



Consequential improvements abandoned

In a ministerial statement issued by Eric Pickles on 13 December 2012, the Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG) stated that it would not be going ahead with any measure involving changes to Part L of the Building Regulations which would introduce a requirement to make improvements to the energy efficiency of homes when carrying out other work.

Reasons cited for this move include research from the Energy Saving Trust which found that consequential improvements, even with Green Deal Finance in place, would put off 38% of households from going ahead with building work on their property that they were otherwise planning (Energy Saving Trust, [‘Exploratory Research into Building Regulations in relation to the Green Deal’](#), page 37).

Other reasons cited, were that focus group research showed that the majority of gas installers did not want to be responsible for telling homeowners about consequential improvement requirements. There were also concerns about non-compliance, with homeowners facing prosecution and fines, leading to problems with enforcement.

By adopting this approach, a major incentive to upgrade energy saving measures where there is a proposed increase in habitable area, has been abandoned.

Changes to the Building Regulations

Don Foster, the Building Regulations Minister, has set out some of the changes in respect to Building Regulations as they impact on deregulation. He said that these changes will deliver savings of around £50 million per year for businesses. In the main, these changes effect Part P (electrical safety in the home), Parts M, K and N (access, slips, glazing and trips & falls), Part B (fire safety) and some changes to the building control system.

Further decisions, relating to the energy efficiency of buildings, the targeting of radon protection and the referencing of British Standards for structural design based on Eurocodes will be set out later this year. The outcome of the review of the framework of building regulations and local housing standards is also expected at some point in 2013.

Measures will shortly be laid before Parliament to amend the Energy Performance of Building Regulations.

Appointed person workshop

The Sustainable and Secure Buildings Act 2004 amends the Building Act 1984 to allow for the appointment of a single person, “the Appointed Person”, to act as an interface between Building Control Bodies (BCBs) and a building developer to help achieve compliance with the Building Regulations. Although discussed in consultations on the future of building control, the role of “appointed person” has not been introduced yet, although the power to do so already exists.

Following a negative response to the formal consultation, in deciding whether the Government should go ahead with this idea on a voluntary basis, DCLG asked CIC to hold a workshop on the issue. This workshop, held on 10 January 2013, revealed that a large majority of the 50 attendees were opposed to the proposed changes. Building control inspectors in both the private and public sectors were well represented at this event.

The Building Regulations Advisory Committee (BRAC) is to consider the matter further at a meeting on 21 February 2013.

Undergraduate education in health and safety

A specially convened sub-group of the CIC health and safety committee held a meeting on 12 December 2012 to review the recommendations of the [joint research report](#) (HSE and RIBA) on the approaches to health and safety teaching and learning in undergraduate schools of architecture. The purpose for this working group is to review these recommendations on behalf of the CIC Health and Safety Committee with a view towards determining if they are appropriate for engineering and other construction oriented undergraduate courses in addition to architecture.

At the December meeting, the working group recommended that the following measures should be taken.

- Expand the working group to include UKCG and some interested academic institutions (e.g Sheffield, Edinburgh and Loughborough universities) to produce a proposal – Feb / Mar 2013.
- Pilot the proposal with a small number of universities – Mid 2013.
- Hold a larger conference with the relevant universities, to provide materials (guidance / case studies) – End 2013.

The working group is now seeking formal approval from the main CIC Health and Safety Committee for these recommendations. If approved, there will be further discussion as to how CIC members could support this initiative by establishing it as a priority and by providing material, conference facilities etc.

Mid term review

The coalition Government 's mid term review includes pledges to speed up rail and road building programmes. Some commentators have noted, however, that it does not mention plans to build new roads through private investment.

Some interesting pledges include the following.

- Creating a business bank to bring together support for SME's and to deploy additional capital of £1 billion together with guarantees to address long-standing, structural gaps in the supply of finance.
- Pursuing the deregulation agenda by moving from a "one-in, one-out" approach to a "one-in, two-out" rule from January 2013.
- Scrapping or improving 85% of health and safety regulations.
- Implementing a gas strategy that gives gas fired power a major role in our future energy mix.
- Promoting the electrification of the car fleet.

Network Rail's strategic plan

Network Rail's strategic business plan which has now been sent to the Office of Rail Regulation sets out proposals for large-scale investment in transport infrastructure. With year-on-year passenger and freight growth continuing at unprecedented levels, Network Rail plan to spend £37.5bn on running and expanding Britain's railway over the five years up to 2019.

In addition to investment in key "pinch points" in the network, the plan also sets out the need to future-proof critical infrastructure against the impact of changing weather pattern and to enable more rail freight by upgrading strategic routes to accommodate bigger freight containers.

By 2019, the plan will deliver a railway that:

- delivers a step change in connectivity between regional centres (e.g. 700 more trains a day linking key northern cities);
- carries 30% more freight than today;
- is future-proofing critical infrastructure such as 30,000 bridges, embankments and tunnels against the impact of changing weather patterns, including more frequent flooding;
- continues to modernise antiquated signalling equipment as part of a plan to move away from over 800 signal boxes to 14 major operations centres; and
- cutting annual public subsidy to between £2.6bn and £2.9bn in 2019 – down from £4.5bn in 2009 and £7bn in 2004.

Green Construction Board report

The Green Construction Board (GCB) established in October 2011 has now provided its first [annual report](#). This report describes the activities of the working groups which cover matters such as buildings, infrastructure and skills. The Board's immediate efforts are focused on developing a Low Carbon Routemap for the built environment, due to be published in the spring. This will set out key milestones and interventions in the delivery of an 80 per cent reduction in emissions by 2050 (working from 1990 levels). The GCB is also developing an interactive tool to illustrate through case studies how to improve resource efficiency, reduce embodied and operational carbon while simultaneously lowering both capital expenditure and running costs.

The report indicates that the UK is now home to the world's sixth largest carbon market valued at over £120 bn, with exports up 3.9% to £11.8 bn from 2011.

Neighbourhood planning funding

From January 2013, local planning authorities will be able to claim grants of up to £50,000 to help up to 10 communities get going with their neighbourhood plans. In April, this will be extended further by making £100,000 available to kick start up to 20 plans in the area. Authorities will then receive a further £25,000 for every neighbourhood plan that gets through a successful examination. In total, local planning authorities can claim up to £30,000 for each neighbourhood plan.

Over two years, local planning authorities will benefit from up to £17 million in relation to the promotion of neighbourhood planning. This money recognises the duties that local authorities have in relation to neighbourhood planning: to provide assistance; to hold an examination and to make arrangements for a referendum.

More than 300 communities are already using the new powers introduced in the Localism Act to "work up" plans for neighbourhood areas.

Key dates for 2013

The next budget will take place on Wednesday 20 March 2013.

The autumn party political conferences will be held in Brighton, Manchester and in Glasgow. The Liberal Democrat conference will take place first in Glasgow from 14 September – 18 September. Less than one week later, the Labour conference will be held in Brighton from 22 September – 25 September. The final major party conference will be the Conservative conference which will take place between 29 September – 2 October 2013.