#BuildingLife Coalition Urges Action to Drive Decarbonisation of Europe's Built Environment

Introduction

A coalition of stakeholders across Europe participating in the #BuildingLife project have come together to call on the European Commission to implement transformative policies that will lead to a fully decarbonised and circular built environment in Europe.

This coalition represents over 4,500 organisations across the real estate and construction sector value chain who are calling on the European Commission to:

- Recognise the full potential of the building sector in delivering a climate neutral Europe.
- Ensure that the review of key legislative files, including the Energy Performance of Buildings Directive (EPBD), support a Whole Life Carbon (WLC) approach in addition to accelerating renovation, and greater accountability for achieved performance.
- Recognise the potential of Level(s) to deliver a harmonised implementation of WLC policy, building circularity and adaptability analysis.
- Deliver the EU Strategy for a Sustainable Built Environment to ensure coherence across policies and coordinate the transition to a sustainable built environment in the EU.
- Work with the committed network of #BuildingLife stakeholders to develop and deliver these transformative policies .

#BuildingLife

#BuildingLife is a regional project of the World Green Building Council (WorldGBC) that brings together a coalition of Green Building Councils across Europe - in Croatia, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland and Spain and the UK - to drive decarbonisation of the building sector through private sector action and public sector policy.

Via the #BuildingLife project, a European Leadership Forum and 10 National Leadership Fora with diverse leaders across the built environment value chain are working collaboratively to build consensus and steer the direction of EU and National Whole Life Carbon Roadmaps.

Why Buildings?

In Europe the use of buildings accounts for around 40% of energy consumption and 36% of CO_2 emissions. And this is just the operational impact of buildings. Globally, 11% of global emissions are from embodied carbon in construction - the emissions created from the construction, demolition and the wider supply chain of a building.

Moreover, Buildings also account for around 50% of all extracted materials, 33% of water consumption and 35% of waste generated.

Although there are figures available globally, a scarcity of data in Europe means there is not yet a common consensus about the extent to which emissions can be attributed to embodied carbon in Europe's building stock. However, what we do know presents a compelling case for action.

It is estimated that embodied carbon today contributes typically between 10-20% of the EU building CO_2 footprint depending on factors such as building type, construction technique & materials, grid intensity, etc. In some European countries with low carbon energy the embodied share can already be as high as 50%[1]. In the future, as buildings become more efficient and the grid more decarbonised, the relative share of embodied emissions will increase.

Further, the carbon footprint of materials and equipment used in construction and renovation to deliver the buildings' basic requirements and operational performances will decrease as manufacturers decarbonise their supply chains and operations. It is important they are sent a market signal on how fast they will have to do it.

Time to consider a Whole Life Carbon Approach

Currently the embodied carbon impacts of buildings are covered via various directives (e.g. EU ETS, transport legislation, energy taxation), but not yet in a way that can sufficiently drive demand for low carbon buildings and products. In other words, there is a significant opportunity to unlock the potential of the buildings sector in addressing climate change.

The greatest opportunity to address operational and embodied carbon in any project occurs during the early design stages. If the whole life impact is not addressed at that point then the opportunity to make carbon reducing decisions diminishes and costs increase. With this in mind, it is imperative that actions to secure (achieve) emissions savings throughout the building lifecycle, including at an early stage, are taken now.

The most effective approach is one that addresses **both operational and embodied carbon ('Whole Life Carbon') in an integrated manner**. Such an approach will ensure that the building sector is playing its optimal role in delivering a climate neutral Europe.

Supporting Transformative Policies

Delivering the Whole Life Carbon approach requires the establishment of strong policies - underpinned by principles of resource/material, circular economy, and energy efficiency - that support transformative action at the local, national, and European level.

A climate neutral Europe will not become a reality unless EU Policymakers in the Commission, Parliament and Council support these policies. The reviews of key policy and legislative files such as the Energy Performance of Buildings Directive, the Energy Efficiency Directive, the Taxonomy and the forthcoming strategy for a Sustainable Built Environment represent an opportunity for the Commission to start integrating 'Whole Life Carbon' into the policy framework. The indicators on Whole Life Carbon in the Level(s) framework should be the starting point to support this integration in setting the trajectory for the wider EU Strategy for a Sustainable Built Environment.

Such action at the building level must also be well coordinated and aligned with policy actions upstream on raw materials and construction products (e.g Construction Products Regulation), as well as end-of-life policies addressing waste and closing the loop/increasing circularity (e.g Waste Framework Directive).

[1]Material Economics (2019) The Circular Economy - a Powerful Force for Climate Mitigation

The Sector Is Ready to Support

Via the #BuildingLife project, a coalition of stakeholders representing the entire value chain and leading European environmental organisations are working on an EU Policy Whole Life Carbon Roadmap to outline the appropriate routes to support the implementation of WLC policy into the EU Policy Framework. This process is also being replicated on the national level in 10 European countries.

With this wide cross-sector support and a community of committed stakeholders, we call on the European Commission to work with us to deliver policies that enable the built environment sector to tackle its total carbon and resource impact.

We are ready and willing to work with the European Commission and invite you to join the conversation #BuildingLife.