

## MIDLANDS

## Foreword



**Martin Gallagher**  
Regional Chair

This edition is unsurprisingly full of articles about sustainability and our industry's role in ensuring the UK reaches its target of net zero carbon by 2050. While political leaders discuss the big picture at COP26, we in the industry must

continue to make changes on the ground.

The NFB is helping members by creating tools to help develop the sustainability of your company. The new future Net Zero Standard (fNZ Standard) is an independently verified standard to help members meet their environmental obligations and aspirations, and also to put themselves in the best position to win new work that must meet increasingly stringent environmental standards.

Using the standard enables members to benchmark their carbon emissions and then track them moving forwards. It's easy to use and is all online and will work for you, whatever the size of your business.

The NFB is also offering



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support in developing smarter energy procurement strategies to ensure your procurement strategy matches your business's unique consumption profile, which will minimise your carbon footprint.

Another priority for the Federation is increasing the number of women in construction. The industry must welcome all talented individuals,

whatever their gender, and the NFB's Women in Construction campaign is designed to help make this happen. Have a look at the Women in Construction section of the website and make a pledge if you can - many already have.

We're also finally starting to see the possibility of some in-person events coming up soon. Keep an eye out for news on the Regional Construction Forums (RCFs) coming to a location near you and put Thursday 7 April 2022 in your diary - the date of the next Construction Awards of Excellence and the new Construction Summit. These events are held at the Chelsea Harbour Hotel in London and are an opportunity to see each other face to face again after two long years online.

## Welcome



**Jackie Stephen**  
Account Manager

Welcome to the latest edition of Britbuild. I'm really pleased to see an article in this issue about our newly-launched Women in Construction programme. The NFB is committed to ensuring the construction industry is a place of diversity and inclusion for all. The Women in Construction programme

addresses the barriers and challenges the sector currently has for women and the actions required from businesses and individuals to overcome them.

Our 'Roadmap for Industry' is full of straightforward ideas that are accessible and applicable to anyone who wishes to start making positive changes for the future of construction. Have a look at the Women in Construction section of the website and perhaps you would also like to pledge your commitment and tell us what you will do differently.

I'd also encourage you to take a look at another new NFB initiative: NFB Shield - a structural defects warranty. This is a ten-year insurance-backed guarantee that you can offer your clients, which also gives them the reassurance that in



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the unlikely event you cease to trade, all guarantees provided will be honoured. At a time when everyone is looking for a competitive advantage, being able to offer this peace of mind could be a dealbreaker.

Here in the office, we're all looking forward to being able

to get back to face-to-face events and being able to meet you in person once again. The date of 7 April 2022 is a big one, as it is home to both the new Construction Summit and also the Construction Awards of Excellence. Award entries will have closed by the time you read this, so best of luck to all those who entered and I look forward to seeing the shortlists.

As you can tell, there is a huge amount going on at the NFB as we continue to look for ways to help you through these challenging times. I'm always more than happy to hear from you on any issue or with any query, so do give me a call on **03450 578 160** - or there's plenty of information on the website too.



# The Journey to Net Zero

**A**s delegates at COP26 have been discovering, when it comes to the environment it is much easier to make fine speeches and set out long-term strategies than it is to get down to the nitty-gritty of how these grand designs will be achieved.

The NFB believes that Government ministers haven't even set out a roadmap to get to net zero homes yet - or even defined what a net zero home is. Rico Wojtulewicz, the Federation's Head of Housing and Planning Policy, explains: "We have always said that if the Government can decide on a national standard of housing, for instance one such as the international low energy design standard of the Passivhaus, then the industry can plan the route to achieving that."

But he warns that change has to be deliverable. He adds, "Let's work out a pragmatic way to achieve zero carbon homes – and the first question that

needs to be answered is: what is a carbon neutral house? Is it one on district heating? Does it use ground or air source heat pumps? Is it made of wood? Is it airtight?

"The method of construction and materials used have to be thought through. Rushing towards a solution will create problems in the future. We need to work out a pragmatic way to get to the end goal and identify what that goal is."

