Built Environment Declares signatories call for stronger environmental legislation

Our group, representing two thousand built environment businesses, believes that the government needs to urgently implement strategies, regulation, and infrastructure that would substantially reform our built environment.

Signatories to the UK built environment declaration groups: Architects, Landscape Architects, Interior Designers, Structural, Civil and Build Services Engineers, Project Managers, and Contractors, have committed to working across businesses and across disciplines to address the huge environmental impacts associated with buildings and construction.

This group, representing over two thousand UK built environment organisations practicing in the UK and abroad, has surveyed members to understand what government support is needed in the form of strategies, regulation, and funding.

The survey, now in its second year, received more than 150 responses from construction companies, and revealed that signatories to the declarations are calling for:

- Planning reform to incorporate incentives such as offering faster planning periods for retrofit and regenerative schemes
- National and local plans to raise biodiversity cover in the UK to the global average
- Rigorous carbon budgets for all publicly funded and procured buildings
- Quotas to be set for each planning use class to support reduction of embodied carbon budgets and embedding of whole life carbon targets in building regulations
- Reform of the UK's housebuilding strategy to end homelessness and stabilise house prices
- Tax incentives, interest-free loans, and grants to enable home retrofit
- A network of storage and remanufacture facilities for building elements, products, and materials
- Bringing water infrastructure into public control and/or ownership

The survey results show a clear appetite for ambitious co-ordinated climate action from businesses and governments to address the environmental crises.

Smith Mordak, Director of Sustainability and Physics at Buro Happold and Built Environment Declares steering group member said: "I was particularly excited to see such widespread support for reforming the UK's housing strategy and housebuilding targets. To tackle embodied carbon, and the wider ecosystem impacts of the built environment, we need to devise ways of retrofitting and more fairly distributing our existing housing wealth. This means tackling the ways that housebuilding is often used for economic and political ends that often seeps outside of meeting housing need. The results showed that the industry believes that ending homelessness, stabilising house prices, and protecting nature are key goals of a good housing strategy and I believe that achieving this within planetary boundaries requires some innovative thinking in terms of design, planning, and policy-making."

Alasdair Ben Dixon, Architect and Co-founder at Collective Works and Architects Declare Steering group member said: "As a sector we are once again calling for improved regulation and a fundamental rethink of policy to address the planetary emergency. This survey captures the latest thinking on reforms which will help create a healthier, more equitable and truly sustainable built environment. Across the industry, organisations large and small have been collectively developing and sharing new knowledge and standards required to guarantee our built environment performs better. These should now be embedded at a national level to ensure we can swiftly and fairly deliver on the UK's essential net zero target."

Mike Sefton, Innovation Engineer at Expedition Engineering and Structural Engineers Declare Action Group member, said: "This survey demonstrates the strong alignment of the UK Structural Engineers Declare signatories with the latest Emissions Gap Report from the UN Environment Programme as we call on government to urgently support our goals through incentivisation and regulation towards zero-carbon building stock. But, importantly, the survey also goes deeper than this, demonstrating our commitment to a socially just transition which improves our natural environment and asks the government to drive this with positive changes to policy, planning, building regulations and public procurement."

Alice Berry, Geotechnics and Sustainability Associate at Arup and Civil Engineers Declare steering group member said: "The signatory organisations for UK Civil Engineers Declare recognise the climate and biodiversity emergency and are committed to doing their part to meet the needs of our society without breaching the earth's ecological boundaries. This survey demonstrates the appetite and support amongst our signatory members for swift and wide-reaching policy change."

Helen Gordon, Founder & Creative Director of Kite and Interior Designers Declare steering group member said: "This survey demonstrates the strong alignment from our Interior Design Declares signatories in recognising the climate and biodiversity emergency and commitment to doing their part to meet the needs of our society without breaching the earth's ecological boundaries. A significant impact on our habitats is born from buildings and construction accounting for nearly 40% of energy-related carbon dioxide emissions (CO_2). We are advocating for urgent policy change to allow for regenerative design practices, incentivising and regulating that move beyond the standard net-zero carbon targets alongside driving positive change to policy planning, building regulations and public procurement. Consequently, the positive impact reflects in the well-being of inhabitants and the planet."

