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POLITICAL STATEMENT FOR THE NSC ANNUAL BUSINESS MEETING 18.06.10;

“THE CHALLENGE OF MAINSTREAMING ENERGY EFFICIENT BUILDINGS IN THE NORTH SEA REGION AND THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE EXISTING BUILDING STOCK.”

PROPOSED BY BUILD WITH CARE, SUPPORTED BY THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT THEMATIC GROUP AND ADOPTED BY THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE 27 APRIL 2010.

SUMMARY

Key to meeting energy and greenhouse gas targets is the buildings sector which accounts for 40 per cent of final energy consumption. However current EU policy largely focuses on energy efficiency in new building. Existing buildings in 2010 will continue to dominate total emissions from the building sector in 2020 and are likely to represent nearly 80 per cent of the EU's building stock even by 2050. Hence tackling emissions from existing buildings is vital if overall emissions from the building sector are to be successfully reduced.

The Commission should ensure that relevant policies and Directives tackle the issue of energy efficiency in the existing building stock and lobby for the introduction of ambitious detailed measures to accelerate the refurbishment of existing buildings to low energy standards.

BUILD WITH CARE

Build with CaRe (Carbon Reduction <http://www.buildwithcare.net/>) is a European project which aims to mainstream energy-efficient building design and construction. Partners from local and regional authorities, universities and institutes from 10 regions in 5 countries in the North Sea Region are active in the Build with CaRe partnership. The project, which started in 2008 and concludes in 2011, is partly financed by the Interreg IV B North Sea Programme.

There are numerous environmental benefits of low energy buildings, however there are also significant non-environmental benefits including financial savings associated with reduced energy use, as well as improved indoor living quality. The benefits of low energy buildings encompass the three pillars of Sustainable Development (environmental, financial and social aspects) which is at the heart of European and National policy.

Build with CaRe (BwC) has identified many barriers to improving energy efficiency of both new buildings and in particular, the existing building stock. The lack of ambition of the recast Energy Performance of Buildings Directive (EPBD) in refurbishment, where responsibility for refurbishment targets is given to Member States (MS), is a reflection of these barriers – in awareness, financial incentives, planning, and in skills. Yet initiatives in Member States and regions have shown how these barriers can be addressed both for new build and for refurbishment.

EUROPE 2020

Europe 2020¹ calls for smart, sustainable, inclusive growth. However, energy and greenhouse gas targets are unchanged from 2009 with targets of 20 per cent cuts relative to 1990 levels. Yet greenhouse gas emissions for the EU-27 are already 10 per cent below 1990 levels. At Copenhagen the EU was prepared to (and remains prepared to) propose a 30 per cent cut in energy use and greenhouse gas emissions. Build with Care notes that a 30 per cent target is feasible and will help kick start the 2020 Vision.

Key to sustainable growth is the buildings sector which accounts for 40 per cent of final energy consumption. Ambitious targets to reduce energy consumption in existing buildings are essential if “Resource Efficient Europe” is to become a reality.

Only if energy consumption in buildings is ambitiously tackled can renewable energy and greenhouse gas targets be met. A campaign to reduce energy use in existing buildings in particular will create jobs, drive innovation and stimulate the smart, sustainable and inclusive growth envisaged in Europe 2020. Such a campaign will not only tackle the issue of energy efficiency but will encompass all three aspects of sustainable development – financial, social and environmental. Billions of Euros will be saved as a result of reduced imports of fossil fuels and a major improvement in public health will be seen as low-carbon buildings, both new and refurbished, provide higher air quality and comfort for children, adults and the elderly alike. This is particularly important when considering the issue of demographic change in Member States as forecasts (up to 2050) predict that the trend of a declining working age population will continue with a parallel increase in the number of retired people².

ENERGY PERFORMANCE OF BUILDINGS DIRECTIVE

Build with CaRe can see many benefits of the recast EPBD³ and view it as a significant step forward towards reducing carbon emissions from buildings. The agreement on a “nearly zero energy” definition is recognition of the vital role that buildings play in reducing carbon emissions in Europe. Additionally, removing the 1 000 square meter threshold and setting minimum energy performance requirements for components of renovations are also important features of the agreement.

However, it compromises on several aspects, especially in respect of refurbishment of existing buildings. Existing buildings in 2010 will continue to dominate total emissions from the building sector in 2020 and are likely to represent nearly 80 per cent of the EU’s building stock even by 2050. Hence tackling emissions from existing buildings is key if overall emissions from the building sector are to be successfully reduced.

¹ Europe 2020, A European strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth, 3 March 2010. <http://ec.europa.eu/eu2020/pdf/COMPLET%20EN%20BARROSO%20%20%20007%20-%20Europe%202020%20-%20EN%20version.pdf>.

² Muenz, R (2007) http://www.monitoringris.org/documents/tools_reg/agingdemochange.pdf

³ Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council on the energy performance of buildings (recast), 25 November 2009, <http://register.consilium.europa.eu/pdf/en/09/st16/st16407.en09.pdf>

The recast EPBD does not effectively tackle the barriers that lead to the low levels of building refurbishment that is currently undertaken. These barriers are many but initiatives in Build with CaRe partner countries and regions show that they can be addressed.

Build with CaRe therefore urges local and regional authorities to continue to put pressure on the EU and on national legislation by Member States by taking a pro-active approach and leading by example both in the regulation of energy performance targets for new buildings and, in particular, in the refurbishment of existing buildings. This can be achieved by cooperating with business and by using a mix of both incentives and regulation. In this way local and regional authorities will contribute to reaching our climate goals on time.

Although it is disappointing that the revised EPBD does not include more stringent targets for refurbishment of existing buildings the forthcoming Energy Efficiency Action Plan brings opportunities to tackle this issue. This Action Plan presents the European Commission with a chance to propose further ambitious and detailed measures to accelerate the refurbishment of existing buildings to low energy standards. Energy efficient buildings represent a cost-effective way to achieve the required energy reductions⁴.

CONCLUSION

For the EU to reach its current and any future climate change targets reducing emissions from buildings is essential, key to this is reducing emissions from existing buildings.

Since the EPBD compromises on several aspects, especially in respect of refurbishment of existing buildings, it is noted that the forthcoming Energy Efficiency Action Plan presents the European Commission with a further chance to address these issues and propose ambitious detailed measures to accelerate the refurbishment of existing buildings to low energy standards.

Build with CaRe, therefore calls for:

- The introduction of policies and fiscal measures for all sectors to address the new build/refurbishment imbalance and to ensure that the latter domain receives the attention it must get;
- The introduction of national targets for energy efficiency in existing buildings; and
- Local and regional authorities to continue to put pressure on national legislation by taking a pro-active approach and leading by example.

The Build with CaRe partnership asks the North Sea Commission to support this paper and help persuade the European Commission to prioritise energy efficiency in existing buildings.

⁴ Energy efficiency in Buildings - Business realities and opportunities
http://www.buildwithcare.net/index.php?option=com_remository&Itemid=99&func=startdown&id=120 "It has already been proven that the energy requirement can be cut by an average of 80 percent through energy-saving design; and dena's standards show that energy-efficient refurbishments are not only technically feasible but also make sense in economic terms".

PARTNERS



Build with CaRe is a project partly funded by European Regional Development Fund.
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