

EU GREEN DEAL POINTS TO GREEN ECONOMY GROWTH



The European Commission's Green Deal to address climate and environmental challenges aims to reach climate neutrality across Europe by 2050. However, it will be critical to see this implemented on the ground, according to Pat Barry, CEO of the Irish Green Building Council, and says the Council is now leading a number of projects to support local authorities and industry during this transition.

In late 2018, the IPCC issued a stark warning. It highlighted that limiting global warming to 1.5°C is crucial to avoiding the most catastrophic impacts of climate change. It also clearly established that achieving the goals of the Paris Climate Agreement will require action at an unprecedented pace and scale.

Five years after the Paris Agreement, the launch of the EU Green Deal and the clear commitment to carbon neutrality and resource efficiency are highly welcome. The EU Green Deal is a unique opportunity to demonstrate what a 1.5 °C degree shift for major economies looks like.

It also takes a holistic approach to the built environment, but like all high-level strategies, it will be critical to see how it is implemented on the ground. The Irish Green Building Council (IGBC) is already supporting Irish local authorities and the industry in this transition.

In the EU, the construction sector currently accounts for 36% of all emissions, 50% of energy consumption, half of all raw material extraction, a third of all waste and water usage, and 18 million construction jobs. It is encouraging that the EU policymakers acknowledge these multiple challenges and take an integrated approach across different policy areas. A series of initiatives published (or to be published) as part of the Green Deal relate directly to the built environment.

2050 CLIMATE NEUTRALITY

The first European Climate Law will write into law the Green Deal objective of reaching climate neutrality by 2050. To achieve this goal, all sectors will need to decarbonise. For the built environment, this will mean going beyond the existing near Zero Energy Building Standard (nZEB). To support this move, a renovation wave initiative will be launched in September.

This will aim at increasing the speed and depth of energy renovation (i.e. at doubling the current retrofit rate). This is highly welcome but various reports highlight that for Europe to deliver on its climate objectives, the rate needs to triple. Besides contributing to CO₂ emissions reduction, energy renovation is critical in supporting jobs creation as part of the Covid-19 economic recovery plan.

However, to date, the general commitment to provide regulatory and financial support to double the renovation rate remains vague. For instance, there was no proposal to create a dedicated financial tool to boost energy efficiency in buildings as part of the EU Economic Recovery Plan.

EFFICIENT USE OF RESOURCES

The European Green Deal provides a roadmap with actions to boost the efficient use of resources. For the first time ever, the EU's new Circular Economy Action Plan acknowledges that

embodied carbon in construction must be tackled. Most of the industry and policy focus to date has been on tackling operational carbon - 29% of global emissions.

However, the construction of new buildings and infrastructure accounts for 11% of global carbon emissions, before they are even used or operated. These 'embodied carbon' emissions result from use of carbon intensive construction products and wasteful practices in the design and construction process.

In order to meet the imperative to maintain the global temperature rise below 1.5°C upfront embodied carbon must be addressed in addition to operational carbon. It is extremely encouraging that the EU's Circular Economy Action Plan opens the door to exploring setting whole life carbon targets for the building sector, addressing the issue of embodied carbon, and integrating whole life carbon assessment into green public procurement and sustainable finance policy.

All these actions will be further detailed in the EU's strategy for a sustainable built environment to be published in 2021. The strategy should be designed to ensure coherence across relevant policy areas – carbon, energy, resource efficiency and management of construction and demolition waste.

Besides taking into account embodied carbon, the strategy will promote measures to improve durability and adaptability of building assets, as well as initiatives to reduce soil sealing and



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rehabilitate abandoned brownfields. It will also support actions to increase the safe, sustainable and circular use of extracted soils.

As an organisation that has always advocated for a more holistic approach to sustainability in the built environment, the Irish Green Building Council welcomes these integrated policies. However, action plans will need to be well-designed and ambitious to unlock the full potential tied up in our building stock and support our transition to a more sustainable built environment.

ADVANCING NET ZERO PROGRAMME
The Irish Green Building Council is already leading a number of projects to support local authorities and industry during this transition. The Advancing

Net Zero programme challenges local authorities to reach net zero operating emissions in their portfolios by 2030, and to advocate for all buildings to be net zero carbon in operation by 2050.

A number of high-profile cities, including Copenhagen, Helsinki and London, have already committed to decarbonising their building stock by 2050 as part of this global initiative, led by the World Green Building Council.

To support Ireland's local authorities in that process, the IGBC has made available a number of resources, such as webinars and mail courses, through its new online learning hub. The organisation is also developing a universal framework to effectively measure the environmental, social and economic impact of deep building renovation as part of the Horizon 2020 funded 'Build Upon' project.

The Framework, which is being piloted by Dublin City Council from July to December, will allow local authorities to better identify best practice and to make a better business case for energy renovation. It will also inform our national renovation policies.

A number of resources are also available on the IGBC's learning hub to support local authorities to transition to more circular constructions. These include webinars on life cycle assessment, circular construction and minimising waste on site. The IGBC has also supported 'One Click LCA' in launching 'One Click Planetary'. This free tool allows building professionals to measure embodied carbon in Ireland.

FACTFILE – Pat Barry, Irish Green Building Council

Pat Barry, CEO of the Irish Green Building Council which he co-founded in 2010, is an architect with over 20 years of experience in Ireland, Europe and South America. He has a Masters in Environmental Design of Buildings from University of Cardiff and is a qualified Passive House and DGNB consultant.

The Irish Green Building Council (IGBC) is Ireland's leading authority on green building best practices with a network of over 140 green building organisations spanning the entire built environment industry. The IGBC is affiliated with the World Green Building Council (a network of over 80 national Green Building Councils worldwide with membership of over 27,000 of the most progressive international organisations and businesses). For further information visit www.igbc.ie

