



House of Commons
Environmental Audit
Committee

**Greener homes for the
future?
An environmental
analysis of the
Government's house-
building plans**

Twelfth Report of Session 2007–08

*Report, together with formal minutes, oral and
written evidence*

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The Environmental Audit Committee

The Environmental Audit Committee is appointed by the House of Commons to consider to what extent the policies and programmes of government departments and non-departmental public bodies contribute to environmental protection and sustainable development; to audit their performance against such targets as may be set for them by Her Majesty's Ministers; and to report thereon to the House.

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A list of Reports of the Committee from the present and prior Parliaments is at the back of this volume.

Committee staff

The current staff of the Committee are: Gordon Clarke (Clerk); Anne-Marie Griffiths (Second Clerk); Richard Douglas (Committee Specialist); Oliver Bennett (Committee Specialist); Susan Monaghan (Committee Assistant); Jennifer Steele (Secretary); and Charlotte Towerton (Sandwich Student)

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Summary

The target for 3 million new homes by 2020

The Committee on Climate Change should assess the impact of the Government's new house-building targets on the UK's 2020 carbon reduction target, and related carbon budgets. In light of the latest economic projections, fundamental changes in the mortgage market, and falling house prices, the Government should urgently review the assumptions on which its 3 million new homes target is based. In particular, the Government should review the share of its house-building targets attributable to meeting aspirations for bigger homes and gardens. In reassessing its targets the Government should not dilute its environmental ambitions, but should seize the opportunity to help the economy by investing in the skills and supply chains needed for a step change in environmental construction standards.

Zero carbon homes

Currently, the Government's target is for 2 million new homes to be built before the zero carbon target comes into effect in 2016, and for a further 1 million to be built afterwards. The Government should change the balance of its target so that the proportion built after the zero carbon target comes into effect is increased significantly.

Zero carbon homes must be built to the highest energy efficiency standards and source their heat and power from renewable sources. Ideally these will come from on-site renewable power generation; where this is impractical, off-site renewables should be built or funded. The Government should seize the opportunity of the 2016 zero carbon target to accelerate the development of district renewable energy sources to supply existing neighbourhoods.

Code for Sustainable Homes and building regulations

In May 2008 it became mandatory for all new homes to be given a rating against the Code for Sustainable Homes. Simply providing a rating for new homes may fail to influence the market in the way the Government would like. The Government should consider making it mandatory to build to aspects of the Code from 2010 onwards. The Government should urgently consider introducing feed-in tariffs as a way of making zero carbon homes more financially attractive to developers and homebuyers.

Greater emphasis ought to be placed on energy efficiency and sustainability within the building control regime that inspects new housing. The Government should consider introducing higher penalties for developers who fail to meet energy efficiency standards, as well as reviewing whether financial incentives could be offered to developers based on the number of properties which pass a post-completion site inspection.

Where new homes should be built

The Government should ensure that, in the current market downturn, an excess of land is not made available to developers, something which is already leading to greenfield sites being developed in preference to brownfield sites. As a key to this, the Government should urgently reintroduce a clear sequential test in favour of brownfield development into planning policy. It should clarify whether its target for 60% of new housing to be built on brownfield land will be applied to the 3 million new homes to be built by 2020. The Government should investigate the potential of vacant buildings to provide new housing.

Eco-towns

The Government should make clearer what influence eco-towns will have on the design of other new and existing developments. The same environmental tests used for eco-towns should be applied to all major housing developments from 2016. Many eco-town proposals have been criticised for being likely to encourage car journeys; the Government should re-examine these proposals, to ensure they have good public transport links, and are located close to commercial centres and employment opportunities.

Sustainable infrastructure for new developments

The Government has recently devoted considerable attention to delivering the infrastructure for sustainable new communities. The funding for this infrastructure from private developers may be very stretched in the current economic crisis. The Government should ensure that minimum standards for public transport and green infrastructure apply to all new developments.

