



Final report of the Housing Retrofit Task and Finish Group



February 2022

Overview and Scrutiny



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Membership of the Task and Finish Group

[Councillor Louise Krupski](#) (Chair)



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Supporting officers:

Timothy Andrew (Scrutiny Manager)

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1. Chair's introduction

- 1.1. In 2019 Lewisham passed a Climate Emergency Motion, which has successfully raised both the profile of this over-arching issue and the urgency in which we need to act. Housing is by far the largest contributor to Lewisham's CO2 emissions and therefore Housing Retrofit was the appropriate choice to examine as part of the first round of Task and Finish in-depth studies this year. What was not foreseen was the recent and forthcoming massive price rises for domestic fuel and the immediate impact this is to have on our residents, 18.2% of whom already live in fuel poverty. Therefore this study, which started as an important piece looking at how we could reduce our CO2 emissions between now and 2030, has become even more urgent.
- 1.2. Tackling the Climate Crisis is a responsibility for all government bodies around the world and particularly the developed nations which have been the main cause of the problem since the industrial revolution. The increasingly unpredictable and extreme weather resulting from rising temperatures has already begun to impact many parts of the world with flooding, violent storms and uncontrollable fires becoming more frequent and volatile.
- 1.3. However, the Climate crisis is no longer something that happens to other people or nations it is happening to us here at home. Housing forms the foundation for so many essential things in life; good education, good opportunities, good health and a strong sense of belonging in a community. In order for our residents to thrive and be expected to contribute to our society they have to have good quality housing; free from damp, mould and condensation and live in a place where they are not frightened of turning the heating on for fear of not being able to feed their families.
- 1.4. Sadly the climate crisis is not an equitable one. Recent reporting on energy prices has emphasised underlying inequalities. Meaning that those in the most inefficient homes face the worst effects of poverty and of the climate crisis. The time has come to act.
- 1.5. Lewisham's communities have always responded to challenges with vision and determination. We build on the best knowledge, we learn from others and we are willing to try new ideas. It is clear that to reduce carbon emissions from homes, we will need to reduce the demand for energy, and the energy that is used will have to become low or zero carbon. This also provides an opportunity to end fuel poverty for good, which will enhance the wellbeing and life chances of the most vulnerable households.
- 1.6. This is a huge area of work and it impacts on many different strands of the Council's work. We needed to understand the practical and technical housing related issues as well as how governance, planning and programming came into play. To add complexity, there are different housing tenures, types and ages, and the varying demographics of the residents living in Lewisham's homes. Then, of course, there is the huge question of how this enormous task could be funded in the absence of any consistent realistic spending by central government. There are many moving parts here and in the limited time we had to carry out this work we touched on a number of different issues. We spoke to the Council's arm's length management organisation about their plans, we conferred with colleagues working on this issue across London – and we heard from a local cooperative that is working across south London with householders, schools and community organisations.
- 1.7. We carried out a short engagement exercise to get a snapshot of the some of the views of home owners, and were encouraged that the climate emergency and the need for warm, energy efficient homes are of importance to local people. However, it is clear that, even for people who are engaged and have the means to retrofit their homes there are still significant challenges.
- 1.8. Amongst the challenges there are also opportunities. We heard about some of the work taking place to understand and prepare for the new green industries, professions and jobs that are coming. As a Council, we are well placed to act as a coordinator and a leader on this agenda.
- 1.9. I hope our report and recommendations go some way to bringing about the step change we need to meet the challenges of the climate and fuel poverty crisis affecting our residents, and provide a positive path to a greener more equitable future.

Councillor Louise Krupski, Chair of the Housing Retrofit Task and Finish Group

2. The role of the Task and Finish Group

- 2.1. The purpose of the Housing Retrofit Task and Finish Group was: ‘to explore the ways in which Lewisham Council might ensure that it is doing everything it can to retrofit and insulate homes, both those owned and managed by Lewisham and those in the private sector, in order to reach its Climate Change target by 2030’.
- 2.2. The outline proposal for this task and finish group and its membership were put forward by Councillor Krupski – and agreed by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee at its meeting in May 2021¹.
- 2.3. The Group had its first meeting in July 2021² – at which it considered a scoping report. This established the context and background for this piece of work. The following key lines of enquiry were agreed:

Meeting the retrofit challenge in social housing

- Key line of enquiry 1: What are the aspirations of Lewisham’s housing providers?
- Key line of enquiry 2: How can we ensure that the planning and sequencing of current decent homes works or other cyclical/planned upgrades are in alignment with any future retrofit works? And - how do we ensure that our housing providers are best placed to make use of additional funding when it becomes available?
- Key line of enquiry 3: Are there examples of good practice amongst councils in London (or elsewhere) in adapting their housing stock to meet the challenges of the climate emergency that we can learn from?

Exploring options for owner occupiers and the private rented sector

- Key line of enquiry 4 - What are the principal barriers to enabling retrofit in Lewisham’s private sector? And – are there planning policy (particularly in reference to the development of the new Local Plan) or building control related issues that need to be considered?
 - Key line of enquiry 5 – What are the current plans for licensing of landlords in relation to energy efficiency ratings?
 - Key line of enquiry 6 - What can the Council do in order to encourage and incentivise change in the private housing sector?
 - Key line of enquiry 7 - What options are there for Lewisham to become involved in the green recovery for jobs?
- 2.4. Members of the group also set out an ambitious plan for engagement with partner organisations, stakeholders, experts and residents.
 - 2.5. Additionally, it was agreed that the task and finish group would be carried out utilising a project based ‘agile’ methodology, further details of which are given in section six of this report (how the task and finish group was run)



¹ [Link to the agenda of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee 26 May 2021](#)

² [Link to the agenda for the Housing Retrofit Task and Finish Group July 2021](#)

3. Recommendations

Leading the transformation

- 3.1. The Task and Finish Group believes that it is time for a comprehensive retrofit strategy – which brings together all of the initiatives relating to housing retrofit across housing types and tenures. This should utilise the broad range of the Council’s powers, its influence and its partnerships. The strategy should set out clear measurable short, medium and long-term targets describing a path to carbon neutrality by 2030.
- 3.2. Progress on the development of the strategy (and the Group’s other recommendations) should be reported to the relevant scrutiny committees by the end of the 2022-23 municipal year.
- 3.3. Mayor and Cabinet should:
 - Consider how best to lead the step change needed to reach the Council’s ambition for net zero by 2030. The Task and Finish Group believes that the cabinet portfolios relating to the climate emergency, housing and planning are connected. It is recommended that discussions take place on how the cabinet portfolios might be formally linked.
 - Hold discussions with leaders in neighbouring boroughs about their ambitions for net zero – and the potential to join resources, projects and ways of thinking together to meet some of the common challenges facing local authorities.
 - Give careful consideration to the mechanisms available to have discussions with amenity societies, stakeholders and local groups about the values and principles guiding conservation and carbon reduction measures. It is important to find a common ground that recognises and emphasises the value of both.
- 3.4. The Housing Select Committee should consider making retrofit a standing item on its agenda. This should include updates from social housing partners on their formal plans for net zero. In particular – the group recommends that the Committee invites Regenter to outline how it will work with the Council to improve the energy efficiency in the homes managed as part of the Brockley private finance initiative. We believe that there should be an expectation that all Council contracts with housing providers support Lewisham’s climate emergency declaration.
- 3.5. Further opportunities should be considered for all councillors to attend training and briefings on the impact of the climate crisis (with a specific focus on the importance of retrofit). The Committee suggest that this take place as part of the induction programme of new and existing Councillors at the start of the next administration, 2022.
- 3.6. The Task and Finish Group welcomes the work being carried out by the economy, jobs and partnerships team (as below) – and it recommends that a further update on this work should be provided to the Sustainable Development Select Committee.

Communicating with purpose

- 3.7. The Council should adopt a ‘one stop shop’ approach for residents to learn about the measures they can take to respond to the climate emergency. Work on this should commence immediately and, if possible, an on-line site be completed by the end of the calendar year 2022. The Council’s ‘one stop shop’ of climate action advice, guidance and trusted links to reputable sources should draw on the best initiatives happening locally. The scale and purpose of this project should increase over time. It may start online with the intent to grow in ambition and reach, for example including exemplar retrofitted homes when available, and pop-up stalls/displays for assemblies and key Council events.
- 3.8. The Council’s communications team should work up a programme of Housing Retrofit advice items using all the usual channels and help residents link to the ‘one stop shop’. Residents should be kept up-to-date with any key Council developments, funding news and innovations in this fast-changing area.
- 3.9. Every effort should be made to work with our housing providers to ensure that tenants moving into retrofitted homes, fully understand the technology they are living with and how it differs from conventionally heated homes, to ensure the complete success of this step-change. This will become even more important when retrofitted homes change hands down the line.

