for attendees to learn from leading experts.

With more than 90 industry partners and associations involved, the Knowledge Programme reflects a collective effort to address shared challenges. This is reinforced by its scale, bringing together over 700 speakers across 13 stages to deliver more than 250 hours of CPD accredited content.

Article supplied by Futurebuild

To register for your ticket, please scan the QR Code.

CCF champions collaboration and greater accuracy in ESG reporting

National interior building products distributor CCF has joined forces with manufacturer supply chain partners British Gypsum and Isover to highlight the growing importance of accurate carbon data within the construction supply chain.

Held at the Saint Gobain Solutions Centre on Portland Street in London, more than 30 main and subcontractors attended, including sustainability specialists Construction Carbon and environmental leads from across the UK. The event was part of CCF, British Gypsum and Isover's wider Focused on Building for Good campaign, which promotes greater supply chain collaboration between manufacturers, suppliers, contractors and project teams.

Several speakers took the stage, with British Gypsum, CCF and Construction Carbon sharing insights into the challenges and opportunities surrounding carbon reporting. The session explored the increasing regulatory and commercial pressure on manufacturers to provide verified Environmental Product Declarations (EPDs) and Life Cycle Assessments (LCAs), and the complexities involved in producing this level of detailed product information.

A key challenge highlighted during the event was the limited availability of reliable carbon data, with many organisations still relying on generic industry averages rather than

verified manufacturer information. Discussions throughout the day reinforced the need for greater transparency and traceability across supply chains to enable materials to be tracked from manufacturer through to installation on site.

Speaking on behalf of CCF was Head of Customer Sustainability Solutions and Sales Phil Monkman who outlined how the company has been working closely with subcontractors, main contractors, industry specialists and the wider Travis Perkins Group to develop CONNECT, a carbon calculation tool designed to provide more accurate reporting than anything currently available in the market.

Representatives from CCF's customer base were also in attendance, with BPC Interiors, an early adopter of the CONNECT tool, sharing first-hand experience of using CONNECT and how gaining access to more accurate product data is helping them manage waste, support early project acceptance and access rebate payments linked to carbon reduction.

Phil said: "CONNECT has been shaped in partnership with the people who will use it every day, so hearing from early adopters like BPC Interiors is invaluable. By combining verified manufacturer data from partners such as British Gypsum and Isover with CCF's own supply chain insight, CONNECT gives contractors a clearer picture of their carbon impact and the confidence to make better informed decisions at every stage of a project."

The discussions also explored how better carbon data can support pre-construction planning, giving project teams the ability to evaluate environmental impact earlier in the design process. Feedback from attendees showed strong demand for accessible sustainability reporting tools, particularly among contractors and subcontractors navigating increasingly complex ESG requirements. The event reinforced that carbon reporting is becoming a strategic priority for the construction sector, supporting both compliance and more sustainable project delivery.

01604 825800
ccfltd.co.uk/content/focused-on-building-for-good

Installing contractor puts forward Wraptite® membrane for Manchester PBSA development

The installing contractor at a high-rise PBSA (purpose-built student accommodation) development has shown their confidence in Proctor Group's Wraptite® external air barrier by putting the product forward for use on the facade.

The Echo Street development in Manchester comprises three towers, of 16, 21 and 27 storeys, with 11 and 15 storey links between them. A total of 1224 rooms, provided across 38,350 m^2 (142,000 ft^2) of floor space, are complemented by extensive indoor and outdoor amenity spaces for working, socialising, dining and exercising. Completion is due in July 2026.

As part of regenerating a gateway site in the city centre, the finished scheme is targeting a BREEAM 'Excellent' rating. Air source heat pumps and solar PV panels form part of an all-electric approach. In addition, the linking sections have green roofs.

COMPREHENSIVE TECHNICAL SUPPORT KEY TO ONGOING RELATIONSHIP

The willingness of Eire Facades, the installing contractor, to propose Wraptite as an alternative to the specified membrane shows the extent of their trust in the product.

This confidence is rooted in their relationship with Proctor Group and the technical support the manufacturer has provided across multiple projects – including Echo Street.

Delivering building performance means getting the most out of quality products. To that end, Proctor Group gave toolbox talks to three project managers. All were receptive to the training, and it was clear from the Proctor Group's subsequent site visits that the information was followed. The standard of installation was very good across the entire development.

"What truly sets Wraptite apart is the support behind it," said Shaun Farnhill, project manager at Eire Facades. "The technical support team is incredibly knowledgeable and responsive, whether providing guidance during installation or helping to troubleshoot unique project challenges. We know we're backed by a team that values precision and performance as much as we do."

"The product is outstanding," added Shaun. "Durable, reliable, and easy to work with. It provides excellent airtightness and weather protection, helping us meet stringent performance standards without compromising on installation efficiency."

Wraptite provides a consistent airtight seal that contributes to meeting a project's airtightness target, while also being highly vapour permeable. That vapour permeability allows the passage of moisture vapour out of the structure, avoiding any increase in condensation risk.

In its external location, Wraptite can act as the sole air barrier in a facade build-up, although Echo Street also features an internal membrane layer.

For installing contractor, the self-adhered nature of Wraptite means there is no need to use accessories like primers or adhesives to achieve a secure installation. The introduction of additional components would risk costly delays for the main contractor, lower confidence in the fire safety of the facade, and potentially compromise the airtightness and permeability of the external membrane.

01250 872 261
proctorgroup.com/products/wraptite

MAKING A PITCH FOR COLD ROOF SYSTEMS

Paul Lambert at Hambleside Danelaw explains why ventilation measures are critical for cold pitched roof systems, in the context of warmer interiors.

In 2018, the World Health Organisation (WHO) provided guidelines that strongly recommended homes in temperate or colder climates should be a minimum of 18°C. This is a big step from the average internal temperature of homes in 1970, which was 12°C. Thanks to increased insulation, internal temperatures have climbed.

However it has become clear that merely increasing the amount of insulation results in a whole host of other problems caused by increased moisture in the living space. High levels of airborne moisture can be created through a range of activities, such as a resident boiling water, taking a shower, or drying clothes. It can also be introduced through weather events, such as periods of high humidity or increased rainfall. This increase in moisture also increases the potential to cause damp, mould, and structural damage as a result of condensation forming, and all the resulting issues.

Therefore, alongside the increasing insulation, it is vital to consider ventilation in the roof space, both in new buildings and refurbishment work, to allow for the moisture-laden air to exit.

The Code of practice BS 5250: Management of Moisture in Buildings was updated to recognise the impact that increasing insulation was having on growing moisture levels, and seeks to outline ways to handle this issue. Ensuring adequate roof ventilation is one of these methods of management. It is recommended that all cold pitched roofs have ventilation openings, whereas unventilated designs are not considered in the standard.

RIDGE VENTILATION – HIGH LEVEL

With ridge tiles requiring to be mechanically fixed, as outlined in BS 5534, the most common method of introducing high-level ventilation to the roof space is to install a ventilated dry fix ridge and hip system. These systems include fasteners, meeting the requirements for the mechanical fixing needed to secure ridge tiles in place. It is imperative that the ridge ventilation system used meets BS 8612 guidelines (which focus on performance requirements – material durability, resistance, ventilation, etc) that dry fix ridge and hip systems must meet. Not all such kits meet these requirements.

