

COUNTY COUNCIL

18 SEPTEMBER 2019

PUBLIC QUESTION

Question from Mr P Newbold

Why can't Durham County Council have planning policies that insist on higher energy conservation standards for new buildings (especially new homes) than those required by Building Regulations in order to reduce CO2 emissions from the built environment?

Response

I'd like to thank Mr Newbold for his question.

The answer is that the County Council soon will have planning policies that insist on higher energy conservation standards for new buildings than those required by Building Regulations.

The County Council is committed to working with partners and local communities to ensure we have a range and mix of homes and commercial premises that meet the needs of local residents and businesses.

Environmental standards are an important part of that process and together with other considerations including viability, the need for community facilities, and affordable housing, all contribute to the decision-making process on new development. Importantly the County Durham Plan, which will be examined by a Government Inspector next month, does include specific requirements for ensuring more environmentally sustainable forms of development. Under our Sustainable Design Policy we will be requiring development proposals to be adaptable to changing social, technological, economic and environmental conditions. Schemes should minimise greenhouse gas emissions, by seeking to achieve zero carbon buildings and providing renewable and low carbon energy generation.

In addition to this, major residential proposals will need to achieve reductions in CO2 emissions of 10% below the Dwelling Emission Rate (DER) against the Target Emission Rate (TER) based on current Building Regulations. This will help to achieve reductions for CO2 emissions.

There is a further requirement for all major new non-residential development to achieve Building Research Establishment Environmental Assessment Method (BREEAM) minimum rating of 'very good' (or any future national equivalent). The Plan also requires new major development to connect to an existing or approved district energy scheme where viable opportunities exist. Developments in off-gas areas will be required to utilise renewable and low carbon technologies as their main heating source.

The Local Plan is our key policy document for new development, but we have also declared a Climate Emergency which underlines the Council's commitment to move forward on a more environmentally sustainable basis. The Council's recent Climate Emergency Update Report suggests that any construction projects carried out by, or for Durham County Council should consider the future phase out of fossil fuels in the design process and could include a requirement for justification to be given for the resulting carbon footprint. In lieu of the Government's proposed review of Part L of the Building Regulations (the part that deals with Energy efficiency and CO2 emissions), it is suggested that the Council should continue to adopt policies that take into account carbon impact assessments of new buildings and building extensions, and consider low carbon options from the outset of the design process.

In July the Council agreed unanimously to undertake a consultation, due shortly, on how to refine and develop these and other schemes to achieve a national net zero target, and we would encourage individuals and organisations, as well as Area Action Partnerships, schools, Town and Parish Councils, businesses and community organisations from across the transport, business and domestic sectors, to contribute their ideas.

Durham County Council is resolved to continue to try and raise energy conservation standards for new buildings, whilst at the same time ensuring development comes forward that meets the needs of our residents and businesses right across the County.