Developing future fit advice on planning

3.10. The Planning Department should:

- Seek to grow officers' knowledge and confidence in dealing with retrofit measures. This should include, if considered appropriate, employing a specialist climate change planning officer or as a minimum altering the functions of key roles to take on responsibility for developing specialist knowledge in this area (as is the case with conservation). Officers should utilise these skills to develop robust and evidence based Council policy to support sustainable, high quality retrofit – in line with the Council's ambitions for net zero.
- Review the advice it provides to households on retrofit. There should be up to date information on the Council's website for applicants considering retrofit measures including: internal and external solid wall insulation, heat pumps and energy efficient windows and doors.
- Consider how best (and when) the Council might proactively provide information and advice on retrofit measures during the planning application process.
- Review the existing extensions and alterations supplementary planning document – to include practical information and guidance on retrofit measures. It is recognised that this recommendation has resourcing implications (in terms of cost and officer time) and that this will require expert consideration and consultation. Accordingly, Members would welcome an assessment of the potential options and opportunities to deliver this work. The Group recognises the quality of the recent small sites SPD as an example of good practice and it recommends that the revised alterations and extension should be up to the same standard.

Working with limited resources

- 3.11. The Council should explore the feasibility of recruiting an in-house retrofit coordination specialist. Likely based in the housing team – this role would support the Council's leadership in bringing together partners and stakeholders to work on this issue. The holder of this post could also develop the proposed retrofit strategy. Furthermore, the Task and Finish Group believes that there is the potential for this role to act commercially by providing paid for retrofit coordination, project management and quality assurance support to housing providers, landlords and homeowners. This could be initiated on a trial basis in coordination with Lewisham's partner organisations and grown according to demand.

The Group notes the Public Accounts Select Committee's work on commercialisation – and it believes that this proposal would align with the goal set by the select committee for the Council to trial new commercial ventures. With the growth of this market and the obvious need for 'trusted providers' there may also be an opportunity in the future for a small in house team to provide homeowners with a (gradually increasing level of complexity) menu of retrofit measures which could grow organically, much as the commercially successful Waltham Forest Council Service Store model.

- 3.12. The Council should continue to bid for pots of government funding to enable energy efficiency. The Executive Management Team should provide proactive and timely project management support in order to ensure that the council and our partners (where appropriate) are ready to bid and spend any funding in the limited timescales that it is most often available.
- 3.13. The Council's economy jobs and partnerships team should continue its proactive work in engaging with the local labour market of installers and builders to link up their needs with local education and skills providers. This should include efforts to engage with contractors and suppliers in Lewisham's 'anchor organisations' and make the most of the partnership working encouraged by the signatories to Lewisham Deal. Consideration should also be given to updating the curriculums of skills providers as soon as possible.
- 3.14. Further work should take place between the Council's housing and enforcement teams to consider how best to robustly enforce the minimum energy efficiency standards.
- 3.15. Every opportunity should be taken to dovetail retrofit work with our social housing providers, namely Lewisham Homes, Regenter, Phoenix, and any successors, with work already planned, or when

new opportunities arise, so that improvements to homes will not have to be re-done a few years after completion, with great cost to the Council. Whenever a void appears in the register, the home should be raised to as high a level of EPC rating as possible including total retrofit and energy production such as the installation of photovoltaic panels or tiles.

- 3.16. The housing revenue account maintenance plan should be used to ensure that any work tied to fire safety, which is currently the key priority, be seen as an opportunity to raise the EPC rating of the buildings being maintained, as has been done at the award winning Hatfield Close and Gerrard House project, now that United Living (the contractor on this project) have a 10 year partnership with Lewisham Homes. Members believe that the boroughs other housing providers should be encouraged to take a similar approach.
- 3.17. Members recognise the importance of green infrastructure in mitigating the effects of the climate crisis, particularly in terms of urban cooling, and they recommend that the Sustainable Development Select Committee should further explore the potential for targeted urban greening to enhance the effectiveness of retrofit measures.

4. Context

'Climate change is happening and is due to human activity, this includes global warming and greater risk of flooding, droughts and heat waves³.'

- 4.1. It is widely acknowledged that climate change is occurring due to human activity. It is also established that increases in global temperatures will lead to further volatility in weather systems and result in major upheavals for human societies and the ecosystems we depend on. The UK Government recognises that amongst the severe effects of climate change on human health, food production, ecosystems and economies it is the poorest people - globally and nationally - that will face the most damaging impacts.

Lewisham's climate emergency declaration

- 4.2. In 2019 Lewisham Council was one of the first local authorities in London to declare a **climate emergency**⁴. The unanimous decision by councillors reflects the concern that changes to the world's climate will have significant detrimental impacts on people and communities generally as well as Lewisham's residents and citizens specifically- with the most significant and harmful impacts being dealt to the most vulnerable.
- 4.3. The motion states that, in Lewisham, the consequences of inaction to address this climate emergency will include:
- Increased risk of flooding and damage to buildings, infrastructure and the local economy.
 - Health problems, particularly for children, older people and those with pre-existing conditions.
 - Higher living costs including energy, food, travel and insurance costs.
 - Increases in social injustice and inequality.
 - Financial and emotional consequences for residents with families around the world adversely affected by the impact of a changing climate.
- 4.4. The motion commits the Council to:
- Set specific and measurable targets to reduce carbon emissions for the Council and for the borough as a whole, including costed milestones to zero-carbon.
 - Consider systematically the climate change impact of each area of the Council's activities.
 - Increase local resilience to climate impacts already in the system.
 - Continue to prioritise support for vulnerable residents through the Council's fuel poverty programmes working with partners at a community, borough wide and regional level to provide advice services and access to funding for heating, insulation and ventilation.
 - Accelerate existing programmes to deliver reductions in greenhouse gas emissions including delivery of heat networks in the borough, low carbon development and high quality housing, an efficient and low carbon corporate estate and support for renewables and for community energy.
 - Work with partner bodies across the borough and across London to ensure the climate emergency is adequately reflected in the development and implementation of all borough wide strategies and plans.
 - Draw up a communications strategy to support delivery of a Zero-Carbon Lewisham and enable Lewisham residents to make low carbon choices.

³ <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/climate-change-explained>

⁴ [link to the Council motion on the declaration of the climate emergency in February 2019](#)

Lewisham's corporate strategy

4.5. The Council's Corporate Strategy for 2018-2022 sets out the following priorities:

Open Lewisham - Lewisham is a welcoming place of safety for all, where we celebrate the diversity that strengthens us.

Tackling the housing crisis - Everyone has a decent home that is secure and affordable.

Giving children and young people the best start in life - Every child has access to an outstanding and inspiring education, and is given the support they need to keep them safe, well and able to achieve their full potential.

Building an inclusive local economy - Everyone can access high-quality job opportunities, with decent pay and security in our thriving and inclusive local economy.

Delivering and defending: health, social care and support - Ensuring everyone receives the health, mental health, social care and support services they need.

Making Lewisham greener - Everyone enjoys our green spaces, and benefits from a healthy environment as we work to protect and improve our local environment.

Building safer communities - Every resident feels safe and secure living here as we work together towards a borough free from the fear of crime.

4.6. Relating as it does to the issues of: safety, community, social justice, housing, health, opportunity, equality and economics - tackling the climate emergency is fundamental to the delivery of the Council's corporate strategy.

London's recovery from the coronavirus crisis

4.7. The Mayor of London has identified nine 'recovery missions' as part of plans for the city's recovery from the coronavirus crisis. Amongst these is **A Green New Deal** for London, through which the Mayor intends to: 'Tackle the climate and ecological emergencies and improve air quality by doubling the size of London's green economy by 2030 to accelerate job creation for all.' The Task and Finish Group considered how the Council might become more closely involved with initiatives happening in the London region and beyond.

4.8. London Councils' Transport and Environment Committee and the London Environment Directors Network met in late 2019 to discuss the climate emergency and to consider options and ideas for collaboration between London boroughs. They recognised the importance of action on the climate as central to councils' core mandates. They issued a joint statement⁵ outlining their support for a number of projects and programmes – including 'Retrofit London' - which has the ambition to retrofit all domestic and non-domestic buildings to an average level of emergency performance certificate⁶ (EPC) B between 2020 and 2030.