ALONGSIDE GREATER INSULATION, IT'S VITAL TO CONSIDER VENTILATING THE ROOF SPACE

TILE & SLATE VENTILATORS – LOW & HIGH LEVEL

There are numerous tile and slate ventilators available that are compatible with a wide range of tiles and slate sizes on the market. These vents are installed to replace the roof tiles or slates and ventilate through the roof covering itself. In addition, some tile and slate roof ventilators have the option to be adapted and fully utilised for both soil pipe ventilation and mechanical extraction from bathrooms.

SOFFIT & OVER FASCIA EAVES VENTILATORS – LOW LEVEL

The eaves are located where the wall meets the roof, and usually run parallel to the ridge. Designs may or may not include fascias and soffit boards.

An overhang is created to keep rainwater away from the walls where it can discharge, usually into the guttering system. Ventilation openings can be provided along the full length of the eaves, providing low level roof ventilation in line with the requirements recommended in BS 5250.

Where low level ventilation is being provided, it is essential to ensure that the ventilating air path is not blocked by the insulation in the roof, and various products are available to assist with this.

OTHER ROOF VENTILATION OPTIONS

Proprietary products such as ventilated ridge systems, tile and slate vents, eaves and soffit vents together with vapour permeable underlays, in combination with eaves panel ventilators and trays, can also contribute to ventilation provision and are easily incorporated into a well-designed roof. For pitched cold roof systems, much of the ventilation requirements depend on the type of underlay used.

Where non-breathable or high resistance underlay is installed, low level vents should be installed, with a 10 mm continuous opening along the eaves. Roofs spanning more than 10 metres, or over 35° pitch require ventilation equivalent to a 5 mm continuous gap at the ridge line. For roofs with low resistance underlay and a normal ceiling, the ventilation openings required at opposite eaves maybe reduced from the equivalent of a 10 mm continuous gap to a 7 mm continuous gap.

With a well-sealed ceiling, the equivalent eaves opening may be reduced to the equivalent of a 3 mm continuous opening with no ridge ventilation required. Alternatively, the equivalent of a continuous 5 mm ventilation opening may be provided at the ridge with a well-sealed ceiling.

Paul Lambert is field technical support at Hambleside Danelaw

Quicker delivery for coloured radiators …

Last year, **Stelrad** introduced a new quicker turnaround service for the supply of some of its radiators in colour. This new rapid turnaround service applied to the popular Column and Concord ranges, and to the Classic Towel Rail, Caliente and Concord towel rail products in one of the 55 standard RAL colours. The lead time was reduced to just fourteen days. Now Stelrad has announced phase 2 of the rollout of the same rapid turnaround for more coloured radiators.

info@stelrad.com www.stelrad.com

Blindingly good news from Designer Contracts

Designer Contracts has added a luxurious new collection of contemporary fabrics to its blinds and curtains portfolio – and doubled its blind making capacity. Its updated Fabric Studio Curtain Collection comprises 35 deluxe fabric options and seven elegant voiles, offering a range that includes subtle and delicate pattern choices. They come in 100% polypropylene or mixtures of polypropylene, cotton, viscous and linen. In addition, the company has expanded its blind production facility to keep pace with growing demand. Its in-house workrooms provide an industry leading 'order to installation' service, offering a comprehensive selection of made-to-measure blinds and curtains.

01246 854577 www.DesignerContracts.com

Award-winning EsyBox Pop takes centre stage

A new product video from **DAB Pumps** is shining a spotlight on the capabilities of its latest pressure boosting solution, the EsyBox Pop. The video demonstrates how the compact unit delivers reliable water pressure boosting in a format designed to simplify installation while maintaining the performance standards associated with the wider EsyBox range. As the newest and smallest member of DAB's EsyBox family, EsyBox Pop has been developed to provide installers with a highly compact, integrated boosting solution suited to residential and light commercial applications where space is limited but performance remains critical.

uk.dabpumps.com www.youtube.com/watch?v=m_M2n_ImptE

Qvantum's exhaust air heat pumps fit the bill

Qvantum's QE exhaust air heat pumps are delivering low-carbon comfort for 76 new-build apartments at The Roundway in Tottenham, North London. The QE recovers energy from extracted air while the inverter control automatically adjusts to minimise energy consumption. By using heat from the integrated thermal store, instantaneous hot water production ensures compliance with the industry standard and effectively eliminates legionella risk. A compact design adds a further benefit for residents, with installation in standard appliance cupboards saving valuable internal space. Bal Padda, sales manager at Qvantum UK, said: "Our QE series is the perfect choice for urban living."

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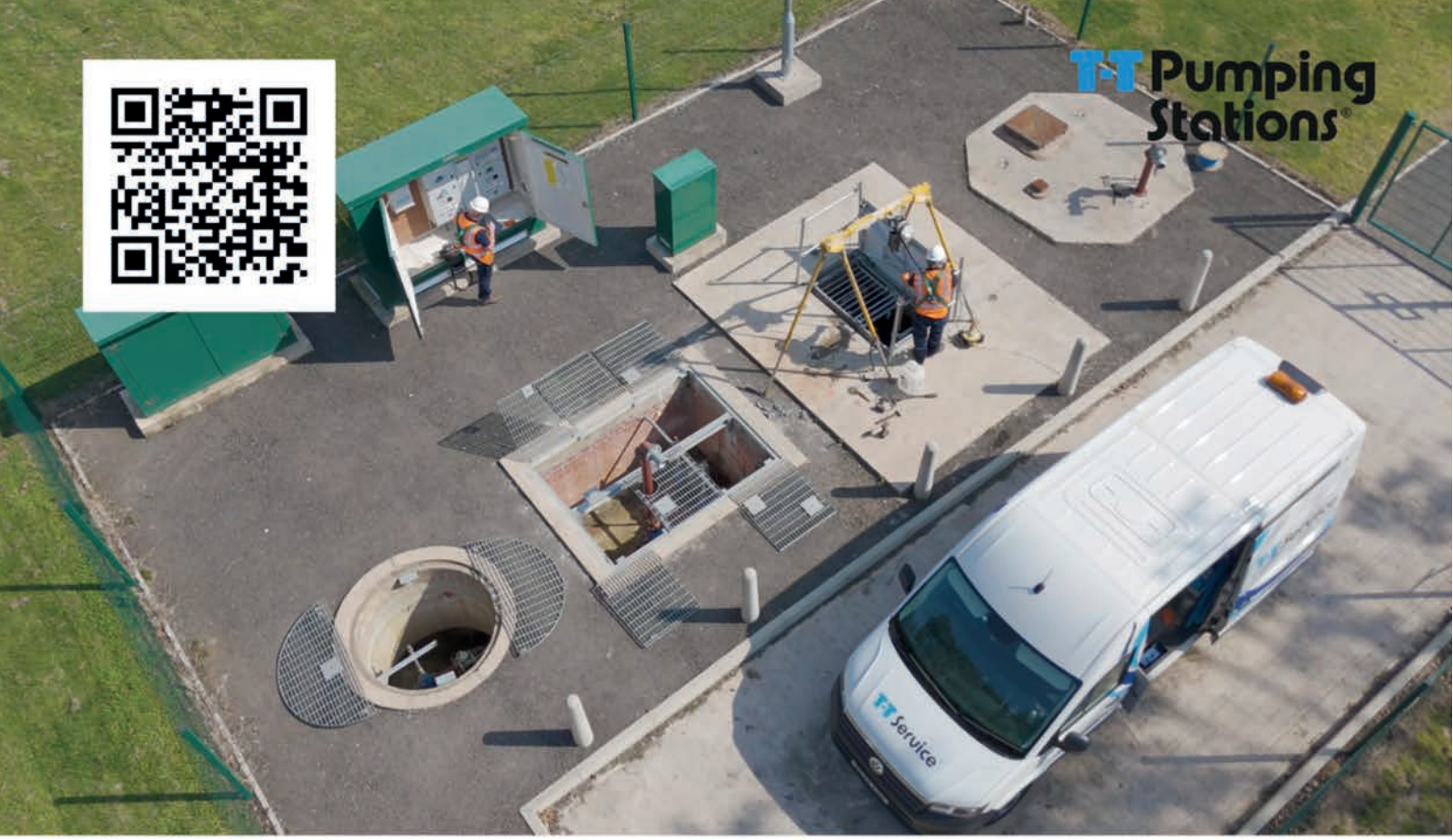