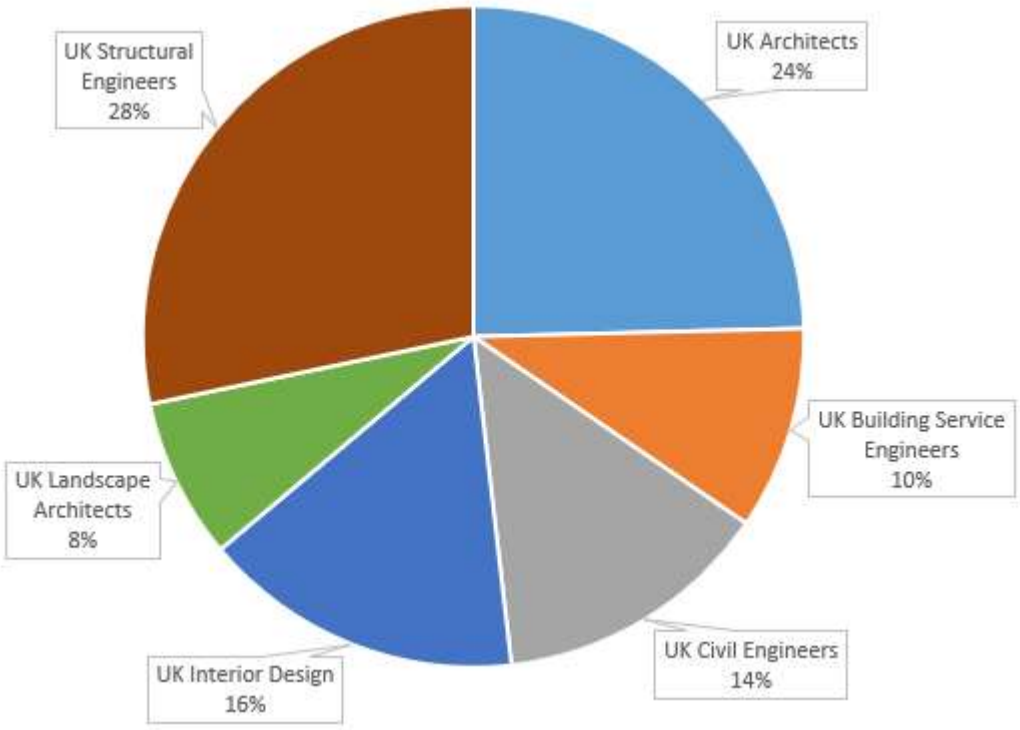
Lise Benningen, Senior Associate at Grant Associates and Landscape Architects Declare steering group member said: "This survey demonstrates that there is widespread support from built environment professionals to address the multiple complexities of the Climate and Biodiversity Emergencies, and importantly, recognises the importance of increasing biodiversity to build an environment more resilient to the changes ahead of us all."

Rob Leslie-Carter, Director at Arup, and Project Managers Declare steering group member, said: "The UK Project Managers Declare declaration has signatories representing over 10,000 project professionals. This survey clearly shows the appetite and sense of urgency across the community, for wide-reaching policy change to kick start our delivery of a sustainable built and natural environment. The power of projects, and our role and influence as integrators and enablers, means we are perfectly placed to deliver on this."

Facts and Figures

As of October 2022, over 2200 UK built environment businesses including architects, engineers, interior designers, and landscape architects have pledged to take positive action in response to climate breakdown and biodiversity collapse.

The survey was sent to all UK BED members between September and October 2022. 155 practices responded to the survey, each of them responding on behalf of their practice (not as individuals). These split into different disciplines as follows:



Full results

The majority of respondents agreed that by 2025, the UK government should:

