

# Open Letter to the Right Honourable Boris Johnson, Prime Minister

Dear Prime Minister

We write to offer practical ideas and expertise to support an economic recovery that protects public health and addresses climate targets.

The UK's hosting of COP 26 gives the Government an opportunity to show true global leadership on the climate emergency.

Transforming the built environment, which accounts for 40% of our greenhouse gas emissions, will be a crucial part of that process. As leading construction professionals from across the UK, we have the capability to:

- initiate a mass retrofit of energy-wasteful and unhealthy buildings;
- design all new buildings to stringent and measurable environmental standards that deliver a positive impact in terms of carbon, biodiversity, health and wellbeing;
- use only materials that benefit public health and the environment;
- create new, long term skilled jobs within a sustainable industry.

To encourage delivery of those benefits, we urgently need your government to establish a supportive framework to enable immediate action.

The construction sector action should include:

- **VAT reforms to promote refurbishment over new-build**  
Currently VAT is applied at 20% to refurbishment. Reduce this to zero, to encourage creative reuse of existing buildings, and kick start efficiency benefits, without the carbon costs of new-build projects.
- **An emergency plan for decarbonising our electricity supply**  
Combine renewables with a step-change in energy efficient buildings to allow industries to deliver this at optimum cost and speed.
- **Reinstatement and updating of the Zero Carbon Buildings Programme**  
Require all new buildings to be built to a stringent and measurable standard that delivers positive impacts in terms of carbon, biodiversity, water, and wellbeing.
- **Fiscal measures to discourage the use of harmful materials**  
Many resources are artificially cheap because the harm caused to people and the environment are not recognised. Factor in these costs through progressive taxation to boost emerging industries that produce zero carbon and non-toxic materials.

Reform of the construction sector is only part of the wider action that is needed across the whole of our society in the coming decade to reduce the impact of climate

and ecological breakdown. For any of these measures to be effective within the short time available, more stringent environmental legislation is now necessary.

This wider action should include:

- **Mandated 80% carbon emission reductions by 2030 and absolute zero carbon by 2040** consistent with the emerging data on decarbonisation
- **A Future Generations Act** which requires all parliamentary decisions to be scrutinised for their impact on young people and future generations
- **A reformed Companies Act** with responsibility to all stakeholders and environmental life support systems
- **Restoration of nature** on a massive scale to address biodiversity loss, lock up carbon in plants and soils, supply building timber and save money by reducing flood damage
- **A Law of Ecocide** to more effectively protect environmental life support systems from destruction

We are ready to help you accomplish this urgent transformation. Only then can we meet our collective responsibility to the future generations from whom we are now borrowing.

We offer to meet at your earliest convenience.

Yours sincerely,

The Steering Group of Construction Declares\*

Architects Climate Action Network

London Energy Transformation Initiative

\*incorporating

*UK Architects Declare*

*UK Structural Engineers Declare*

*UK Building Services Engineers Declare*

*UK Civil Engineers Declare*

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