

RCCF Chairman: Cllr Peter Schwier

Head of Service: Adam Thorp

Lee Rowley MP
Department for Levelling Up, Housing and
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Please ask for: **Adam Thorp**
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Date: **01/03/24**

Dear Lee Rowley MP

East of England Response to the Future Homes Standard Consultation and Written Ministerial Statement on 'Planning – Local Energy Efficiency Standards Update'

I am writing to you in my capacity as Chair of the East of England Regional Climate Change Forum (RCCF) to share the Forum's views on the Government's consultation on its proposed Future Homes Standard (FHS) and the Written Ministerial Statement published on the 13th December 2023.

The RCCF brings together the lead elected members and senior officers from the East of England's county-based climate change partnerships (or equivalent) of local authorities and wider agencies. Our Forum provides the collective voice of the region's 50 councils with regards to climate change mitigation and adaptation activity.

We urge the Government to revisit these plans to:

- Be more ambitious in providing a framework that supports sustainable development standards.
- Enable and empower local authorities to fully respond to the climate crisis, meet statutory obligations and deliver wider community benefits.
- Amend the proposed metrics for future homes.
- Ensure that future proposals consider the impact on electricity infrastructure.

Be more ambitious and draw upon existing best practice

We have significant concerns that the FHS proposals, and the accompanying Written Ministerial Statement do not go far enough in setting the sustainable development standards required to meet the UK's legally binding 2050 net zero target and, as such, will not deliver the climate resilience, mitigation and adaptation that our communities need, expect and deserve.

Progressive and innovative developers, including housing associations and local authorities, are already providing high-quality, sustainable homes and buildings. These approaches are what should be aimed and legislated for. However, the FHS proposals in their current form will set worse standards for energy efficiency and carbon reduction than these existing progressive and innovative approaches. We should be making great strides forward on this as a nation, not sideways, and at worst, backwards steps.

The fabric standards are broadly the same as Part L 2021. There is no progress in improving fabric standards from the current position. The proposals are focussed on technology and building systems only. Improving fabric standards is a severe omission and a missed opportunity to significantly reduce energy demand. Also, the FHS proposals do not recognise the role that the design of buildings can play in minimising energy demand and reducing carbon emissions. In addition, we are extremely concerned that the proposals suggest that adherence to Part L can be "relaxed or dispensed with" if the local authority or Building Safety Regulator concludes those standards are "unreasonable in the circumstances". We believe that this creates the opportunity for some developers to push this definition in the Planning Appeals process and the courts. If Part L standards were waived, we would effectively be constructing buildings to lower standards than today.

Great examples exist of local authorities and their partners setting out standards and policy positions regarding sustainable development. These go further than the FHS, and are more beneficial in achieving significant carbon savings and reductions in energy bills. We believe that these examples, including the ['Planning Policy Position for Net Zero Carbon Homes and Buildings in Greater Essex'](#) should be drawn upon in setting national standards.

If the standards set out in these proposals are taken forward, it is our view that it should be made clear that these are the lowest acceptable standards and that developers should aim for higher sustainability standards whenever possible.

Enable and empower local authorities to fully respond to the climate crisis.

Given that the FHS is not ambitious enough and that the Written Ministerial Statement seeks to prevent local authorities from setting policies that would deliver net zero homes, this will have significant, direct impacts on the East of England.

Local authorities have an enormous role to play in supporting the country to achieve its legally binding net zero targets. This is especially true of elements regarding the built environment. However, we are not being supported by the Government to carry out this role to our full potential.

In addition to the stifling impacts of the FHS proposals and Ministerial Statement, recent competitive, short-timescale funding pots available to councils for net zero activity have not achieved the best possible outcomes for communities. We believe that longer-term, allocative funding for councils would provide much better value for money.

Amend the proposed metrics for future homes.

We also believe that the Government should move away from using the relative approach of % reduction in carbon emissions from the Target Emissions Rate (TER) for a notional building towards using an absolute energy metrics approach which sets a specific target for total energy use in homes.

The energy metrics approach is expressed as Energy Use Intensity (EUI) which is an annual measure of the total energy that is used in a home or building (kWh/m²/year). The approach also includes a target for space heating.

The EUI metric aligns with net zero as it covers both regulated and unregulated energy, can be measured post construction and is supported by industry. It is straightforward to understand, and buildings can be compared which is useful for the construction industry, consumers and other stakeholders.

Ensure that future proposals consider the impact on electricity infrastructure.

Due to the existing and increasing electricity demands of the nation, coupled with the proposals set out in the FHS, we feel that a robust impact assessment on energy infrastructure should be completed.

The reliance on 'grid decarbonisation' for achieving zero carbon is a serious concern. By not setting standards that require the high levels of energy efficiency that we know can be achieved, there will be unnecessary energy demand locked into future homes. The impact on the grid will be significant. It is a critical omission that the impact of the FHS options in this consultation on the energy infrastructure has not been evaluated.

In conclusion, we urge the Government to go further in its plans to deliver sustainable future development, learning from best practice currently being carried out by local authorities in the East of England. We also urge the Government to develop future funding models for councils that support us to achieve our full potential in providing a healthy, sustainable and green country for future generations.

Yours sincerely



Clr Peter Schwier

Chair of the East of England Regional Climate Change Forum and Climate Czar, Essex County Council