UKGBC’s policy platform ‘Building Britain’s Future’ sets out 4 key opportunities for the next government to tackle the crises facing our country by renewing and greening the built environment.

This briefing explores the second opportunity and the game-changing policies urgently needed.

2. MAKE NEW DEVELOPMENTS HIGH QUALITY, WELL CONNECTED AND GREEN

WHAT’S THE OPPORTUNITY?

The next government is set to oversee the development of new homes and buildings across the country. We have a chance to do things differently. Every development could be part of the solution to the cost of living, climate and nature crises, not a driver of the problem.

New developments could be more sustainable with ever-better access to public services, transport and green spaces, and meet people’s expectations for modern features such as solar panels and low energy demand to make them cheaper to run. Reduced and decentralised energy demand will also be key to decarbonising the wider energy system.

1 in 10 tonnes of UK carbon emissions are ‘embodied’ in construction. Tackling these is a huge opportunity to make faster progress on climate targets.

CURRENT POLICIES

The planning system is inconsistent and unpredictable in the way it treats climate and nature, giving some high-carbon developments the go-ahead and blocking other low-carbon projects. This causes delay and conflict.

Current national building regulations are outdated. The draft Future Homes and Buildings Standards are weaker than standards already set by some local councils and could leave households and businesses with higher energy bills and large carbon footprints. It would also result in a national multibillion-pound bill for an oversized electricity grid.

The huge ‘embodied’ carbon emissions from construction are almost completely unregulated with no government strategy to address them.

The new 10% Biodiversity Net Gain requirement for new developments is an important advance, but doesn’t go far enough. Government action is needed to reduce the impact of the UK construction industry on global ecosystems.
GAME-CHANGING POLICIES
WE’RE CALLING FOR:

**NATURE AND CLIMATE AT THE CORE OF PLANNING**

The next government should modernise the planning system to place strong and predictable climate and nature protection at its core, in line with the UK’s legally binding Climate Change and Environment Acts.

This will facilitate **high-quality sustainable developments** and give developers and local authorities the certainty they need to invest and plan for the transition to a net zero economy. This **consistency will help cut costs** while unlocking low carbon projects.

**STRONGER SUSTAINABLE BUILDINGS STANDARD**

The strongest versions of the current draft Future Homes and Buildings Standards should be quickly followed by a framework for more **ambitious voluntary building standards** to support those local authorities and developers which want to go further.

Following this, a further standard should be introduced **improving energy efficiency and requiring ‘in-use’ performance measurement** to cut bills and carbon, support the low-carbon electricity grid, and ensure quality.

**RESTRICTED EMBODIED CARBON EMISSIONS**

The next government should require developers to **measure and report whole-life carbon emissions**, and introduce legal limits on embodied carbon.

These emissions should also be reduced through new mechanisms to **encourage the reuse of existing buildings** and assets instead of demolition and rebuild.

Existing buildings should be valued as social and economic assets to be re-imagined and repurposed for community needs.

**REGULATION TO PROTECT AND RESTORE NATURE**

Nature-rich, and a new designation of ‘nature recovery’, areas should be protected from development, regardless of their status as brown, green or ‘grey’ belt.

The next government should **build on the success of 10% Biodiversity Net Gain** for new developments, increasing this to 20% - the minimum needed to stem overall habitat loss.

The material resource extraction associated with construction often results in devasting impacts on ecosystems worldwide. The government should consult on and regulate these **‘embodied ecological impacts.’**

**GET INVOLVED**

- Visit our website, a central hub for the general election and beyond.
- Read our 4 point policy platform ‘Building Britain’s Future’ and our other policy guides.
- Contact us at policy@ukgbc.org.

**FURTHER RESOURCES**

- The Whole Life Carbon Roadmap
- Future Homes and Buildings Standard Response
- Biodiversity Net Gain
- New Homes Policy Playbook
- The Nature Recovery Playbook