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DON'T BE A CYBER VICTIM

Colin Donnellon of Clear warns construction firms that it's time they woke up to the real threats posed by cyber attacks, as they are more vulnerable than ever due to growing reliance on digital tools and electronic transfers; and wonders why only 21% of board members oversee cybersecurity issues.

Despite the growing number of cyber attacks, UK-based construction companies still aren't getting the message: They are just as vulnerable to attacks as any other sector, and cybercriminals see them as lucrative, soft targets.

High-profile incidents, such as the cyber attacks on Bam Construct and Interserve, have highlighted the sector's susceptibility. Yet, many construction firms continue to underestimate the threat they face. A Government study has revealed that construction companies are among the most likely to fall victim to cyber fraud.

It's time therefore that the construction industry woke up to the reality of cyber threats. The stakes are high, and the consequences of just carrying on as normal could be devastating.

FALLING BEHIND

The 2023 survey commissioned by the Government on cyber security breaches has revealed a concerning trend: construction businesses are falling behind in online protection, resulting in higher rates of fraud. Defined in the study as "fraud involving deception for financial gain," these attacks often employ methods such as ransomware, viruses, spyware, malware, hacking, or phishing.

The survey found that 5% of building firms reported falling victim to cyber fraud in the past year. Alarmingly, only 21% of construction companies have board members responsible for cybersecurity, which is lower than almost every other sector. The report goes on to reveal that 26% of construction companies do not have adequate software security update policies or 'patch management,' representing a higher proportion than most other industries.

Other protective measures recommended by the Government include the use of VPNs, firewalls, up-to-date malware protection, separate guest and staff Wi-Fi networks, and data backups.

For construction firms, the risks associated with cyber attacks are manifold – operational, reputational, and legal. Construction companies rely heavily on their supply chains, and any disruption, including those caused by cyber-attacks, can significantly impact project delivery, leading to lengthy delays and increased costs.

From a reputational standpoint, a cyber-attack can have far-reaching consequences too. If malware spreads beyond the company or if confidential data is leaked, it can impact suppliers and clients, further damaging the company's reputation.

A data breach can also put a firm in hot water with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), which requires businesses to keep data secure and confidential. This includes sensitive information about other businesses, employees, and clients.

If a data breach happens, the firm responsible could face fines and penalties for violating GDPR, even if the breach was due to a cyber attack. Additionally, the firm may have to notify individuals whose data has been compromised, a process that can be both costly and time-consuming, especially in large-scale breaches.

THREAT OF FRAUDULENT EFTS

Electronic fund transfers (EFTs) are a lifeline for construction firms. They offer a fast and secure way to move large sums of money, which is crucial for paying suppliers, subcontractors, and other stakeholders. They also simplify international transactions, enabling construction companies to source materials and services from around the world. While the speed and reliability of EFTs help maintain cash flow and keep construction projects on schedule – they

are also digital, making them highly susceptible to cyber-attack.

Typically, cybercriminals will use social engineering techniques to trick employees into authorising fraudulent EFTs. This can involve impersonating a trusted contact or creating fake email addresses that appear legitimate.

As soon as a fraudulent EFT is completed, the funds are quickly moved to offshore accounts, making it difficult to recover them. This can result in substantial financial losses for construction firms and disrupt their financial operations, by delaying payments to suppliers and subcontractors, which can, in turn, delay project timelines.

The fallout from transacting fraudulent EFTs can be highly detrimental, leading to reputational damage among clients and partners. Furthermore, construction firms may face legal and compliance challenges if they fail to protect sensitive financial information, potentially resulting in fines and regulatory scrutiny.

REBUILDING AFTER A CYBER ATTACK

Preventing a cyber event isn't always possible, but being prepared can make all the difference. For construction companies, specialised cyber insurance policies are invaluable. They cover various cyber risks such as data breaches, ransomware attacks, and fraudulent EFTs.

26% OF CONSTRUCTION COMPANIES DO NOT HAVE ADEQUATE SOFTWARE SECURITY UPDATE POLICIES OR 'PATCH MANAGEMENT'

A cyber insurance policy can also cover financial losses from cyber incidents, including investigation costs, legal fees, and potential fines for violating data protection regulations like GDPR, as well as the costs of notifying affected individuals and providing credit monitoring services. These policies can also provide access to specialised incident response teams that can manage and mitigate the effects of a cyber attack by identifying the breach source, containing the damage, and restoring systems.

Moreover, cyber insurance helps protect a firm's reputation by covering public relations efforts to manage the repercussions of a cyber incident, such as communicating with clients, suppliers, and other stakeholders to reassure them that the firm is taking appropriate measures.

IT'S TIME TO HEED THE WARNINGS

It's no secret that the UK's construction industry is facing a multitude of challenges. Labour shortages, rising costs, economic uncertainty, and the push for sustainability – including the ambitious goal of net-zero carbon emissions by 2050 – are all headwinds the sector must weather. So, tackling the threat of cybercriminals who view the industry as an easy mark might not be a top priority.

However, cybercriminals are opportunists who, frankly, don't care about the industry's woes. They are simply on the lookout for vulnerabilities like outdated software, lack of employee training, and insufficient data protection that they can exploit. Construction firms, therefore, really need to take these threats seriously and beef up their cyber defences. This includes getting comprehensive cyber insurance and treating the current digital environment with the urgency it deserves. Otherwise, one day a ransomware attack could cripple their operations, leaving them struggling to recover and rebuild, without support.

Colin Donnellon is development director at Clear

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Wood fibre insulation: Is it suitable for mainstream housebuilding?

Yes, wood fibre insulation is suitable for mainstream housebuilding. It can be used to insulate the walls, floors and roof, and is available in air-injected or rigid board form.

It is formed from at least 80% wood fibre and this naturally derived raw material comes from PEFC certified forests. Insulants like wood fibre are often seen as materials suitable for projects whose main focus is sustainability but that is changing fast.

HOW CAN WOOD FIBRE INSULATION HELP REDUCE EMBODIED CARBON FOR MAINSTREAM HOUSEBUILDING?