Future Lewisham⁷

4.9. The work of the Task and Finish Group was also in accordance with the strategic themes set out in the Council's recovery strategy. The strategy describes how Lewisham will recover from the coronavirus crisis – and it places emphasis on the goal of attaining 'a greener future' and as such, the Council's response to the climate emergency will be a key part of the recovery.

⁵ London Councils: [Joint Statement on Climate Change](#)

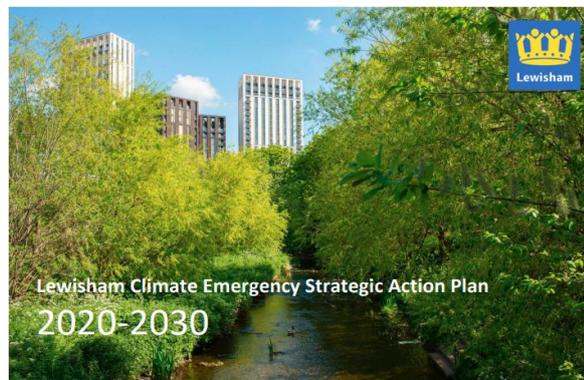
⁶ See [the Energy Savings Trust's guide to energy performance certificates](#) for more information.

⁷ [Future Lewisham announcement: our borough's recovery](#)



Lewisham's climate emergency action plan

- 4.10. Following from the Council's declaration of a climate emergency, officers were tasked with developing an action plan⁸. The plan is based on in-depth modelling and analysis of Lewisham's current (and historic) carbon emissions and the likely actions that will need to be taken to reach the target of net zero emissions by 2030. Research carried out for the development of the plan indicates that over the 10 years to 2030, £1.6 billion in funding will be required for Lewisham to achieve its carbon neutral target.
- 4.11. The plan sets out activities across five delivery areas:
- Leading By Example.
 - Sustainable Housing.
 - Decarbonised Transport.
 - Greener Adaptive Lewisham.
 - Inspiring, Learning and Lobbying.



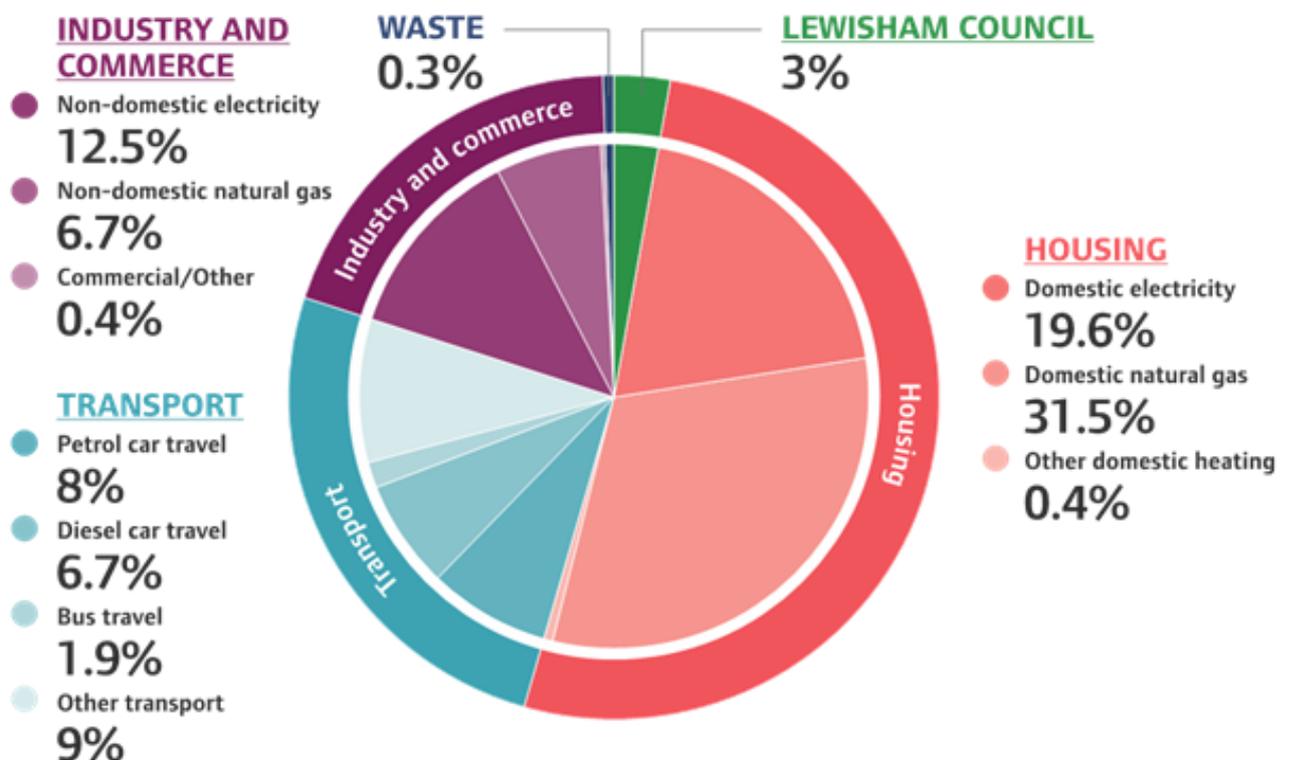
- 4.12. The work of the Task and Finish Group was influenced by the 'sustainable housing' section of the plan, which details the original measures identified across the different housing sectors to support the borough in its pursuit of the net zero target and as such, the Task and Finish Group's work sought to further the progress already made by building on the necessary actions already identified.
- 4.13. At its meeting in March 2020, Lewisham's Mayor and Cabinet⁹ adopted the action plan and affirmed the ambition for the borough to reach carbon neutral by 2030.
- 4.14. In the [2021 update](#), officers acknowledged that the action plan would require reviewing and streamlining in order to align with the council's financial and organisational recovery plans as a result of the impact of the pandemic. The Task and Finish Group's recommendations are well placed to support this work.

⁸ [Lewisham Climate Emergency Strategic Action Plan 2020-2030](#)

⁹ [Mayor and Cabinet decision on the climate emergency, March 2020](#)

The importance of housing

- 4.15. Housing accounts for half of Lewisham’s measurable carbon emissions. The use of natural gas (for heating, hot water and cooking) is the largest source of direct¹⁰ emissions from homes – making up over a third of the borough’s total. In addition, the use of electricity in homes makes up a fifth of the borough’s (indirect) emissions. To reduce these emissions it is estimated that 80% of Lewisham housing needs to be retrofitted to meet the Council’s ambition to be carbon neutral by 2030.



- 4.16. Lewisham has a mix of housing ownership and tenure types. Census data (2011¹¹) shows that owner occupiers (either owning outright or with a mortgage) make up the largest housing tenure in the borough at over 40% of households. Households living in socially rented homes make up approximately 30% (more than 36,000 households). The Council, through its arm’s length management organisation, Lewisham Homes¹² (and Regenter B3) manages almost 20,000 (more than half) of these socially rented homes. Thirdly, the private rented sector accounts for nearly 25% of Lewisham households – with the remaining (approximately 5% of) households living rent free or in other types of socially rented homes or shared ownership properties. It is notable that the number of households in the private rented sector has doubled in the past 20 years¹³.
- 4.17. Work to tackle emissions from homes is evidently made more difficult by the complexity across different tenures in terms of responsibilities and the actions needed in each of the housing sectors. In order to meet the challenge of the climate crisis, Lewisham’s climate emergency action plan sets out initiatives across all of the tenure types - with the involvement of Lewisham’s home owners as well as social and private landlords. However, the Council clearly has the most responsibility for (and direct control over) its homes - managed by Lewisham Homes and Regenter B3.

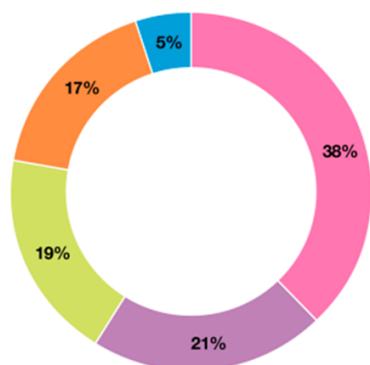
¹⁰ Put simply - direct emissions are as the result of fuel consumption in the borough (the use of natural gas boilers in central heating systems, for example) – indirect emissions are as a result of energy used in the borough but produced elsewhere (a power station fuelling the electric grid, for example).

