

Code for Sustainable Homes

New build housing

Relevant to: England

Introduction

A number of developments are taking place in the arena of new build housing that are highly relevant to local authorities and registered social landlords (RSLs) in England. Most importantly, in December 2006 the Government launched the much-awaited Code for Sustainable Homes, together with consultations on 'zero carbon development' and on a draft Planning Policy Statement (PPS) on planning and climate change (supplement to PPS1). This briefing note sets out the details of the Code, its relevance, and the action that local authorities need to take.¹

What is the Code for Sustainable Homes?

The Code for Sustainable Homes sets six levels of sustainability for new build housing in England. These levels are indicated by stars. Each level includes mandatory requirements for energy performance and water usage, together with tradable requirements for other aspects of sustainability. On energy, the requirements are a percentage reduction in carbon emissions compared with Building Regulations Part L1 (2006), as follows:

★	10 per cent
★★	18 per cent
★★★	25 per cent
★★★★	44 per cent
★★★★★	100 per cent
★★★★★★★	Zero carbon

('Zero carbon' means zero carbon produced (net over the year) from all energy use in the home – cooking, washing and appliances as well as space

heating, cooling, ventilation, lighting and hot water.)

Why has it been developed?

There are two reasons for the development of the Code: first, it offers, for the first time, an independently accredited, Government-endorsed sustainability rating for all new build housing. This rating can be used by prospective home purchasers, local authorities and others to authoritatively define and recognise a 'green' home. It is hoped that it will enable developers to use sustainability as a credible selling feature.

Second, the levels of the Code indicate the direction of future Building Regulations. This allows industry to build to specific levels with confidence, developing experience and expertise they can use when new revisions to Building Regulations come into force. For instance, the energy performance standard of Code level 3 (a 25 per cent improvement on current Building Regulations) is proposed to become the new standard for Building Regulations in England in 2010.



¹ The Code currently applies to England only, as do Planning Policy Statements. Building Regulations Part L apply to both England and Wales. Government intends that all new build homes should be zero carbon by 2016 in England and is proposing 2011 in Wales.

Operation

As with Ecohomes, the Code will rely on independent assessors to advise on achieving specific Code levels. But it also requires them to undertake a post-completion check before issuing a final certificate. Energy performance will be assessed using Building Regulations software.

Communities and Local Government has published a technical guidance document¹ and the Energy Saving Trust will also provide practical guidance on how to reach the energy performance standards within the Code. Guidance is already available on reaching the energy performance standard for level 3 of the Code under the Energy Saving Trust's energy efficiency best practice in housing programme. For further information, visit the [website](#)².

Implementation

Currently, use of the Code is voluntary for private developers. In July, the Government published its consultation³ on the future of the Code, including whether a rating against the Code should be mandatory for all new homes from April 2008. The aim is to encourage house builders to build to at least Code level 1 and preferably higher.



For all publicly supported developments, achievement of Code level 3 will be mandatory. In the case of registered social landlords (RSLs), this applies to all plans from the Housing Corporation's April 2008 funding cycle (until which time the Ecohomes 'very good' standard will continue to apply). In the case of homes developed by English

¹ www.planningportal.gov.uk/uploads/code_for_sustainable_homes_techguide.pdf.

² www.energysavingtrust.org.uk/housingbuildings/professionals/standards/.

³ www.communities.gov.uk/documents/corporate/pdf/Makingaringmandatory.

Partnerships or with support from the Government's housing growth programmes, it applies to all plans from April 2007.

Wider context

In December 2006, the Government issued a consultation document on moving towards 'zero carbon development' within ten years, ie: by 2016. In July 2007, the Government published a policy statement⁴ which confirms this ambition together with the progressive tightening of the energy efficiency building regulations - by 25 per cent in 2010 and by 44 per cent in 2013 - up to the zero carbon target in 2016.

The policy statement also makes it clear that local authorities should use the Code for Sustainable Homes to set higher environmental standards for new residential developments. Guidance on achieving this objective will be provided in the PPS on planning and climate change which is due to be finalised by the end of 2007.

Application

RSLs must build to Code level 3 or higher from April 2008. Whilst local authorities very rarely build new homes themselves, they still have a number of roles they can play if they wish to go beyond legal minimum requirements:

1. When negotiating plans for new development, local authorities should set out the desired sustainability credentials of the development. This should include a minimum Code performance level. The Energy Saving Trust recommends Code level 3 as minimum.

2. Local authorities should set out their proposed approach in the Development Plan Document, highlighting specific development opportunities where higher levels of the Code seem appropriate. This should be examined by a Planning Inspector to ensure it will indeed lead to the delivery of the required amount of high-quality housing.

Reference to these Code levels in relevant English regional strategies (notably Regional Spatial Strategies) will help with local adoption of such planning policies, as well as avoiding

⁴ www.communities.gov.uk/documents/planningandbuilding/pdf/153125.

competition between neighbouring local authorities at the expense of sustainability.

3. When running local promotions and/or promoting the benefits of new housing developments, local authorities can use the achievement of specific Code performance levels as a sales feature.

The Energy Saving Trust recommends widespread application of the energy performance standard of Code level 3 because:

- This can be achieved relatively easily and in general without the use of microgeneration technologies.
- The supply chains are generally available to build to this standard. The easiest solutions tend to entail better workmanship and quality products, which the developer should be able to secure.
- It paves the way for building to the legal minimum Building Regulations expected in 2010.

The Energy Saving Trust encourages the adoption of higher levels of the Code as exemplar and demonstration projects. We would be interested in hearing about such proposed developments, in order to help inform progress at national level.

Energy Saving Trust support

The Energy Saving Trust runs a number of support schemes to assist with the achievement of low-carbon developments. These include:

- Practical help, offering a free enquiries service to local authorities and housing associations on issues surrounding sustainable energy use.
- The energy efficiency best practice in housing programme, offering technical information, advice and training, primarily to industry players.
- The Department for Business Enterprise and Regulatory Reform's (BERR) Low Carbon Buildings Programme, offering grants for the installation of microgeneration technologies for both new build and existing housing.

Further information

To download the full text of the Code for Sustainable Homes, please visit www.communities.gov.uk/thecode.

The Energy Saving Trust offers a free enquiries service via our dedicated Practical help team – the team will undertake to answer any query regarding sustainable energy or sustainable road transport within a maximum of three working days.

Abbreviations used

BERR	The Department for Business Enterprise and Regulatory Reform
PPS	Planning Policy Statement
RSL	Registered social landlord

At the time of publication and to the best of our knowledge, the information contained in this briefing note was correct. This briefing note was first published in April 2007 and updated in August 2007.

Practical help cannot vouch for any of the organisations involved.

Practical help

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