- **reform the planning system** to facilitate built environment interventions that address the climate and biodiversity emergencies. This should include incentives such as offering faster planning periods for retrofit and regenerative schemes, checks to disincentivise interventions that exacerbate the climate and biodiversity emergencies such as requiring permission to demolish a building, and establishing clear guidelines for managing conflicting regulations such as where listed buildings and conservation areas conflict with environmental regulations. (83% by 2025, 95% by 2030 or sooner)
- devise a strategy, implement regulation, and commit funding towards **protecting space for nature**. This should include creating national and local plans that inform planning to raise the biodiversity cover of the UK to meet the global average by protecting habitats and soils, improving air and water quality, and facilitating rewilding, land conservation, sustainable food production, and carbon sequestration. Plans should incorporate green corridors at ground, canopy, and roof levels, and ways of ensuring everybody has access to green space for public amenity. (73% by 2025, 95% by 2030 or sooner)
- devise a strategy, implement regulation, and commit funding towards **driving change through public procurement**. All publicly funded and/or procured buildings and projects should have rigorous carbon management, with carbon targets set in accordance with science-based fair share climate targets, and adequate programmes and budgets to achieve this regardless of how much of a departure from industry business as usual. (63% by 2025, 92% by 2030 or sooner)
- devise a strategy and implement regulation to **address embodied carbon**. This should include implementing a decarbonisation routemap for buildings, infrastructure and construction with carbon budgets for different building sectors and regions and a mechanism for meeting these budgets such as quotas set for each planning use class to support meeting needs while building less and more efficiently. The routemap should also include incentivising the use of nature-based materials and embedding whole life carbon targets in building regulations, planning, and Development Consent Orders. (59% by 2025, 90% by 2030 or sooner)
- **reform the housing strategy and housebuilding targets** to prioritise equity and sustainability over profit. This should include explicit goals around ending homelessness, stabilising house prices, and protecting nature. (69% by 2025, 85% by 2030 or sooner)

The majority of respondents agreed that by 2030, the UK government should:

- devise a strategy, implement regulation, and commit funding towards **retrofitting the UK's homes**. This should be facilitated through socially equitable mechanisms such as tax incentives, interest-free loans, and grants, and should deliver insulation, ventilation and moisture control, disconnecting from the gas grid, external shading, and local energy generation in order to limit global warming to 1.5° above pre-industrial levels, address fuel poverty in the immediate and long term, and protect land that supports biodiversity and carbon sinks. (90% by 2030)

- devise a strategy, implement regulation, and commit funding towards implementing a **circular economy infrastructure plan** to facilitate reclamation, remanufacture, and recycling of building elements, products and materials. This should be enabled through a network of storage and remanufacture facilities, and supported by a planning system and building codes that facilitate reused materials. (88% by 2030)
- devise a strategy, implement regulation, and commit funding towards tackling **climate change adaptation**. The strategies should prioritise nature-based solutions and encompass all infrastructure systems by developing a systems-based understanding of the impacts of the IPCC's five plausible climate change scenarios on the built environment, supply chains, and the economy. (88% by 2030)
- bring **water infrastructure into public control and/or ownership**. The ongoing stewardship plan should include water efficiency measures such as fixing leaks, reversing pollution of and harm caused to ecosystems, water recovery and recycling, demand reduction measures, and protecting and improving water habitats and ecosystems. (83% by 2030)
- devise a strategy and implement regulation to **decarbonise building materials**. The comprehensive strategy should cover all building materials including concrete, steel, bricks, aluminium, timber, finishes and furniture, and include transition plans to reduce use of materials whose decarbonisation is challenging. (86% by 2030)
- devise a strategy, implement regulation, and commit funding towards **addressing urban heat islands**. The strategy should involve implementing nature-based infrastructure to tackle urban heat islands to include tree-planting, greening, and shading with greatest investment in areas with blue and green space deficiency. (83% by 2030)
- devise a strategy, implement regulation, and consider funding a comprehensive strategy for the integration of **ecosystem-based adaptation** for all new and retrofit-based developments to help communities adapt to the effects of climate change. The strategy should ensure that we are designing for the changes to come and not for a world that no longer exists. (81% by 2030)
- devise a strategy, implement regulation, and commit funding towards **retrofitting all the UK's buildings**. This should include sector-specific plans to limit global warming to 1.5° above pre-industrial levels, address fuel poverty in the immediate and long term, and protect land that supports biodiversity and carbon sinks. The government should lead by example by retrofitting public buildings to exemplary sustainability standards. (83% by 2030)
- devise a strategy, implement regulation, and commit funding towards delivering **energy efficiency infrastructure** to include large scale heat recovery and heat networks. This should be complemented by design codes to ensure heat infrastructure can operate at maximum efficiency, and investment in and facilitating of community owned/operated renewable energy schemes. (75% by 2030)
- provide **economic support for a just transition**. This should include employment policies such as jobs guarantee schemes and furlough schemes that can be rolled out to support workers and businesses during environmental and economic shocks, and that support a transition to a sustainable built environment and economy. (66% by 2030, 98% by 2050 or sooner)