With the government's target for the UK to become net zero by 2050, there's an increasing pressure on housebuilders to play their part in reducing the embodied carbon of new homes.

Embodied carbon is currently unregulated, even though it makes up 20% of the UK's built environment emissions. However, there is growing talk of legislation being introduced to regulate embodied carbon – and the construction industry has already drafted a potential Approved Document called 'Part Z'.

HOW WOOD FIBRE INSULATION CAN HELP REDUCE EMBODIED CARBON

When developers need to determine the carbon contribution of construction materials as a measure of their sustainability, they look at each product's Environmental Product Declaration (EPD). Due to its composition, wood fibre insulation can contribute to climate protection making it a viable option when looking to reduce embodied carbon.

On top of this, its insulation properties can help increase the energy efficiency of a building and reduce its associated carbon emissions.

HOW WOOD FIBRE INSULATION CAN HELP MITIGATE OVERHEATING

Wood fibre insulation doesn't just keep the heat in during the colder months. It can also help to keep heat out during hot summer days and evenings.

Wood fibre insulation is characterised by a high raw density. This means it can offer greater resistance to heat radiation due to its higher heat storage capacity.

HOW DOES WOOD FIBRE INSULATION HELP HOUSEBUILDERS WITH MOISTURE CONTROL?

Control of moisture in buildings is a requirement of 'Approved Document C: Site preparation and resistance to contaminants and moisture' of the building regulations. The document references the standard BS 5250:2021 Management of moisture in buildings.

Wood fibre insulation materials are diffusion open allowing water vapour to safely pass through the material. Vapour control layers (VCLs) are used to help control the level of internal moisture entering the building fabric.

HOW CAN WOOD FIBRE INSULATION CONTRIBUTE TO IMPROVED INDOOR AIR QUALITY?

As we spend 90% of our time indoors, and the average Brit spends 53 years of their life inside it's important that the indoor environment is one that promotes health and wellbeing. There is a pressure on housebuilders to ensure that new stock does not suffer the same fate as existing stock in the future.

Due to its density and composition, wood fibre insulation helps to keep noise pollution out of the home. Dense batts are used to insulate between timber studs, joists or rafters. These batts reduce the risks of gaps in the building fabric which can lead to cold spots and condensation issues. This helps to maintain the thermal integrity of the insulation layer.

To find out more about wood fibre insulations and how they can benefit mainstream housing developments contact STEICO's expert team for advice.

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Complete Wetroom Protection with Marmox

Linmear Basin With Support Brackets

Wetrooms are increasingly popular in modern residential developments, offering open-plan accessibility, contemporary appeal, and flexible layouts. For developers and builders, delivering wetrooms that are fully waterproof, thermally efficient, and easy to install is essential for ensuring quality, regulatory compliance, and long-term value. Marmox provides a complete wetroom system – including the reworked Showerlay, Multiboards, Tileable Basins, and Niches – designed to streamline installation, enhance durability, and provide adaptable solutions for a wide variety of layouts and project types.

The Showerlay forms the foundation of any wetroom, providing a fully waterproof floor suitable for high-use residential and commercial spaces. Redesigned from the surface down, it features a fleece overhang of 100 mm, creating a reliable seal at tanking joints between floor and walls. Each panel is trimable on all sides by up to 100 mm, allowing easy adaptation to irregular or confined layouts, making it ideal for both new-builds and refurbishment projects. The updated drainage system includes point drains, which can be positioned in the centre or offset, and linear drains, with an option for a tileable version that creates a seamless, level surface. All drains are designed for quick installation, easy access for cleaning, and long-term reliability. Coloured grilles – black, white, copper, and gold – are available alongside stainless steel, giving designers and developers flexibility to coordinate finishes without affecting functionality.

Marmox Multiboards complement the floor system by providing lightweight, waterproof, and thermally insulated bases for walls and floors. They can be cut and shaped to fit around plumbing, corners, and other structural features, making them suitable for new-build projects or complex layouts. Their insulation properties reduce condensation, maintain warmth, and work efficiently with underfloor heating, helping developers meet energy performance standards while improving occupant comfort. The combination of waterproofing and thermal efficiency ensures long-term durability and reduces the risk of water-related defects, supporting a more reliable build.

Multiboard Basin

Tileable Basins offer four practical options to suit a range of layouts: Infinity (no visible drain), Linear Drain (discreet channel), Push Plug (traditional filling), and Flat (doubles as a shelf). All basins share the same dimensions (770 x 485 x 100 mm) and come with either chrome or black bottle traps, allowing builders to adapt wetroom designs to individual project requirements while ensuring robust, easy-to-install components that reduce on-site risk and labour time.

Niches provide integrated storage options for wetroom walls, available in 1200 x 400 x 150 mm and 600 x 300 x 100 mm sizes. They reduce clutter, integrate seamlessly into layouts, and allow developers to deliver fully functional wetrooms without additional carpentry or bespoke solutions, saving time and simplifying the specification process.

Together, Marmox Showerlays, Multiboards, basins, and niches form a complete system that delivers efficiency, adaptability, and long-term reliability. Installation is streamlined, layouts are flexible, and wetrooms are fully waterproof, thermally comfortable, and durable from day one. Whether building luxury apartments, housing developments, or commercial residential spaces, Marmox wetroom solutions provide developers with a robust, specification-ready system that reduces build risk, ensures compliance, and adds lasting value for residents while minimising disruption on-site.