¹¹ Housing ownership and tenancy: <https://www.observatory.lewisham.gov.uk/housing/>

¹² As a result of the Council’s strategy for stock ownership, management and investment, which has been in place since the Lewisham Housing Commission of 2001, operational management of Council homes is undertaken by two organisations. These are - Lewisham Homes, an arms-length management organisation (or ALMO) - which manages 19,000 homes and Regenter B3, which is a special purpose vehicle for homes in Brockley as part of a private finance (PFI) arrangement - which manages just over 1800 homes.

¹³ [Lewisham Housing Strategy 2020-2026](#)

- 4.18. Cost also presents a considerable challenge. Research for the development of Lewisham’s climate emergency action plan found that £1.6 billion in funding would be needed over the ten years to 2030 in order to enable the systemic change needed for the borough to meet its ambition to be carbon neutral. Just over 50% of the investment needed (£843m) relates to private housing. Social housing and Lewisham Homes account for a further £393m (p8, Lewisham Climate Emergency Action Plan 2020).
- 4.19. This is important – because the government’s assessment of housing in its heat and building’s strategy (2021) confirms that energy used in homes is responsible for a significant proportion of emissions from buildings in the UK.



Energy used in homes is responsible for a significant proportion of Carbon emissions from buildings in the UK.

Improving thermal performance is one of the key ways in which emissions from buildings can be reduced.

Source: UK Government Heat and Buildings Strategy



- 4.20. However, it also notes that improving thermal performance of buildings is one of the key ways in which emissions from buildings can be reduced. This is important because, whilst higher standards are being implemented for new homes – the majority of homes that residents will live in in 2030 have already been built to very different standards.

Retrofit

- 4.21. The Government’s heat and buildings strategy recognises that there are a number of ways to reduce energy demand and lower carbon emissions from buildings. These can be broadly categorised as¹⁴:
- Improving energy efficiency.
 - Measuring, controlling and optimising energy use.
 - Providing low carbon sources of heat.
- 4.22. Retrofit might refer to the implementation any of the measures under these headings – for example – a property might require the replacement of a gas boiler with a heat pump. It might also need smart heating controls and systems for monitoring in order to reduce waste. A primary consideration, however, is taking steps to improve the fabric of a building (insulating its walls, floors, doors and windows) as a first step in order reduce heat demand – before opting for low carbon heating systems.

¹⁴ UK Government [Heat and Buildings Strategy 2021](#), p73

- 4.23. Moreover, throughout the review members heard that the process of ‘deep retrofit’ is more often than not a preferred option. This is where a combination of measures (including those outlined above) is used in a coordinated and systematic way to raise the energy efficiency of an entire home. This might be achieved in stages, likely focusing firstly on insulation and energy efficiency measures. A system of designing and managing the implementation of ‘whole house’ retrofit has been developed – and is managed under the PAS2035 framework.
- 4.24. PAS2035 sets out the assessment measures, standards and processes to which energy efficiency measures should be implemented. The intention is that installers should consider a range of factors when specifying and implementing efficiency measures – and that households should be protected from poorly designed and implemented schemes, which in some cases increased the risk of damp and condensation. The standards also make use of the knowledge of specialist retrofit professionals¹⁵. Compliance with the framework is usually a prerequisite for accessing government funding.

Protecting the most vulnerable

- 4.25. Fuel poverty is defined by government using the low income low energy efficiency indicator (LILEE). This is different from previous measures, which emphasised a direct link between low incomes and high costs. The LILEE takes into account the energy performance of homes (removing homes in higher energy performance categories from the data) as well as heating costs - and calculates whether the remaining income available to a household is above the poverty line¹⁶. By this measure, Lewisham has a high proportion of homes in fuel poverty, as illustrated in the table below.

Area	Number of households	Number of households in fuel poverty	Proportion of households fuel poor (%)
Lewisham	123,821	22,576	18.2
Greenwich	108,057	18,004	16.7
Croydon	154,868	25,443	16.4
Lambeth	138,398	21,844	15.8
London (GLA area)	3,483,960	530,740	15.2
Southwark	128,171	18,765	14.6
Tower Hamlets	107,761	15,290	14.2
Bromley	139,712	16,610	11.9

Source: Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy¹⁷

- 4.26. There are, of course limitations to the measure – and its specificity over time. Nonetheless, the comparison with neighbouring boroughs serves as an impetus to meet the challenge of fuel poverty.
- 4.27. Energy prices are a significant cost for many households. Recent news articles¹⁸ about fuel prices highlight the situation facing households in fuel poverty - as they struggle to afford the increasing costs of energy bills and maintain comfortable living conditions. The costs of heating poorly insulated, energy inefficient homes are clearly higher and more wasteful and detrimental to those households already facing fuel poverty.
- 4.28. As recognised in the Council’s climate emergency declaration, the reverse situation is also true - with households in poverty and poor housing also likely to suffer from the worst impacts of heatwaves and overheating as well as flooding and the many other associated dangers linked to an increasingly volatile climate. Quality retrofit projects consider how the whole of a building is used – and adapt projects to improve thermal efficiency accordingly. This includes ensuring that buildings

¹⁵ <https://www.trustmark.org.uk/tradespeople/pas-2035>

¹⁶ See Gov.uk: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/fuel-poverty-statistics>

¹⁷ [Sub-regional fuel poverty data \(2019\), 2021](#)

¹⁸ BBC ‘Energy Prices ‘It feels like I’m sleeping outside’: [BBC news online](#)

being insulated also have adequate ventilation (to prevent damp and mould) as well as mechanisms to prevent overheating¹⁹.

- 4.29. The Council's approach to the climate emergency is intended to be integrated – in order to ensure that measures taken to improve green spaces and the public realm also mitigate the impacts of the climate crisis. The crisis is understood as a collective issue and an issue of social justice. The climate emergency action plan, which also recognises the need for further equalities analysis and engagement in order to support affected groups to mitigate the effects of the climate crisis²⁰.
- 4.30. The effects of fuel poverty on both acute and long term physical and mental health conditions are also well documented²¹. The effects of damp, cold and mould may exacerbate pre-existing health conditions – and the impact of the financial insecurity caused by fuel poverty on household resilience and wellbeing may also worsen the life chances of the most vulnerable residents in the most insecure housing. Over the last year and in the immediate future we will see further energy price rises, and on the horizon is a shift of subsidy from gas to electricity as more of the electricity grid is decarbonised; those who remain in buildings heated by gas will see a significant rise in their heating bills.

¹⁹ <https://www.climatejust.org.uk/messages/adapting-buildings>

²⁰ See also: <https://www.climatejust.org.uk/messages/adapting-buildings> (People can experience different intensities of climate impacts as a result of the type of housing that they live in).

²¹ See for example, the evidence gathered for this report of the [Committee on Fuel Poverty, 2020](#)

5. Key findings

Lewisham's directly managed homes: can we take the lead?

5.1. The Department for Business Energy and Industrial Strategy commissioned a report in 2018²² on the barriers to retrofit in social housing. The report's authors carried out research with a number of housing associations and councils' arm's-length housing providers. They found a range of barriers to retrofit – not least amongst them was the financial cost of the works required, however – the report's authors also highlighted some of the key things that brought about change²³:

- “An EPC target included within a sustainability or asset management strategy.
- Heating system replacements as part of planned investment programmes.
- Window and door replacements as part of planned investment programmes.
- Voids between tenancies, when property is empty and works can be carried out.
- Political intervention internally (i.e. Board members prioritising certain projects) or externally (i.e. media attention).
- Availability of external funding, such as ECO.”

Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (2018), p15 – what are the triggers to action?

5.2. Officers from Lewisham Homes met with the Task and Finish Group in July (2021) to answer questions about the organisation's approach to housing retrofit. At the time, officers were in the process of drafting an asset management strategy for 2021-26. These are critical years for the Council's response to the climate emergency because decisions made in the early part of the decade will have a cumulative impact up to – and beyond – 2030.



5.3. Lewisham Homes has committed to improving the sustainability of homes and reaching zero carbon by 2030 and its draft asset strategy reiterates the Council's aspiration, where possible, for Lewisham's housing stock to move towards an EPC of B. The new asset strategy is of fundamental importance because it will guide investment (intensively) over the next five years and establish goals for the longer term.

