

Insulation

The Energy Efficiency Newsletter

Queen's Speech acts as spur to increase insulation innovation

New legislation introduced in the Queen's Speech, which some critics believe waters down the impact of the 2016 Zero Carbon target, serves as a spur to encourage innovation in the building industry, says insulation expert, architect and Actis technical manager Thomas Wiedmer.

The rules, announced in July, confirmed concerns that in the government's battle to increase building across the UK, the reins on house builders have been loosened, enabling them to reach their low carbon goals through investing in Allowable Solutions rather than via improving fabric efficiency. They will now be allowed to reach code level 4 on site and top it up through Allowable Solutions, rather than attaining the originally proposed level 5.

But, while on the surface the move may sound to some like a backward step, what is needed is greater awareness of cost effective and innovative building products which will enable developers to get close to the Zero Carbon goal without such a great emphasis on these measures, believes insulation manufacturer Actis.

The firm's technical manager, architect Thomas Wiedmer, says while the Allowable Solutions element of the Zero Carbon target is

a good approach in principle, strengthening the FEE (Fabric Energy Efficiency) through a range of innovative products and techniques is also essential.

"It is important not to forget that innovation has an important role to play in our quest for Zero Carbon," he said.

"To achieve carbon compliance housebuilders will have to meet two criteria – fabric energy efficiency and efficient building energy technologies such as renewables, with Allowable Solutions being the third requirement to help them achieve the goal of zero carbon homes.

"The three key elements in improving the target FEE are lower U-values, reducing or eliminating thermal bridging and improving air tightness. This is quite straightforward – and not just for high end developers but for volume house builders too. Our CE marked Hybrid range, which consists of an insulation product, an insulating vapour control layer and an insulating breather membrane, plays a role in all three of these elements.



Architect and Actis technical manager Thomas Wiedmer says innovation has a key role to play in helping builders reach the Zero Carbon Homes target.

Will this cabinet reshuffle fill the gap between aspiration and delivery?

In his biggest reshuffle since becoming Prime Minister, David Cameron fired the starting gun for the general election by sacking or moving at least six Cabinet members to make way for a series of fresh replacements, who will be promoted on Tuesday. Knauf Insulation's Steven Heath, responds to the latest Cabinet news:

"... the Committee on Climate Change's (CCC) annual progress report warned a lack of certainty is eroding the country's chance of meeting the fourth carbon budget. The CCC goes on to highlight the failure of current policy to exploit the cost effective carbon savings available in the UK's building stock – especially our existing homes.

"It is because of this absence of a coherent direction of travel in policy that industry is reduced to looking for confidence in signs, such as who has been promoted to

what job and what their track record on the energy efficiency agenda actually is...?"

"In truth, there is little time to make a significant impact on policies such as Green Deal before the next election, yet changes were promised and there remains a yawning gap between the aspirations set out at the beginning of this parliament and the numbers delivered to date. The new entrants to the Department of Energy & Climate Change (DECC) could go some way to rebuilding trust with the supply chain – if they show a willingness to both recognise that gap and begin the change process on some of the more glaring barriers to wider roll out.

"However, within the detail of new Cabinet posts is the apparent downgrading of the role from 'Minister' to 'Parliamentary Under Secretary for State'. In addition, replacing Greg Barker who was a champion of energy efficiency – albeit a champion who promised much but delivered little – with Amber Rudd, someone who has no proven track record on energy issues, places further questions over the Government's commitment to limiting climate change.

"We may indeed be reading too much into this reshuffle, however historically this

Government has set a trend of persistently diluting its approach to energy efficiency from high ambition to low priority. This attitude can perhaps be traced back to inaction as key players such as high street banks and stores retreated from Green Deal in the early days, through sanctioning the abandonment of the consequential improvements consultation that offered to drive uptake of Green Deal and the removal of the Minister in charge of that consultation, Andrew Stunnell. No alternative renovation demand drivers of a scale likely to salvage the Green Deal were ever offered, whilst the devastating cuts to the Energy Companies Obligation (ECO) late last year were perhaps the greatest retreat from the agenda. This approach has certainly had damaging effects on the stability of future green investments. Indeed, those companies that invested on this Government's aspirations will not be likely to make the same mistake twice.

"We await the new entrants to DECC to set out their stalls but, in the absence of any prior activity in the field, we hope that their appointment brings with it a new energy in driving the retrofit agenda, rather than offering a sign of further retreat."

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