And he warns that while academics can come up with novel construction methods and materials, that doesn't always mean they will do the job. "Whatever the industry decides, the solution needs to be one which can work at scale."

It is not just new builds that will contribute to net zero homes and the NFB has made a number of recommendations around retrofitting. These include:

- Training - PAS2035 is a recognised retrofitting framework and standard



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but needs greater industry take-up. This take-up could come in the form of government funded works, consumer confidence, training schemes or guaranteed retrofitting direction of travel. A trained workforce is vital.

- Retrofitting Passport and National Retrofit Strategy (NRS) - Retrofitting or Building Renovation Passports give consumers greater knowledge of the works available to them

and which have been done. They would also act as a precursor, or partner, for the industry-led NRS, which identifies a roadmap through finance, policy, training and innovation, in how we retrofit the UK's 28million existing homes.

- VAT Cut and Stamp Duty Rebate - Industry has long supported a VAT cut for renovations but the Treasury is understandably concerned about losing revenue on 28 million houses. Separately, the Government could award a stamp duty holiday for new homes meeting EPC A, or rebate stamp duty on existing homes achieving EPC C within 2 years.

With more than five million UK homes without cavity walls, almost five million built before 1919 and around 18 million built without insulation, the retrofit housing challenge is clear to see and it must be addressed.

Rico Wojtulewicz adds:

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We work with a third-party carbon offset specialist to undertake a detailed examination of our operational and embodied carbon so we can offset through carbon sequestration.

“There are many things we should be looking at that wouldn't require public funding, such as simplified planning processes for retrofit projects, longer-lasting permissions to allow homeowners time to save for upgrades, and cutting VAT on refurbishment.”

The Government is not short of advice on this issue, with the Construction Leadership Council also publishing a comprehensive second iteration of the National Retrofit Strategy, a twenty-year blueprint for how the construction industry can work with Government to retrofit the UK's 28 million existing homes.

While the Government could be accused of dragging its feet around sustainability in construction and housing, it has often been contractors and their supply chains who have taken it upon themselves to drive for change. Tom Carr, co-founder of Verto, which builds in the South-West of England, comments:

“Sustainability has been top of Verto's agenda since day one. If we want to leave a healthy planet to the next generation, it is paramount for us all to be sustainability focused.

“We have been delivering our Zero Carbon Smart Homes for a decade now and the properties are designed to generate clean energy from the sun, and emit no CO<sub>2</sub> into the atmosphere.

“We work with a third-party carbon offset specialist

to undertake a detailed examination of our operational and embodied carbon so we can offset through carbon sequestration. Our product, however, has now surpassed zero carbon, and we are now delivering homes which are 2.0 tonnes negative carbon with EPCs of up to 117A.”

Welsh NFB member Knox & Wells was well ahead of the game when it drafted its first de-carbonisation plan in 2006 and has been working towards zero carbon, which it aims to achieve by 2030, ever since. Stephen Clayden, Quality & Environmental Manager at Knox & Wells, says:

“We've taken it step by step since we introduced environmentally-focused KPIs in 2006, which is also when we first undertook to reduce waste and demonstrated just how much could be achieved with a strong focus and commitment. We adopted Site Waste Management Plans in 2008 well before they were required by the Welsh Government. We acquired ISO14001 accreditation in 2015 and at the same time embedded our Net Zero plan in all of our systems and procedures. By 2025, we are looking at ground source heat pumps for our building, and between 2025 and 2030 we will replace all company vehicles

with electric vehicles.

“We have already installed EV charging points at our head office in 2020 to provide electricity free to staff and visitors for use on private vehicles, and our first full EV will be purchased in early 2022. We are also encouraging the move to electric vehicles.”

This is exactly the kind of step by step approach that makes the wider journey to Net Zero much more realistic for construction companies. But it can't happen without the supply chain being on board. Stephen continues:

“The supply chain makes up a considerable amount of on-site operations so it's critical that they are on the same page. We want continuous improvement in procurement and a shared ambition to reach Net Zero.