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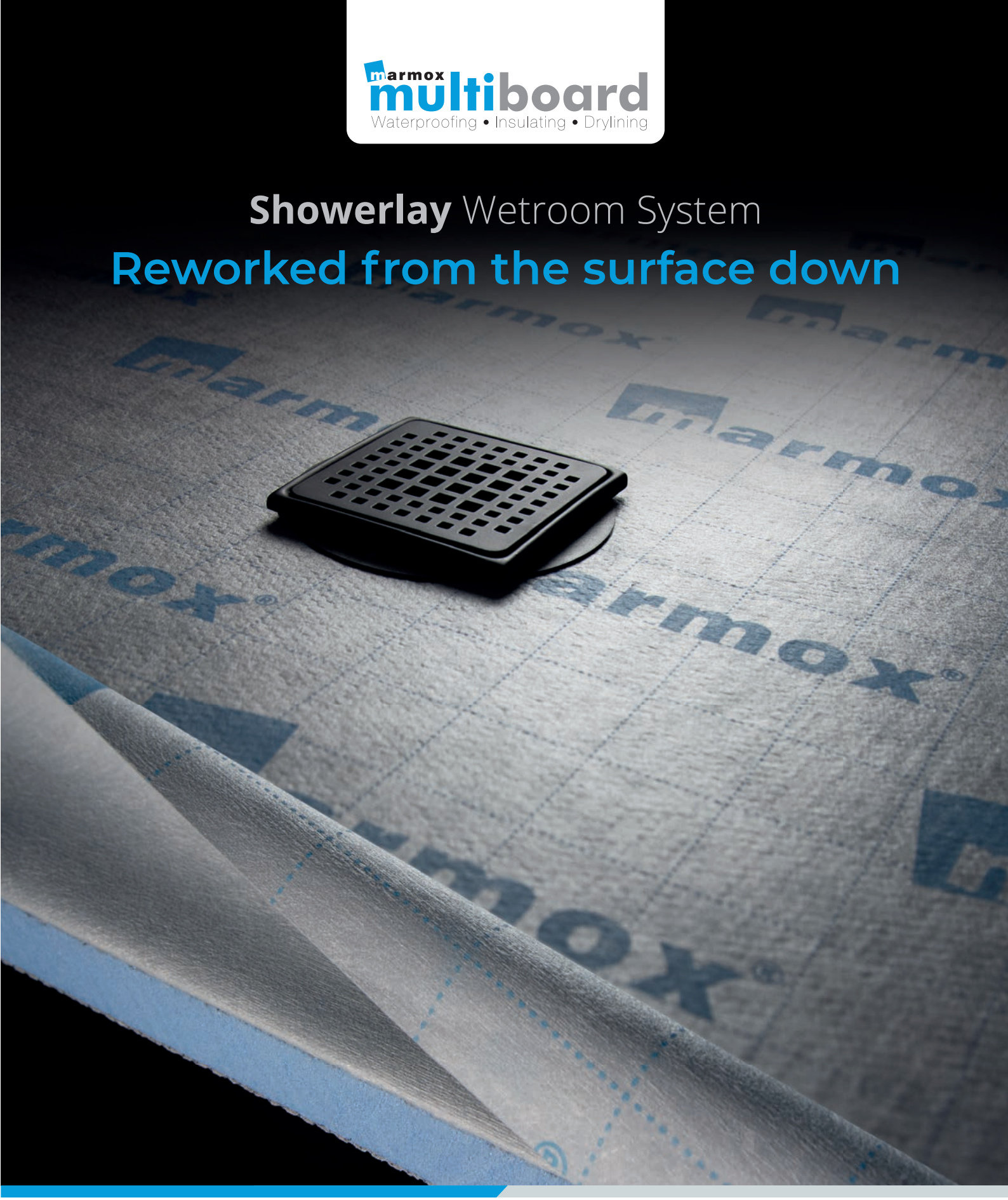

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Efficient by design: Why appliance choices matter more than ever for housebuilders and developers

Katie O'Shea, national contracts manager, UK & Ireland, Beko

Appliances account for a significant proportion of household energy use, with dryers, refrigeration, dishwashers and washing machines making up around 27% of UK domestic consumption, according to Energy Saving Trust's 2025 report. This offers a clear opportunity for developers to influence the long-term running costs of a home – a key factor buyers are paying closer attention to.

We designed our integrated appliance range to support both energy performance and everyday usability. Our patented technologies such as AquaTech or the use of the ProSmart inverter motors can reduce energy overall. Moreover, while the Eco programme remains the most efficient washing programme in terms of both energy and water consumption, technologies like Beko's EnergySpin, brings savings in other everyday programmes, giving consumers concerned about energy costs more flexibility.

These are not just technical specifications, but practical benefits that can be clearly communicated to buyers who are increasingly focused on affordability and long-term value.

This shift in buyer behaviour is already apparent. Our own research (Smart Living Index) points to how rising energy costs are actively changing how consumers use appliances, with many limiting usage or turning to alternatives such as hand-washing dishes (58%). For developers, this shows a clear change, with running costs no longer a secondary consideration, but a core factor in purchase decisions.

Efficient, integrated appliances provide practical advantages and easy-to-communicate selling points at both the marketing and viewing stage. They allow developers to demonstrate not just how a home looks, but how it performs over time.

Integrated appliances also play a crucial role in shaping first impressions. A fully specified kitchen, complete with built-in ovens, fridge freezers, dishwashers and laundry appliances, creates an immediate sense of quality and completeness, reducing the need for incentives or post-sale upgrades.

Beko's multi-brand portfolio supports this across a range of development types, allowing specification to be aligned with different market segments while maintaining consistency in performance, reliability and aftercare. For developers managing mixed-tenure or multi-phase schemes, this flexibility is key.

Brand visibility also contributes to buyer perception. Appliances are one of the few front-facing branded elements within a home, making trusted manufacturers an important factor in reinforcing quality at the point of sale. With Beko, this is supported by a comprehensive aftercare offering - including warranties, extensive spare parts availability, and nationwide repair networks with 76% first-time fix rates - this reduces risk and ongoing management burden for developers, while providing reassurance to homeowners.

Appliance specification now sits at the intersection buyer expectation and commercial performance. Developers who prioritise energy-conscious, integrated appliances will be better placed to strengthen buyer appeal and drive faster, more confident sales.

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When you install a Quooker, you're not simply fitting a tap – you're elevating a kitchen and enhancing the value of a home.

Access expert support & advice with **Quooker's dedicated online platform**

Quooker's B2B online platform aids clear visualisation and integration of a Quooker system into any kitchen design. It offers the guidance, resources and expert advice trade partners need to deliver Quooker installations with confidence and efficiency.

The tap that does it all

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CELEBRATING THE UNSUNG KITCHEN HEROES

What are the key factors for developers to consider when specifying taps and sinks? Dave Mayer at Reginox UK explains why these kitchen fixtures and fittings aren't so humble after all, but their importance is underappreciated.

It's widely acknowledged that the kitchen is the heart of the modern home, and arguably, its sink and tap are at the heart of the kitchen. Yet a search for the most kitchen essentials tends to sees lists headed by the kettle, microwave, air fryer and refrigerator, mostly in that order of usage.

But housebuilders and developers should take heed. While other kitchen equipment might have more selling power with consumers, make sure the sink and tap are not the poor relations in your kitchen spec.

Why? As a kitchen focal point, while not as obviously 'sexy' as some other kitchen attributes, the kitchen sink and tap – often placed under a window – command a position of high visibility, not to mention high usage. (If the kettle is the most used kitchen essential, it's filled up over the sink – using the tap.)

TRUSTED MANUFACTURERS

Brands with a rich heritage share a common denominator: manufacturing excellence and innovation. It's why their products capture consumers' imaginations, who in turn know they can trust what they're getting.

While the kettle might be the most used kitchen essential, the growth of the hot water tap market, fuelled by an increasing demand for convenience and energy efficiency, could eventually knock it off its perch.

The global boiling water tap market size was valued approximately US $728m in 2025, and will touch US $1356.52m by 2034, a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 7.16% (1).

Dutch engineer Henri Peteri first came up with the idea of a hot water tap in 1970, and later launched the company that would become Quooker. Its first commercially viable product offering boiling, hot, and cold water came to market in 1992 and the rest, as they say, is history.

It's one example of why housebuilders should consider manufacturing excellence and innovation when specifying kitchen sinks and taps.

The kitchen sink and tap need to be a perfect combination – well made, durable, stylish, practical and, of course, represent excellent value.

It is a never-ending challenge for sink and tap manufacturers to deliver clever design that blends quality, style and practicality. So, for instance, the curves on some of our steel sink designs might look pretty, but they are also there to add rigidity and strength to the product.

The old adage 'people do business with

people they know, like, and trust' is just as significant today as it always was.

Likeability fosters connection and customer loyalty, although a big caveat here is that developers need to perceive they are encountering value, competence, and that you understand their needs – and not just want their money!

Reputations can be pretty fragile. One of the strongest elements of a good reputation is world class customer service.