5.4. The Task and Finish Group heard from officers that funding was a significant consideration – because different properties in the housing portfolio require different levels of works to bring them up to EPC B – and for a small number it would not be possible at all. This is important – because funding for the delivery of the strategy will come from the housing revenue account, which is currently subject to review, in partnership with the Council, to determine the costs of priorities for funding and investment.

²² Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (2018) [Barriers to retrofit in social housing](#)

²³p15 – what are the triggers to action?

- 5.5. At the evidence session with officers, members heard that the next five years the delivery of the asset strategy would require approximately £300m of investment- and that not all of this investment had been identified. Furthermore, over the 30 years to 2050, it is anticipated that the amount of investment required will be £1.4b. At the time of the evidence session with the Task and Finish Group – figures were not available on the expected funding required for retrofit measures to reach the EPC B target. However – in the subsequent publication of the draft strategy, officers identified that at least £96m of funding would need to be found to bring the majority of the Lewisham Homes stock up to target.
- 5.6. Lewisham Homes has committed to following a ‘fabric first’ approach to retrofit. It plans to get the insulation, ventilation and airtightness of its properties up to standard (in order to reduce the demand for heat) before making major investments in newer types of low carbon heating technology. Lewisham Homes is not looking to be an innovator in this regard. However, consideration is being given to using funding for projects to connect to district heating networks and to replacing communal heating systems in tower blocks with ground source heat pumps as part of planned upgrades and investment works.
- 5.7. Officers are also bidding for funding. Consideration is being given to all of the funding streams that are available for this work (including from energy companies (particularly through ECO3 funding) and grants from government). This includes the Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund. Lewisham Homes is engaging with work being carried out by London Councils – and the Greater London Authority (through the Social Housing Retrofit Accelerator).
- 5.8. Encouragingly, Lewisham Homes used the officer time that was available during the pandemic lockdowns to review its stock condition data. It is intended that this will form a solid foundation for future investment decisions and funding bids – allowing works to focus on the ‘worst first’ for home improvements and upgrades. Officers are clear that supporting the most vulnerable households and tackling fuel poverty are priorities.
- 5.9. Lewisham Homes also worked with the Council to submit a bid to the Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund – and made use of advice from the social housing retrofit accelerator for homes, which is run by the Greater London Authority. What is clear, however, is that the pots of funding available from government will not provide for the wholesale upgrade of the housing stock to reach the ambitions set out in the Council’s climate emergency action plan.
- 5.10. Members questioned the scale of the ambition at Lewisham Homes to meet the level of the challenge posed by the climate emergency – and its impact on residents. Throughout the evidence gathering process – it was acknowledged that retrofit measures are being considered alongside other high priority issues in the housing stock – including measures to improve fire safety.
- 5.11. Councillor Krupski visited a recently completed scheme in the north of the borough to see some building improvement works in three tower blocks. Following the removal of potentially dangerous cladding in 2017 – the homes had undergone extensive fire safety and improvement works. The opportunity was taken at the same time to improve their thermal efficiency and increase the EPC rating across most homes in the scheme to EPC B.
- 5.12. Opportunities are created to carry out work to improve the energy efficiency of homes when they become void (even if they aren’t in the priority groups). This is particularly the case in homes that require intrusive works. Additionally, the ‘voids team’ at Lewisham Homes has a decanting process for properties that are not due to become void but require major remedial works. This provides further opportunities to enhance the efficiency of homes whilst carrying out other works.
- 5.13. Officers recognise that the targets in the sustainability strategy will need to be reviewed on a regular basis - and may have to be revised in coming years as technology improves and costs of solutions decreases. The current draft asset strategy reflects current considerations, feasibility and likely costs.
- 5.14. Task and Finish Group discussions with other housing providers indicated that there is the potential for Lewisham Homes to support the wider housing sector – with joint projects, pooled resources and shared learning. Members believe that one of the principal hurdles to action is the lack of engagement from senior leaders in different organisations. This relates to recognising the scale of the challenge, agreeing on priorities and facilitating the potential solutions. Lewisham Council and

Lewisham Homes are in a prime position to use their organising authority to support the integration of solutions across local organisations.

Regional responses: this is an issue for everyone

- 5.15. Retrofit London²⁴ is a project hosted by London Councils. It is the result of leaders' shared ambition to tackle the climate crisis.
- 5.16. The Task and Finish Group invited officers from the London Boroughs of Enfield and Waltham Forest, who are leading on this work, to update the group on the London wide response to this issue.
- 5.17. Retrofit is one of the priorities identified as central to the capital's response to the climate emergency. The intent of the Retrofit London project is to facilitate the retrofit of all domestic and non-domestic properties in London to an average of EPC B (or equivalent) by 2030.
- 5.18. Officers have reviewed data from every London borough in order to develop an action plan (published in late 2021) – and the team is in the process of developing an implementation plan to guide actions across the London boroughs.
- 5.19. Meeting the targets set out in the plan (to reach an average of EPC B) would require some retrofitting works to more than three million homes at a cost of more than £49 billion pounds, based on varying levels of investment for each home. In order to reach net zero almost every home in London would need some form of retrofit – with the costs reaching £98 billion pounds.
- 5.20. It is recognised that there are opportunities from investing in retrofit – particularly in terms of jobs. It is estimated that more than one hundred thousand new jobs (for both specialists and non specialists) could be created in the capital to support this work.
- 5.21. The action plan is based on a set of common principles:



²⁴ Retrofit London Housing Action Plan: <https://www.londoncouncils.gov.uk/our-key-themes/environment/climate-change/retrofit-london-housing-action-plan>

- 5.22. The principles are underpinned by a series of actions under a set of overarching themes:
- Retrofit measures and plans.
 - Delivery models, skills and supply chains.
 - Costs funding and finance.
 - Engagement, take up and lobbying.
- 5.23. Government is not providing top down direction on this agenda – preferring rather to open competitive bids for pots of funding for boroughs that are interested. And, the Greater London Authority has ambitious plans but it does not have the devolution of powers to implement retrofit at scale. Therefore, London boroughs are developing this work at varying speeds and with uneven levels of emphasis. Nonetheless, it is recognised that local authorities are essential to delivering this work – but that they will need to work in partnership with each other – and the relevant stakeholders to ensure that it can be delivered.
- 5.24. Officers recognise the importance of well thought out solutions to managing the retrofit of buildings in conservation areas - but that retrofit and conservation are not necessarily incompatible. It is also clear that this issue is being considered by heritage bodies and conservation specialists to develop sustainable solutions.

Understanding residents' aspirations: costs, contractors and conservation areas

- 5.25. Engagement with residents is a key part of ensuring that any future plans for retrofit are a success. In the limited time available, the Task and Finish Group decided to carry out a short engagement project on the barriers to retrofit in privately owned homes. As noted above, these homes form the largest section of Lewisham's housing stock – and with the exception of some low income households there is no package of financial support for homeowners to improve the thermal efficiency of their homes.
- 5.26. An online survey²⁵ was published in November 2021 seeking answers to the following questions:
- What are the current experiences of householders in the borough with regards to retrofitting their homes?
 - What are the main issues and barriers for owner occupiers who want to retrofit their homes?
 - What do owner occupiers need in order to overcome these barriers?
 - What are potential options for the Council to support residents with overcoming these barriers?
- 5.27. There were 287 survey responses. 90 expressed an interest in participating in a focus group and left an email address for follow-up. Most respondents were home owners living in terraced property.
- 5.28. About 40% had not done any retrofitting work in the last two years, 20% had never done any. This is a significant percentage of participants who are not currently invested in this topic, but nevertheless interested. The survey also found that draft proofing and insulation are the most commonly completed retrofits. Most respondents considered partial retrofits 'as and when' repairs and upgrades became necessary.
- 5.29. Increasing comfort in their own home and the climate emergency were identified as the most common motivators for retrofit, with reducing costs a close third. The greatest barriers identified were finding reliable contractors and the fear of escalating costs. Not knowing where to get good advice from, and the perception that technology is not good enough yet to make it worth investing in were also highlighted.
- 5.30. As well as internet searches, respondents were asking friends, families and neighbours who had completed retrofit projects already to find relevant information. A website with signposting to local suppliers and services, a helpline to ask for specific advice and an online planning tool were all

²⁵ [Barriers to retrofitting privately owned homes: call for evidence](#)

seen as very helpful. Financial incentives were identified as the biggest motivator, as well as access to vetted contractors.