“We collaborate with and support our supply chain as much as possible, including holding regular seminars which include sustainability issues, and we provide them with free access to use the Supply Chain Sustainability School. The vast majority have committed to partnership with us in the drive towards sustainability.”

Looking at the challenges and opportunities ahead, Stephen adds:

“There are two main challenges: the first is the

cost of renewable technology, which remains high, and tech is also changing all the time; this makes life hard for SMEs especially. The other challenge is behavioural change – there remains much work to be done in certain demographics.

“Apart from contributing to a greener, safer world, the more immediate opportunities include the fact that reaching Net Zero means companies like ours can reduce costs in the long term. In the meantime, our commitment to Net Zero will continue to be well received in tender situations, which will help us to build the business well into the future.”

It is companies such as Knox & Wells and Verto who have a clarity of vision needed to be successful on their own journey to Net Zero and to play their part in the industry's journey too. Those who ignore sustainability will be left behind – and it will take every single part of the industry to collaborate and to play their part if the drive towards Net Zero is to be successful. As Tom Carr concludes:

“If our industry wants to make a substantial impact on climate change, then legislators, planners, councils, suppliers and developers all need to be working together and singing from the same hymn sheet.”





# A quick word with..



**Chris Harbot**  
Managing Director,  
Harbot Builders  
Limited

## What do you like best about working in construction?

The positiveness – even though I'm not on the tools anymore I love to see the new buildings evolve and take shape, changing the landscape/street scene and people's quality of life.

## If you could change one thing in construction, what would it be?

The increasing bureaucracy. I know a lot of it is necessary, but having the same rules for the smaller and bigger builders is stifling the industry.

## If you weren't working in construction, what would be your dream job?

I would love to know enough to be able to buy and sell antiques. Particularly architectural and automobilia related items. The lads think I'm daft when I ask them to save, say, a small pane of glass or a door knob/latch but I hate to see them thrown away and I know many people now appreciate their value, both monetary and historically.

## What do you like to do to unwind?

We are lucky enough to have a holiday home and I love travelling there and relaxing in our own space especially out of the holiday season. The weather's not particularly important; what is important is that the family – including the dog – have time to enjoy the beaches, pubs, cafes without us all thinking of the next appointment or task.

## What's your favourite holiday location and why?

If we are not visiting our own place, we have often enjoyed holidaying around Lake Como in Italy. It's a beautiful spot, I enjoy a leisurely drive there and using the many ferries and trains to tour the area, we zig-zag over the lake, visiting all the bars and sites.

## What's the last movie you saw? Which character best sums up your life?

With COVID, I cannot remember the last big screen movie I saw. I am looking forward to seeing the new Bond movie though and I enjoy all the Jason Bourne reruns!

## What's your favourite TV viewing?

I still look forward to Match Of The Day on a Saturday night – always have done. I like reality programmes - though I'm not enamoured with some of the presenters - like Salvage Hunters and American Pickers, just to see what's out there, the peculiar places they are kept and the history/stories surrounding the items.

## What sports do you follow and what teams do you support?

I am fortunate to have always followed Leicester City Football Club, having a season ticket and the family to go with. The past six years we've had a great time sharing their fantastic success! Even the preceding decades I have always enjoyed the club's and highs and lows.

## If you could have lunch with a celebrity or historical figure of your choice, who would it be and why?

I have been known to joke that I have two regrets in life – not travelling on Concorde and not seeing Elvis live. I would have loved to have lunch with Elvis; I don't think I could relate to his lifestyle but would have loved to know more about it. I suppose lunch with Elvis on Concorde would have been ideal!

## Who has been the most inspiring person in your life?

It must be my parents – supportive, hard working and generous in all respects.

## If time travel was possible, what era would you most like to visit and why?

I would go back to the late 20s, early 30s get in an SS Jaguar and tour the garages and forecourts of the day studying all the pumps and signs.