Customer satisfaction is not only key to business growth, but it also directly impacts a brand's reputation. Satisfied customers share their positive experiences with friends and colleagues, which is a vital boon for a company's reputation, especially given the potential impact that social media has these days.

So, there you have it. Kitchen sinks and taps might not be on the list of kitchen essentials, but specifiers need to understand they are more important for customers than they may realise!

Dave Mayer is commercial director at Reginox UK

Furlong Flooring extends Trident range with trend-led Plains and modern Heathers

Furlong Flooring has launched a contemporary refresh of its bestselling Trident twist carpet range, introducing a sharper palette of plains and heathers designed to reflect current interior trends and deliver greater versatility across the home.

Manufactured in the UK by Furlong Flooring under its Regency Carpets brand, Trident remains one of the industry's most reliable, high-performing twist carpets.

The refreshed colour palette has been developed to align with today's design preferences, offering a versatile spectrum from calm, understated neutrals to richer, more characterful tones. This new additions to the range support both classic and contemporary interiors, making Trident an ideal whole-house solution.

Heather shades include Semolina, Pandora, Bathstone, Twilight, Mercury, Ash, Maple Leaf, Rusting Oak, Soft Truffle, Woodland Trill, Drifted Stone and Velvet Sand. Plains are available in Quicklime, Pebble, Cicogna, Graphite Silk, Coral Cove, Taupe, Sage Whisper, Amber Clay Driftwood Hue, Silver Frost, Oyster shell and Antique Ivory.

Trident features Furlong Flooring's award-winning Combi-bac® backing. Providing a flexible yet robust structure it makes the carpet easier to transport, handle and fit. The range is stain resistant and bleach cleanable, moth and insect proof and offers excellent appearance retention, with colour fastness to light rated 4/5.

Engineered for long-term performance, Trident meets Class 23 Heavy Domestic and Class 33 Heavy Commercial classifications to BS EN 1307. Its tufted cut pile construction uses 100% recycled yarn, balancing durability, comfort and sustainability. A 10-year wear warranty and dependable UK manufacture ensure consistent stock availability, a hallmark of Furlong Flooring's service model.

"Trident is one of the industry's most loved carpet ranges and the additions of the new Plains and Heathers further reinforces its wide market appeal," commented Ian Collacott, sales director at Furlong Flooring. "Trident Plains and Heathers are ranges that offers practical benefits to the installer as well as meeting the trend-led aesthetic desires of the homeowner."

With its latest update, Trident reinforces its position as a practical, proven favourite, designed to support the trade with performance, consistency and simplicity, while offering homeowners a stylish, whole-house flooring solution.

01322 628 700 www.furlongflooring.com

TO BUY OR TO HIRE? THAT IS THE QUESTION

Construction plant can be high cost and often may require specialist machinery and services. Groundwork specialist and YouTuber Dave Vickers gives some pointers on when to buy and when to hire.

Getting the right tools and plant, on time, in good working condition and at the right price is critical – it can keep you on schedule or severely put you behind. Sometimes specialist one-off tools might be a necessity, and some parts of the build schedule are heavier on equipment than others. Groundworks are notoriously the big unknown – until you dig you don't know what's needed; bigger excavators, piling, under-pinning. Site survey equipment with the latest technology is essential.

Housebuilders are one of the largest consumers of plant and tool hire and rely on local and national plant hire companies. Larger plant is overall cheaper to hire-in for specific jobs and short-term hires. It's when a housebuilder looks at multiple job sites and continuously uses kit that the investment equation kicks in and it's worth buying.

Hiring has massive benefits. It's always good to work closely with local hirers to get that partnership on which you can rely. They will introduce you to new equipment and tools to try, they can source specialist tools, always use their expertise. Another benefit is that you can try a machine out first.

On any typical housebuilding project certain equipment is only ever worth hiring. It's infrequently used e.g. different sized shoring trench panels. For onsite health and safety, from noise reduction to dust control tools your local hire companies will always help. With the latest push for emission-free electric vehicles, hire fleets offer choice.

Investing in plant is always a big decision for any business. But having a core fleet can make economic sense. We have just decided to commit to investing in 13 tonne Takeuchi and Hitachi excavators, 6-9 tonne Thwaites dumpers, and ride-on Bomag rollers. We can see at least two years work ahead of us so scaling up is the next natural step.

When buying construction plant there are specialist finance firms geared to help with plenty of choices so shop around. They are familiar with leading construction brands and offer alternatives, such as lease, HP or lease-buy. Residual value on any investment can be key; what you can trade in a machine for in three to five years makes a big difference. There is always a ready-used equipment market and that sometimes might be the place to start when asset buying.

ON ANY HOUSEBUILDING PROJECT, CERTAIN EQUIPMENT IS ONLY EVER WORTH HIRING

We started with smaller miniexcavators, dumpers and rollers; hiring in larger plant when needed. The moment we started hiring for longer periods, we made the move into purchasing equipment. Buying the best brands was key for reliability and residual value, and to reduce downtime on site with breakdowns. You really do get what you pay for.

Having won Operator of the Year in 2021, I champion good practice onsite, and am also keen to highlight the benefit of plant training for machine operators onsite. CPCS cards and NPORS cards both offer excellent training on plant and construction courses.

Good operators save time and money. Operators with plant maintenance knowledge always help when something won't work and help your own plant and tools keep their value.

Groundworks can be potentially the largest cost and where the biggest pitfalls are in any housebuilding project. They can take up to 30% of the budget – more when unforeseen problems arise. Getting groundworks right is therefore key.

An excavator is often the first and last piece of kit onsite doing everything from early footings and groundwork, utilities infrastructure, access roads to precision grading and finishing for external works and landscaped gardens.

My favourite plant item is a 9-tonne excavator – remember machine power is also required for tracking and grading. Grading is often regarded as one of the key skills for groundworks and having a machine that can give a consistent flat finish is essential on housebuilding sites.

For larger (50-units+) plots, a wheeled excavator or backhoe provides real versatility. At the smaller end, the classic 1.6 tonne mini-digger is the most well-used and worth investing in. Very popular with housebuilders and utilities, it remains the most popular weight class.

Dave Vickers is a director at Clickers Construction and runs the Digging With Dave YouTube channel

Supporting developers to deliver BNG

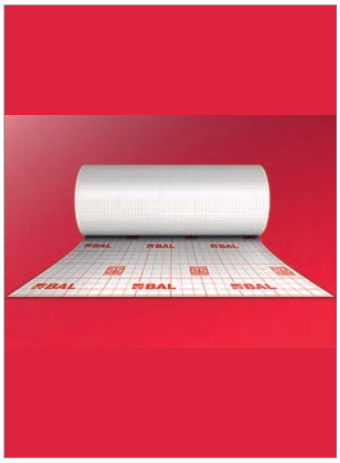
It has been over two years since Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) became mandatory in England, and **Meadfleet** continues to support housing developers in meeting their long-term obligations with confidence. As a specialist open space management company, Meadfleet provide the expertise needed to deliver and maintain habitats over the full 30-year period. Our dedicated Ecology Team manages monitoring, surveying and reporting, ensuring habitat management plans are implemented effectively and remain compliant. Working in partnership with developers and key stakeholders, Meadfleet help secure successful BNG outcomes – protecting both ecological value and the long-term success of the development.

enquiries@meadfleet.co.uk www.meadfleet.co.uk

Setcrete creates base for Great British Summer

MKM Stoke branch manager Paul Hodgkiss used **Setcrete** Exterior levelling compound to deliver a flawlessly smooth base that will withstand exposure to the worst of the British weather for a garden dome at his Nantwich home. Unaffected by rain or frost when set and dried, Setcrete Exterior is designed for smoothing and levelling outside areas that are subject to varying climatic conditions. It is ideally suited for balconies, patios and walkways, as well as semi-external spaces, such as garages, that are partially exposed to the elements. While it provides a durable standalone finish, it is also ideal for the receipt of non-slip coatings, artificial grass or tiles.