Key themes	Key issues	Key recommendations/ideas
Cost	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cost is for many the main barrier • Lack of local information, advice and support to ensure that those who can and want to spend, spend wisely • Difficulty accessing available grants and funding to offset cost 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explore loan scheme to help with up-front capital costs? • Build support and advice infrastructure, including 'retrofit champions' that can advise and signpost • Lobbying for VAT changes and grants, but also focus on local changes that don't cost (i.e. streamline planning)?
Contractors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difficulty finding suitably qualified and experienced contractors • Lack of trust in competence, honesty and fair prices of contractors • Lack of knowledge around and availability of retrofit professionals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A local 'trusted traders' scheme with a specific section on retrofit installers • Promote available retrofit coordinators and quality assurance schemes, maybe via webinars • Ensure that local training providers focus on skills gap
Conservation areas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conflicting strategic priorities from different parts of the Council leave residents confused • Planning application to replace windows in conservation areas is not fit for purpose • Lack of trust that residents are being listened to 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A consultative review that reassesses the balance between preserving aesthetics of conservation area and needs of climate emergency • Agile planning policies that support retrofitting and rapidly improving technologies • Clear and supportive guidance on retrofitting in conservation areas and more generally

5.31. Following the survey, a series of focus groups were convened to bring together the views of interested residents. This was a self-selecting sample (30) of engaged residents – who had responded to the online consultation.

5.32. The focus groups took place in four online sessions during December – and were attended by members of the Task and Finish Group – with officer support. The groups provided a rich source of ideas and considerations for group members to consider, whilst providing the opportunity for those involved to hear differing perspectives and points of view.

5.33. The themes from the group sessions were analysed for key points and areas of agreement – as follows:

- Cost. For many participants cost is the single biggest barrier to tackling retrofitting projects.
- Lack of trust.
- Lack of access to reliable information and clear, accessible guidance for retrofitting projects.
- Confused messages around conservation and sustainability in the light of the climate emergency.

5.34. These were distilled into key messages for the Council to consider:

- The need to think deeply about the notion of conservation.
- Who should the Council listen to when it comes to building regulations in conservation areas?
- The importance of lobbying central government for financial incentives and addressing irregularities.

- The need for independent, neutral advice and information about challenges.
- Skills shortages and supply chain of qualified and certified contractors.
- Support for residents who want to do the right thing.
- The leverage the Council has through its planning and building control responsibilities.

5.35. A number of potential ‘quick wins’ were also identified from the focus group feedback, including:

- Increasing publicity of successful initiatives and low cost measures.
- Creating opportunities for residents to inform each other and share ideas.

5.36. A detailed write up of the survey and resident focus group findings is included at appendices 2 and 3.

Planning: the local plan, conservation and the dynamics of decision making

5.37. Planning officers presented the Task and Finish Group with an update on the development of the local plan – as well as retrofit and conservation related issues.



5.38. The new local plan supports the Council’s ambition for net zero – and includes a number of specific policies relating to the implementation of sustainable design and the protection of the environment. These measures include: the conservation of green spaces; the use of sustainable drainage; the construction of buildings to minimise their energy demand- and opportunities for future connections to district heating networks.

5.39. There is some scope in the plan for retrofit measures to be encouraged in major redevelopments or proposals for the remodelling of buildings. This is included in the local plan policy on sustainable design:

Retrofitting

- ❑ **Major residential** refurbishment - ‘Excellent’ rating under the BREEAM Domestic Refurbishment 2014 scheme, or future equivalent.
- ❑ **Major non-residential** refurbishment - ‘Excellent’ rating under the BREEAM Non-Domestic Refurbishment scheme, or future equivalent.
- ❑ **Sustainable retrofitting** measures to existing buildings and other development will be supported where they comply with other Local Plan policies, including on the historic environment.



- 5.40. There is an acknowledged tension between large scale retrofit proposals and heritage and conservation. Planning officers emphasised the importance of high quality design – and sympathetic implementation of measures to ensure that any retrofit plans conform with the Council’s approach to preservation of historic features in conservation areas.
- 5.41. Members also heard that some historic buildings – particularly those from the early 1900s with solid walls – might be damaged by approaches to retrofit that relied on high levels of (internal or external) insulation and draught proofing. Alternative approaches to retrofit were proposed – including: upgrades to appliances and lighting in the short term – as well as the decarbonisation of heating systems in the medium and longer term as an alternative to intrusive retrofit measures.
- 5.42. As noted in the feedback from the Group’s engagement with residents, the seeming tensions between conservation and carbon reduction is acknowledged. Some residents responding to the consultation felt compelled to improve the thermal efficiency of their homes – but were unsure what would – and would not be agreed by the Council’s planning department.
- 5.43. The Group considered a supplementary planning document proposed by Westminster Council – which provides advice and guidance for residents on retrofit. In particular, it acknowledges the importance of the balance between sustainability and heritage²⁶. It is recognised that Westminster has a large number of historic buildings – and that the Council is uniquely placed to lead on the issues of historic conservation and carbon reduction.
- 5.44. In particular – it is noted that the insulation of walls may well play a part in improving the thermal efficiency of buildings, given that around a third of a building’s heat loss is from its walls²⁷.

		Permissions required		
Upgrade	Risks, Issues and considerations	Unlisted within a conservation area	Listed building	Unlisted outside a conservation area
Internal solid wall insulation	Very high – Specialist advice and installation required due to possible moisture and ventilation problems. Breathable insulation should be used.	Internal alterations of an unlisted property in a conservation area don’t require planning permission. However, you are advised to speak specialist advice if this is proposed to a building of traditional construction.	Acceptability will depend on impact on significance and fabric. Would require listed building consent for changes affecting the building’s character as one of special architectural or historic interest, such as materials, details and finishes. This may be granted in spaces of lesser significance where original finishes have already been lost but impact on fabric needs consideration.	Internal alterations of an unlisted property don’t require planning permission. However, you are advised to speak specialist advice if this is proposed to a building of traditional construction.
External solid wall insulation	High – Specialist advice and installation required due to possible moisture and ventilation problems. Breathable insulation should be used.	In certain circumstances external wall insulation may be possible, such as on the rear elevation, in an enclosed situation (not part of a unified terrace) where the materials used are of a similar appearance to the existing building or extension. Planning permission will be needed in all cases for external wall insulation comprising or including the following: stone, artificial stone, pebble dash, render, timber, plastic or tiles.	This is generally not considered appropriate for listed buildings but this will depend on the impact on significance, as well as potential impacts on fabric. Planning permission and listed building consent would be needed.	Central Government guidance suggests this is permitted development on the principal elevation (or other elevations) of a dwelling house (not flats) subject to the material being of a similar appearance to the existing building or extension.

- 5.45. The extract from the Westminster SPD above outlines the risks and requirements for applicants considering insulating their walls. It provides a useful snapshot of the advice that will be most useful to residents in determining how to proceed with improvements to their homes.
- 5.46. The Group believes that the Council should be ambitious and proactive in its approach to climate resilience and conservation. It is clear from the literature – and from the engagement carried out by members – that more and more people are going to be seeking to adapt and upgrade their homes. And – whilst funding is an issue there are a number of residents who are planning or preparing to invest in their properties. The planning department will need to ensure that it has the mechanisms, knowledge and policy in place to meet the requests for direction.

²⁶ [Westminster Council 2021 environment SPD](#)

²⁷ <https://energysavingtrust.org.uk/energy-at-home/reducing-home-heat-loss/>

5.47. Members recognise Lewisham's alterations and extensions supplementary planning document as an example of the type of guidance needed by households. The SPD provides pictures of improvements that are in line with Council policy and those that are not in keeping/contrary to the rules. It is clear that - as the demand for efficiency improvements increases – the Council will need good quality examples of high quality work to demonstrate how best these improvements should be made. The Group believes that this work should begin immediately.

Reasons for optimism: building on areas of good practice

5.48. Future Fit Homes²⁸ is a scheme run by the South East London Community Energy (SELCE) cooperative. Which works to promote the following priorities:

- Renewable energy.
- Energy efficiency.
- Energy justice and support for the most vulnerable.

5.49. The Task and Finish Group heard from officers at the organisation about the tailored retrofit services provided to local households.



