

NET ZERO AMBITION NEEDS A PLAN OF ACTION

Simon Storer, Chief Executive of the **Insulation Manufacturers Association**, discusses why the relaunch of the **Net Zero Council** is an encouraging sign for construction.

The relaunch of the Net Zero Council and the Housing Minister's renewed commitment to large-scale housing delivery has the potential to accelerate the transition towards a net zero future, but only if ministers can turn their words into reality. As the industry gears up for significant change, it is clear that while ambition is essential, execution will be the key to achieving meaningful progress.

Energy Secretary and Net Zero Council co-chair Ed Miliband's assertion that accelerating towards net zero presents the economic opportunity of the 21st century will no doubt resonate across the construction industry. Tackling the climate crisis while fostering job creation and reducing bills aligns perfectly with the vision of building a cleaner, more sustainable economy.

However, as we have said many times before, it's not enough to simply talk about ambition – it's time for action. The Net Zero Council's new mission to drive investment, innovation, and industrial transformation to make the UK a clean energy superpower must be followed through with clear, measurable milestones. There can be no room for complacency. Businesses and industry leaders, such as NZ Council member David Thomas from Barratt Redrow, are right to emphasise the urgent need for large-scale retrofit initiatives to improve

the energy efficiency of the UK's 27 million existing homes. But, equally critical is ensuring that the progress we make is real, verifiable, and aligned with the targets set.

I cannot stress enough how crucial it is that the government embeds transparency and accountability into ensuring homes are climate ready. The programme must have teeth, with clear milestones and the ability to hold stakeholders accountable for their progress. If we are to truly meet the net zero targets, we need more than rhetoric – we need implementation that matches the scale of ambition.

Rhetoric to reality

In parallel with the Net Zero Council's efforts, the Housing Minister's recent focus on large-scale housing development is another step forward. While Matthew Pennycook's announcement of the government's support for the New Towns Taskforce and the New Homes Accelerator is a promising sign, it is imperative that this ambition is balanced with an emphasis on quality, not just quantity.

The push for more homes is undoubtedly important, but we cannot afford to add properties to the future retrofit challenge by building homes that will require substantial retrofitting and refurbishment in the coming decades.

New houses must not cut corners on performance – they should be built to high standards from the start.

More importantly, we need robust inspection processes in place to guarantee compliance with net zero regulations. Holding housebuilders accountable is essential. Builders should



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no longer be allowed to cut corners or deliver homes that will need to be refurbished before 2050. We need stricter regulations, and we need to make sure they are followed.

Closing the performance gap

As we look to the future, it's critical that we close the performance gap by tightening regulations and ensuring that all new developments meet the highest standards of energy efficiency from day one. Regulators must have the tools and the authority to enforce these standards, even denying the ability to sell these homes if they are not compliant. Creating high-performance homes and reducing energy demand now will save us from expensive problems later and propel us towards our net-zero goals.

A clear, consistent and enforceable policy framework is necessary for the housing sector to have the confidence to invest and innovate. We are at a critical juncture, and if we are to meet our climate goals and deliver on the promises made to future generations, we must act with urgency, transparency, and resolve.

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