01538 361633 www.setcrete.co.uk



Introducing BAL Rapid-Mat in White – new colour, improved performance

BAL is pleased to introduce its improved BAL Rapid-Mat thin uncoupling mat – now in white. This latest development provides the same trusted performance installers rely on for tiling onto problematic substrates with movement, with additional improvements to make every installation smoother and more efficient. The move to a white mat – with red gridlines and markings – provides enhanced visibility for setting out plus easier to see wetting out of the adhesive, helping installers easily confirm full coverage during installation. Add to this the improved roll-out and mat stability, and you've got a system designed to speed up workflow without compromising reliability. And the benefits don't stop there: the updated mat colour also delivers a 2.5% CO_2 reduction in the production of the non-woven fleece – supporting our ongoing sustainability efforts. Alex Underwood, head of marketing at BAL, said: "Our improved BAL Rapid-Mat provides great new benefits for installers, on-top of its already outstanding performance as a thin, low height build-up uncoupling system. Importantly, nothing changes about its fundamental design. The unique fast-track thin uncoupling mat is still utilising our exclusive technology to accommodate lateral movement and counteracts tension stresses between the substrate and the floor to be installed."

01782 591100 www.bal-adhesives.com/products/rapid-mat

Setcrete® launches tile adhesives and grout range

Setcrete has launched a new tile adhesives and grout range. Backed by the company's reputation for high quality products and proven performance, Setcrete tile adhesives and grouts are aimed at building professionals who want an easy-to-use, no-nonsense product that is consistent and reliable. Suitable for both wall and floor tiles, the launch range includes Rapid S1 Tile Adhesive and Standard S1 Tile Adhesive, which provide excellent bond strength and flexibility to combat moderate movement and vibration. These adhesives are complemented by Rapid Flex Tile Grout, suitable for joints up to 15 mm wide. All adhesives and grouts are specially formulated for internal and external applications.

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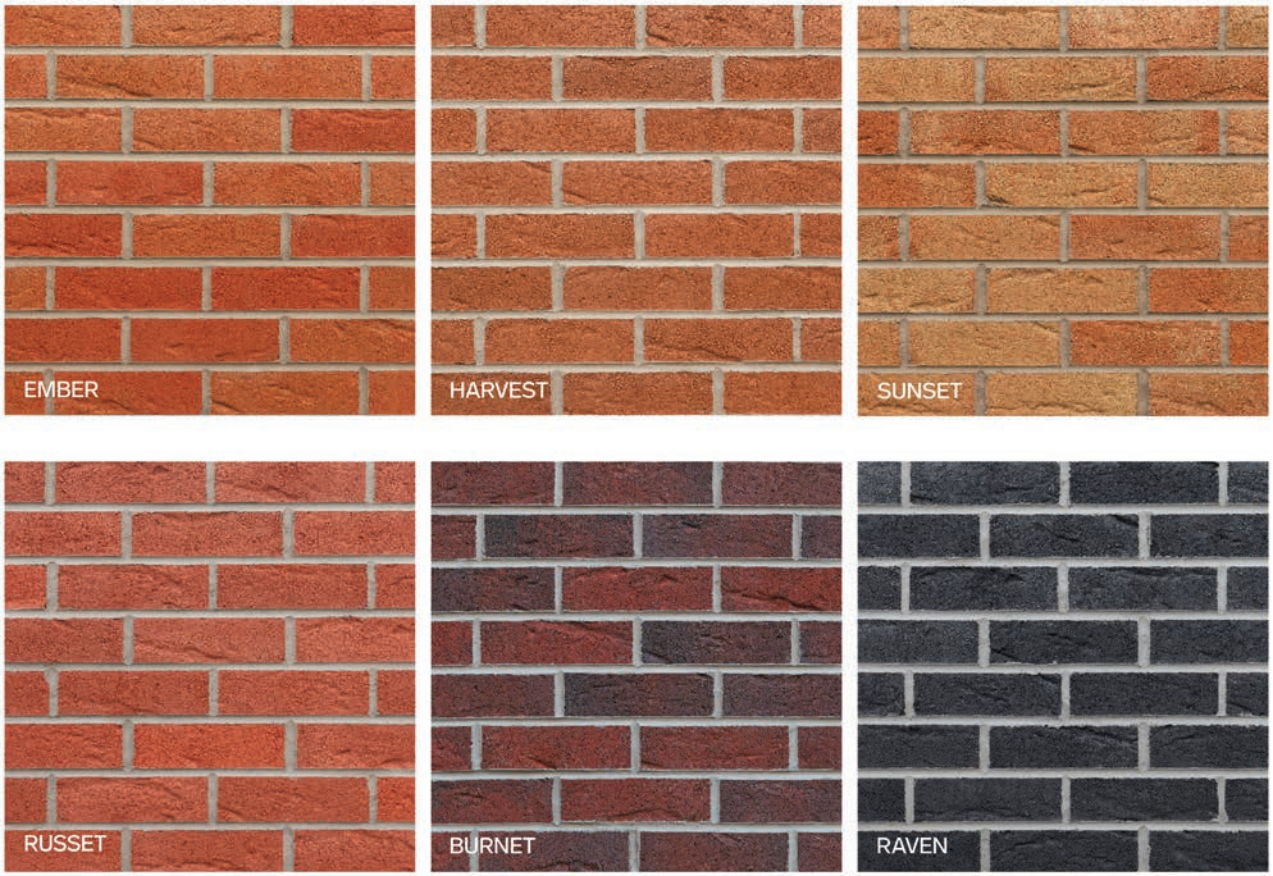
Favoured by specifiers who need to consider solutions to noise pollution in today's busy, building world, CaberAcoustic from **West Fraser** is a versatile, economical sound-reducing flooring system which reduces both impact and airborne transmitted sounds. It can be laid over concrete and timber floors and is available in 18 mm and 22 mm thicknesses. Recommended to be laid and fitted with D3 PVA glue in the tongue and groove joints, CaberAcoustic achieves 19 dB reduction in sound transference when installed on its own; it reduces sound but will not completely proof buildings from the transference of sound. Greater reductions are reached when used within a system for noise transference reductions.

uk.westfraser.com

AG strengthens brick offering with clay-like range



AG, a Tyrone headquartered, manufacturer of low carbon paving and building products, has launched Heathfield, a new clay-like concrete brick range designed to challenge long-held assumptions about what brick should be.

Developed in response to growing pressure on traditional clay supply, rising energy costs and increasing demand for consistent, reliable materials, Heathfield delivers the authentic appearance of clay with the performance, availability and sustainability of precision-engineered concrete.