5.50. Advice ranges in scale from webinars and advice on its website - to a telephone helpline run by trained energy advisors and basic survey work (including thermal imaging) all the way to full retrofit planning and coordination support carried out by retrofit professionals. Initial advice is free of charge – and further support is available on a chargeable basis. SELCE provides advice and support for low cost measures – and it works in partnership with other organisations to provide the full range of retrofit advice and coordination services.

5.51. The thermal imaging service is particularly popular- and provides an upfront and visible way of households engaging with retrofit – and the potential measures that can be taken. The organisation also promotes the use of the Ecofurb plan builder²⁹, which enables householders to input information about their homes – and determine which measures are likely to be the most effective at improving energy efficiency.

5.52. SELCE promotes a ‘fabric first’ approach to retrofit and responds to many requests from residents about insulation. However, it is also keen to promote smaller scale measures and low cost interventions (such as draught proofing and energy efficient lighting) for households to incrementally improve their energy efficiency and manage their fuel costs.

5.53. Tailored one to one advice is an important part of the Future Fit Homes service – due to the different household tenures and types in south London. The advice is impartial – and is intended to be trustworthy. The scheme is part of the Retrofit works cooperative – which brings together installers, advocates for energy efficiency and homeowners. The cooperative assures the work carried out by its vetted installers.

5.54. SELCE operates across the south London Boroughs of Lewisham, Greenwich and Bromley. The income it generates from its activities is used to support the energy efficiency and advice work of the cooperative. It would welcome increased coordination between these boroughs to support organisations working on retrofit.

5.55. The scale of Future Fit Homes is relatively small – but with collaboration between boroughs and the promotion of its work there is the potential for it to grow. However, a substantial barrier to growing this work is also the limitation of the market for installers. It is recognised that there are limited incentives for both householders and for installers to carry out retrofit.

²⁸ <https://www.futurefithomes.org/>

²⁹ <https://www.ecofurb.com/>

- 5.56. The Council's economy, jobs and partnerships team is proactive in this area. The Group heard from officers about the work being carried out on the green jobs and skills agenda. Encouragingly, this is being carried out in collaboration with Southwark and Lambeth Councils through an existing partnership arrangement. The partnership builds on work already carried out by Central London Forward – to develop the definition, understanding and recognition of green jobs and skills in the local area.
- 5.57. Focus is being directed towards localising the analysis created at London level. There is also further work to be done on coordination between skills providers – including Lewisham College. The Council is well placed to convene, encourage and support this work. There is currently a lack of skills coordination and a single forum for businesses and supply chains.
- 5.58. The Retrofit London target for housing to reach an EPC of B by 2030 will require a major upskilling of the workforce and substantial numbers of contractors to carry out this work. There is also a role for retrofit coordinators and assessors to become a new field for professionals.
- 5.59. It is recognised that there is potential for new jobs from green skills and 'green occupational growth' in the local economy. Particularly in green finance; green power; homes and buildings and low carbon transport. However – the majority of local businesses are small or micro businesses – so the Council's role in procurement and commissioning is of particular importance – as is encouraging businesses to work in consortiums to bid for larger contracts.
- 5.60. The team is also developing work that was started by Lambeth Council and London Southbank University on understanding the needs of the retrofit supply chain and the local business base. Councils can work with local education and skills providers to encourage training and reskilling opportunities for retrofit and green jobs.
- 5.61. Following a number of stops and starts in funding and initiatives from central government, which has led to a lack of confidence in the market, it is important for local authorities to provide stability and certainty in their approach to retrofit. There has been some poor retrofit work carried out on behalf of local authorities – which acts as a caution to the ambition of boroughs in this area. However, there are opportunities for the development of a 'Trustmark' for installers and a quality assurance process led by local authorities.
- 5.62. Furthermore – the Council has been successful in bidding for funding for project support to examine the gaps in the local market, and planning work for future strategic interventions between employers and the local skills base.

Over the next 12 months, we aim to deliver:

- **An understanding of net-zero building investment** across LLS over the next 10 years
- **Create forums** of employers and training advisers to understand and maximise on the net-zero building investment
- **Facilitate strategic conversations** around delivery and skills
- Develop a robust **plan to support residents into training and employment** opportunities
- Understand how skills-system changes can help **accelerate the delivery of net-zero/retrofit**
- **Identify where the three boroughs can collaborate** on investment, delivery, market/supply chain development & policy

Source: presentation from officer in the Council's economy, jobs and partnerships team

5.63. The Task and Finish Group was encouraged to find that there are a number of options for collaboration and joint working with other councils to make a success of the opportunities in this area.

6. How the Task and Finish Group was run

6.1. The Task and Finish Group was run as a project, utilising an Agile methodology, with the intention of being:

Collaborative – scrutiny officers, directorate officers and councillors working together to address a topical issue of concern, using a shared space on MS Teams

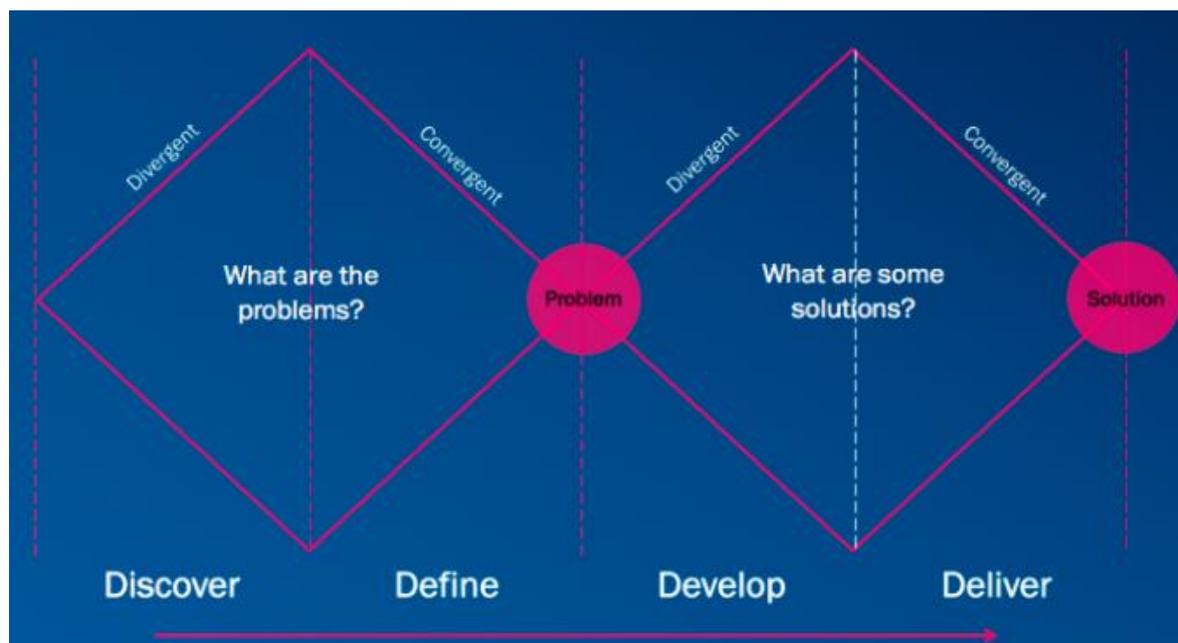
Time limited – to suggest solutions in a timely manner, with allocated tasks, progress checks and deadlines

Flexible – with a mixture of formal and informal meetings, visits, research, user engagement etc.

Focussed on residents – service user experience is key, the issues clearly defined, and solutions suggested, on the basis of understanding residents' experience

Focussed on solutions – the aim was to take evidence from a wide range of sources and good practice to develop affordable, practical solutions that are evidence based and implementable and that will have a positive impact on the lives of residents.

6.2. A 'double diamond' approach was taken which split the project into two parts (diamonds). The first part was the 'discovery' stage. The issue (the topic of the task and finish group) was the starting point and then research and evidence collection was carried out to really understand the issue and define it more clearly. Once the issue was well understood and well defined, the second stage began. Further research and evidence collection was carried out, seeking inspiration from elsewhere and working with a range of different stakeholders and experts to investigate potential solutions. This led to the Group's clear set of carefully considered recommendations.



Intended outcomes

6.3. The work of the task and finish group was intended to support work to improve the following outcomes:

- More housing in Lewisham retrofitted with insulation, connected to heat networks and other sources of low carbon heating.
- Increased understanding and awareness among housing providers, owners and tenants about the importance of retrofit and the options available across housing tenures to implement changes.
- Ensuring that the Council's housing providers (specifically Lewisham Homes) are considering the necessary financial, technical, operational and resident satisfaction implications of delivering carbon neutral standards across the stock.

