

# DECARBONISING THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT – THE WORLD GREEN BUILDING COUNCIL LAUNCHES ITS NET ZERO CARBON BUILDINGS COMMITMENT

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- ▶ The World Green Building Council's net zero carbon buildings commitment
- ▶ Significant strides are being taken to reduce emissions in the built environment
- ▶ Construction companies should be mindful of the change to come
- ▶ London aims to become the world's greenest city

## What's it about?

The World Green Building Council's (WGBC) Global Climate Action Summit took place on 13 September 2018 with an ambitious remit of pursuing the decarbonisation of the global economy. The Summit saw the launch of WGBC's net zero carbon buildings commitment (the Commitment).

Signatories are urged by the Commitment to achieve net zero operating emissions in all new buildings by 2030, and achieve the same target for all buildings by 2050. WGBC defines a net zero carbon building as one which is highly energy efficient and fully powered from on-site and/or off-site renewable sources.

At the time of writing, the Commitment signatories include 42 businesses, cities, and regions. Founding signatories include the likes of Berkeley Group (which builds 10 per cent of homes in London), Cundall, Elementa, Catalonia, Baden-Württemberg, London, Tokyo, and New York City, amongst others. Shortly after the Global Climate Action Summit, Bruntwood became the first UK commercial property firm to sign the Commitment.

The 22 cities and 4 region signatories will implement regulations to achieve the Commitment's targets. Achieving the targets will lead to the elimination of 209 million tonnes of carbon emissions by 2050. The implementation of the Commitment's framework is believed by WGBC to be capable of reducing global warming by up to 2 degrees. In addition, the signatories will actively advocate across the supply chain.

London's signing of the Commitment echoes the UK government's ambitious plan to make London the greenest city in the world by 2050.

As part of the WGBC's international campaign, the UK Green Building Council (UKGBC) subsequently launched its Advancing Net Zero programme. Signatories include the likes of Redevco Foundation, BAM and Hoare Lea. The UKGBC's programme will see the formation of an industry task group who will be responsible for developing a UK market definition of net zero carbon buildings. Like the Commitment, UKGBC's programme will amalgamate a variety of market stakeholders and policy makers to promote the advancement of a zero net carbon built environment.

## Why does it matter?

Amid growing concerns that most signatories will not reach the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change's targets, the Commitment demonstrates a more concrete progression towards lowering global emissions. The Paris Agreement does not require its signatories to set specific targets by a particular date. The Commitment's firm objective for all buildings to be net zero carbon by 2050 establishes a prescriptive route to lowering emissions. Although it is likely that the Commitment will see more signatories, the current participants hold considerable influence in the market. The revenue contribution to the global construction supply chain of the 42 signatories is in excess of USD 22.95 billion.

Decarbonisation should now be at the forefront of development, not only because of sustainability, but also for regulatory compliance. Employers, as well as other entities operating in the construction industry, will need to stay abreast of their

obligations, both present and future. In addition, property investors looking at assets in London, or indeed the other city signatories, should be mindful of the 2050 target when evaluating long-term asset purchases.

The Commitment also represents an opportunity for zero carbon energy producers as well as green energy consultants and decarbonising built environment specialists.

## What now?

The influence of the signatories of both the Commitment and the UKGBC's programme emphasises the current market attitude towards decarbonisation. Whereas decarbonisation was, for many, previously nothing more than a CSR consideration, it now appears to be a fundamental feature of the future of the construction industry. Parties to construction contracts should ensure that they consider the carbon footprint of their projects in future.

Employers, as well as other stakeholders within the construction industry, should be aware of the impending change in regulations, particularly as decarbonisation is a fast paced and an ever evolving subject. Construction employers need to be aware that from 2030 all buildings constructed in London must operate at net zero carbon. Likewise all property holders need to be aware of the 2050 target.

The UK government has yet to pass legislation to reach net zero emissions, but has promised this year to assess its climate targets, meaning that London's signature of the Commitment and the launch of the UKGBC's programme could be merely the first significant move in the UK's fight towards eradicating building carbon emissions. It is important to note that, although London is the only UK city to sign the Commitment, cities throughout the UK, such as Manchester and Leeds, are implementing their own climate change strategies and frameworks.

The targets of the Commitment are ambitious, and should act as an impetus towards a global net zero carbon built environment.

## Who to contact

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