The launch marks the latest step in AG's continued investment in innovation that gives developers and specifiers greater confidence in an increasingly unpredictable market.

Each brick is moulded directly from clay samples, with varied embossing applied across each slice offering 27 unique patterns to replicate the natural, irregular surface of clay.

This creates a non-repetitive, organic finish across elevations, delivering a timeless aesthetic while avoiding the common challenges of traditional clay.

Produced in the third generation company's state-of-the-art facilities using Enduur 1 advanced concrete technology, Heathfield offers enhanced strength, durability, UV resistance, and hydrophobic performance.

Two teardrop-shaped perforations also enhance density and structural strength compared with traditional three-holed bricks. With water absorption around 6% much lower than clay's 15-20%, and no soluble salts in the mix, Heathfield significantly reduces the risk of efflorescence on site.

Cured with renewable energy, the range is more consistent in size than traditional clay, creating uniform bedding joints, sharper finishes, and quicker, more reliable installation while avoiding the uneven joints caused by warped, energy-intensive kiln-fired bricks.

Sustainably produced using aggregates from AG's own quarry, including limestone to enrich colour, the range delivers consistent tones throughout each brick. Currently offered in six traditional colourways, with more planned, the collection provides architects and developers with flexible design options across housing, education and commercial projects.

Building on the success of AG's Woodward bricks, named Responsible Product of the Year 2025 by Business in the Community, Heathfield delivers the same innovative, high-performance qualities as an alternative to traditional clay bricks.

Backed by a 60-year guarantee, Heathfield is produced locally in the UK, with typical lead times of just three to five working days, giving builders and specifiers confidence even in unpredictable markets.

With energy prices and global supply chains under pressure, many construction materials face significant risk. AG's low-energy, UK-based manufacturing avoids that exposure, ensuring reliable supply, consistent quality, and a partner customers can trust for the long term.

The newly launched range is also part of AG's broader portfolio of building products, including paving and walling solutions, providing specifiers and developers with a complete, one-stop solution for external materials.

Commenting on the launch, AG CEO Stephen Acheson said: "The success of our Woodward range proved that concrete bricks can genuinely compete with, and in many cases outperform, traditional clay. Heathfield builds on that momentum and represents a further step forward in how the industry thinks about brick."

"We set out to create a product that delivers the character and warmth of clay while removing many of the challenges that developers, specifiers and bricklayers experience on site. Every detail has been carefully engineered, informed by close collaboration with the people who use our products day in, day out."

"As the market continues to rethink material choices in light of cost, availability and sustainability pressures, Heathfield offers a confident alternative. We believe products like this will play an increasingly important role in the future of construction, and we are proud to be leading that shift."

02879 650631
ag.uk.com

Heathfield

Every face tells a story

Introducing **Heathfield**, AG's new perforated concrete facing brick with a creased, clay-like finish. Designed to capture the timeless character of traditional brickwork, without the compromises.

AG.UK.COM

So much more than just bathrooms and kitchens

IVC Commercial sheet vinyl floors can help providers in achieving a better quality of life for tenants affordably. Jake Parks, national sales manager – commercial, IVC, explains: "Sheet vinyl is chosen for bathrooms and kitchens because of its affordability and ease of installation, but those factors also make it a great option elsewhere in social housing." Along with other benefits such as durability and easy maintenance, sheet vinyl gives providers the chance to create homes that go beyond adhering to regulation with flooring that's cost-effective to purchase and install. For providers keen to raise the quality of their housing stock, IVC Commercial's Zenura ranges are purpose-made as a budget-sensitive floor covering that has the staying power to last across tenancies – cost and the removal of floor coverings at void are the biggest barriers to wider adoption. The Zenura collection is equipped with a long-lasting wear layer that holds its appearance, and vinyl's low maintenance, seamless finish also helps tenants to maintain their floors to a high standard, further aiding longevity. In terms of installation, Zenura offers both standard compact-backed ranges and textile backings that can be installed directly on top of some existing floor coverings. Both types can be loose laid in rooms, speeding up time and reducing the cost of new build and refurbishment.

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Building for what's next

Water scarcity could slow future building

Local authorities are planning for extensive housebuilding to meet government targets. However, it is estimated that in some areas 39% of Labour's additional homes will be undeliverable due to water scarcity.

To allow new homes to be built at the rates required, more water efficient homes are required. Standards of 30% greater efficiency allows 45% more homes to be built without increased water demand.

Smart meters are seen as a significant part of the solution to reducing domestic water usage, Thames Water have recorded post installation savings of 12-17%, most major UK water companies have announced their plans for Advanced metering infrastructure, where all new connections or meters will replaced with the latest generation of smart meters.

GROUNDBREAKER – THE BEST LOCATION FOR SMART METERS

Groundbreaker is an insulated, surface mounted enclosure for a secure water management system and smart water meter. This locates the meter above ground, providing a better environment for smart technology over traditional underground boundary boxes, extends signal transmission and allows easy meter exchange.

The unique location of the Groundbreaker water management system future proofs the network and minimises the risk of developing future leaks. The position of the meter allows for an unjointed water supply, hence maintaining the integrity of the supply. The use of an uninterrupted supply has been recognised as best practice by Water UK and the Home Builders Federation.

In addition to new developments, Groundbreaker is ideal for redevelopment or refurbishment of properties that have architectural or water supply structures that make traditional metering options impractical.

This point of entry location makes it the perfect solution for installation in existing properties with shared supply or challenging architecture. Its location on the building also means no street furniture or liability in the highway.

SAVE WATER, SAVE ENERGY, SAVE MONEY

Stewart Clements, Director of the Heating & Hotwater Industry Council (HHIC) explained. "It's important that those responsible for building new homes and for upgrading existing homes – including both social and private housing providers and landlords – recognise the different factors involved in minimising energy consumption and in making tomorrow's homes the efficient properties needed to achieve decarbonisation and reach the net zero target for 2050."

"The energy used to heat water for devices and appliances emits an average of 875kg of CO_2 per household per year. This is equivalent to the CO_2 emissions from driving more than 1,700 miles in an average family car."
Energy Saving Trust

While water efficient appliances, i.e. dishwashers and washing machines, can reduce domestic water and energy usage, much of this hot water used in 'time critical' usage e.g. taking a shower or running the tap to rinse dishes.

LO-FLO – ADDITIONAL WATER SAVING, BUILT IN

To further improve home water efficiency, major water companies are also rolling out flow regulating devices, such as Groundbreaker's LoFlo. These modulate the level of flow entering premises – regardless of network pressure, meaning a reduction in the level of water used by customers when 'variable use' appliances (i.e. showers, taps, hosepipes). As the flow of water into the premises is limited, then the amount used by the customer is also limited – but without providing a degradation of service, and more importantly not requiring any intervention or behavioural change on the part of the customer.

The NRv2 LoFlo can be easily and simply fitted to any meter installation or retrofitted on meter exchange or when upgrading or remediating underground meter chambers. Thus, allowing Water Companies to manage demand with little or no impact on consumers and at minimal cost to the water undertakers.

Whether it's new build or redevelopment, Groundbreaker has a range of products to design in water efficient homes.

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