

Proposed Changes to Part L and Part F of the Building Regulations

September 2009

Northgate Public Services Response

Response

Introduction

1. Northgate welcomes the opportunity to respond to the government's consultation on proposed changes to the Building Regulations. The consultation seeks views on proposed changes to Part L (Conservation of Fuel and Power) and Part F (Means of Ventilation) of the Building Regulations that are planned to come into force in 2010.
2. The consultation proposes improved standards of energy efficiency for the construction of new buildings; when building work is carried out to existing buildings; and changes to ensure adequate means of ventilation is provided. It also proposes changes to the associated tools for calculating the energy performance of buildings and to the technical guidance, as well as a range of measures designed to improve further the levels of compliance and performance.
3. Our brief response draws on our experience of working for over fifteen years in innovative partnerships designed to promote energy efficiency and develop sustainable communities, as well as working with a range of stakeholders in the field of energy efficiency including local authorities, surveyors, architects and most recently energy assessors.

General comment

4. Climate change is one of the most pressing problems facing the world. Building accounts for 45 per cent of carbon emissions in the UK and promoting energy efficiency through the effective use of building regulations is key to building success.
5. It is also essential that the growing needs of households for affordable housing are met over coming years and that this is met by government in a manner which does not add to the scale of the climate change problem.
6. We welcome the clear targets that have been set but are concerned that there is currently a plethora of initiatives which need to be effectively communicated to stakeholders in a more effective manner.
7. So whilst we welcome the proposal to consult on the update the Code for Sustainable Homes, we believe that it is essential that a route map is provided by government to stakeholders to ensure that the inter-connectedness of the range of initiatives are fully understood, and that their impact is maximised through the fullest implementation. We believe at the moment that there is confusion, even within the energy efficiency industry itself.
8. Clear communications, training, development and support are critical to making such initiatives work and ensuring that the targets are successfully met.

Specific comment

New Buildings

9. Criterion 1 of the compliance procedure requires comparison of CO₂ emissions of the actual building with a Target Emission Rate (TER) based upon a hypothetical reference or “notional” building of the same shape and size. The current Part L 2006 performance targets are based upon a notional building that meets 2002 energy efficiency standards plus an improvement factor. We agree that the approach which continues to use the 2002 notional building and apply a larger improvement factor moving forwards is a sensible one. The 2002 baseline is easily understood and consistently measurable over time.
10. We also agree that a differentiated approach to measuring improvement between non domestic buildings and new homes makes sense. The impact assessment clearly shows that an aggregated approach has lower costs and higher benefits for non domestic buildings, whilst a flat rate makes sense for new homes.
11. We welcome the fact that irrespective of which target is adopted there will only be one regulatory regime. We have said elsewhere in other responses that it is essential that the system is co-ordinated, and further simplified.
12. We warmly welcome the log book approach for non-domestic buildings as a means of ensuring that the new building is operated and maintained in an energy efficient manner. For new home, the occupier is provided with the recommendations report prepared as part of the Energy Performance Certificate (EPC). We also think that consideration should be given to encouraging Display Energy Certificates to feed into the logbook. Whilst an EPC is required to gain building control approval for a new build, this only lets the new owner know how the asset should perform. A DEC will show how the building can be used properly and form a baseline to show whether this performance is maintained over time.

Existing buildings

13. It is essential that the energy efficiency of existing buildings is tackled as the majority of emissions in 2050 will be from buildings that have already been built. As the consultation points out, these buildings are, on average, less energy efficient than buildings constructed to current Building Regulations.
14. We welcome the fact that there will be no exemptions for existing buildings and that specific guidance will be drawn up in relation to specific buildings such as historic building Historic buildings, temporary (portable) buildings (< 2 years), small stand-alone buildings and buildings with low energy demand. We agree that in relation to historic buildings it is important to attempt to improve energy efficiency to the extent that it is practicable and so that it does not prejudice the character of the building or increase the risk of long term deterioration

15. We believe that it is essential that new conservatories are brought fully into the measurement system. A conservatory with poor energy efficiency standards and no thermal separation can double the CO₂ impact of the house, as well as increasing fuel bills. We also think that notification to building control would help to raise awareness of the importance of designing energy efficiency into the building of a new conservatory. We would further recommend requiring an EPC for building control on completion so as to help towards existing building carbon savings. Further consideration could be given to extending the requirement to have an EPC to many other areas where building control is needed.

Part 5

16. We welcome the proposals to amend Part F as healthy ventilation is important. Given that we spend 80 per cent of our time indoors it is important that buildings are healthily and efficiently ventilated particularly for those with health issues and the young and the elderly.

Improving compliance and building performance

17. We also welcome the proposal to improve compliance through the introduction of an option to claim higher performance by adopting an Accredited Construction Details Scheme.
18. We previously responded to the Building Control consultation and believe that there is a need for fundamental reform to support the public and private sector in improving performance in energy efficiency.
19. We welcome the emphasis on training within the consultation. It is essential that relevant stakeholders within the construction industry, its supporting infrastructure (supply chain, educators, professions etc.) and the building control community are able to acquire and develop the knowledge and skills needed to deliver an efficient and effective low carbon building environment.
20. We also believe that it is essential that a coherent picture is communicated to all stakeholders on the various policy and initiatives, how the optional items fit together and what help is available to individuals, organisations and communities.

Timetable

21. In terms of the timetable, it is essential that the timing is consistent with the software lifecycle and allows sufficient length of time so that software changes can be fully implemented and accredited, as well as ensuring that the landmark register also needs to be consistent.

For more information

Russell Osborne

Managing Director, Citizen Solutions, Northgate Public Services

russell.osborne@northgate-is.com

Kathy Sutton

Fellows' Associates

ksutton@fellowsassociates.com