Monitoring and ongoing scrutiny

- 6.4. Responsibility for monitoring the implementation of the Group's recommendations will be led by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The Task and Finish Group has also recommended that there be dedicated time for scrutiny of this issue at the Housing Select Committee – and as such it asks that members of the Select Committee consider its recommendations (and their implementation) as part of the development of their 2022-23 work programme. This is, of course, a decision for members of that Committee.
- 6.5. Additionally – at the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 30 November 2021, it was recommended that each select committee should appoint a climate change champion to ensure that (a) the annual work programme takes climate change matters into account; and (b) officers are given appropriate steers in relation to the reports for specific items, to ensure they include relevant climate change considerations. The Task and Finish Group asks champions to consider whether there are retrofit or fuel poverty related issues on the agendas of select committees – and if not – how items on their agendas reflect the need to protect the most vulnerable, fuel poor households from climate uncertainty, poor housing and poor health.

7. List of terms

7.1. This list of terms incorporates the standard usage that was applied throughout the work of the group for example: the term 'climate crisis' or 'climate emergency' was most often used in preference to 'climate change'.

Term	Definition
Carbon dioxide	Carbon dioxide (CO ₂) is a naturally occurring gas fixed by photosynthesis into organic matter and is a by-product of fossil fuel combustion, land use changes and other industrial processes. CO ₂ is the principal greenhouse gas associated with human activity and climate change (see below) and the reference against which other greenhouse gases are measured. Unless otherwise indicated the terms 'carbon' or 'carbon dioxide' are used in this report to refer to a combined measure of greenhouse gases (CO ₂ e or CO ₂ equivalent), of which carbon dioxide is the most common.
Carbon neutral	The term 'carbon neutral' is used in this report in line with the original declaration of a Climate Emergency in Lewisham. Carbon neutrality balances greenhouse gas emissions with carbon removals. As defined by the Committee on Climate Change, a net-zero or carbon neutral target requires "deep reductions in emissions, with any remaining sources offset by removals of CO ₂ from the atmosphere". In the context of Lewisham's target this means additional carbon removal and storage activity at the borough level or 'carbon offsets' funding an equivalent removal outside the borough.
Climate	Climate is usually defined as the average weather, or more rigorously, as a statistical description in terms of the mean and variability of relevant quantities over a period of time ranging from months to thousands or millions of years. The relevant quantities are most often surface variables such as temperature, precipitation, and wind.
Climate change	Climate change, as used by the United Nations International Panel on Climate Change, refers to a change in the state of the climate that can be identified by changes in the mean and/or the variability of its properties, and that persists for an extended period, typically decades or longer.
Climate emergency	Recognition that a changing climate will have severe and enduring social, economic and environmental implications. Declaration acknowledges the current gap between understanding and the sustained effort needed to meet the challenge of climate change.
Climate emergency action plan	The Council's formal plan to reduce emissions. Formally first adopted in 2020 and reprioritised on an annual basis. It originally consisted of 143 actions across five key themes.
Green New Deal	The Mayor of London's plan to reduce emissions (and improve air quality) alongside a programme for skills, job creation and investment.
Housing tenure	Whether someone owns (with or without a mortgage or loan), rents (either from a private landlord – or - the council or a housing association (referred to as social renting)) – or otherwise has formal arrangements for occupying a property.
Retrofit	Retrofit is the introduction of new materials, products and technologies into an existing building to reduce the energy needed to occupy that building. In most cases this would include work to insulate a home – although the two terms are sometimes separated to draw a distinction between technological interventions or appliances (providing heat) and increasing thermal efficiency (retaining heat generated and/or levelling out fluctuating temperatures within a home)

8. Report authors and contact

- 8.1. If you have any questions about this report please contact scrutiny managers: Timothy Andrew (timothy.andrew@lewisham.gov.uk) or Beate Hellowell (beate.hellowell@lewisham.gov.uk)

Appendices:

Appendix 1: list of engagement and evidence gathering

Appendix 2: key findings from the residents focus groups

Appendix 3: survey findings

Appendix 1: List of engagement and evidence gathering

Session	Date
July	
Climate resilience team evidence session (Martin O'Brien, Emma Bushell)	22 July 21
Lewisham homes asset strategy and sustainability plan evidence session (Jenny Chaplin, Brian Burton, Mark Newstead)	29 July 21
September	
Building housing retrofit skills (LGA webinar)	15 Sep 21
Chair's discussion with officers at the Greater London Authority	22 Sep 21
Retrofit London evidence session (Dominic Millen, LB Enfield & James McHugh, LB Waltham Forest)	23 Sep 21
Publication of Lewisham Homes' asset strategy and sustainability plan	26 Sep 21
Chair's discussion with Lewisham Homes re: the social housing decarbonisation fund.	30 Sep 21
October	
Local Plan retrofit evidence session (David Syme, Erik Nilsen, Joanna Eccelstone)	5 Oct 21
South East London Community Energy (SELCE), (Nadia Smith, Future Fit Homes programme)	12 Oct 21
November	
Green jobs and skills evidence session (Spike van der Vliet-Firth and John Bennet)	9 Nov 21
Cllr Krupski speaking at the SELCE workshop on retrofit in conservation areas	9 Nov 21
Barriers to retrofitting privately owned homes: call for evidence published	12 Nov 21
December	
Task and finish group evidence review workshop	7 Dec 21
Residents focus group	9 Dec 21
Residents focus group	13 Dec 21
Residents focus group (am)	14 Dec 21
Residents focus group (pm)	14 Dec 21
January	
Phoenix Community Homes (Adam Pope)	13 Jan 22
Second evidence review workshop	25 Jan 22
February	
Cabinet Member for Housing & Planning and Cabinet Member for Environment and Transport	2 Feb 22
Cllr Krupski meeting with Lewisham Homes and United Living at Hatfield and Gerrard Transformation Project	15 Feb 22
Task and finish group final report and recommendations	25 Feb 22

Background

As a follow-up to the online survey, four virtual focus groups, taking place from 9th - 14th December 2021 were organised. The 30 participants, recruited from self-selected survey respondents, came from diverse backgrounds and age groups, from various localities in Lewisham, and with a wide range of experiences, including:

- Residents who have completed whole-house retrofitting as retirement projects, using consultants and contractors.
- Local residents who have lived in their homes for a long time, retrofitting 'as and when' gradually, including when grants become available. Many are in Victorian or other older buildings and in conservation areas, which then present particular challenges.
- Residents who have just moved into the area or into their first homes and are considering their retrofitting options.
- Some who are in flats and therefore have very limited opportunities to make independent decisions.
- Some who have previous experiences of retrofitting Victorian buildings and have now moved into 50s and 70s houses. They are realising that prior experience counts for little in a different type of home, but do want to continue with their DIY approach.
- Some who have experience of adding more modern mansards and extensions to older homes.
- A number of local architects and building engineers with professional interests and experience of negotiating planning and building regulations, but who also have personal experience of recently purchased or newly-built local homes.
- Representatives from conservation area interest groups with diverse perspectives on conservation and sustainability.

The main barriers the focus group participants discussed:

- **Cost.** For many participants, cost is the single biggest barrier to tackling retrofitting projects. Many residents have to make hard choices between extending and retrofitting their homes when they would like to do both. Most participants qualify cost barriers by stating that as costs are inevitably high, they need to therefore be sure that their money is well spent. For some, spending a bit more is possible and in line with their values and the legacy they wish to leave for their grandchildren. For others, it is important that what they spend is an investment and increases the value of their homes. Many are looking for financial incentives.
- **Lack of trust.** One participant talked about the fear that they 'might be bullied by the Council, by central government or by unscrupulous builders' to do unnecessary work; another about 'feeling like you might get ripped off'. Participants understand that there is a difficult balancing act for the Council to both protect residents from exploitation and being ripped off, but also to encourage people to go ahead with retrofitting. They also recognise that a lot is down to central government policies.
- **Lack of access to reliable information and clear, accessible guidance** for retrofitting projects. There is a lack of advice, for example, about whether it is 'realistic to have wall insulation and still live in the house', and this lack of advice stops residents from tackling retrofitting projects. Additionally, for ordinary residents, there is a lack of clarity around when planning permission is needed (e.g. for solar panels, double glazing) in and outside conservation areas and it is very difficult to access this information independently. Local residents need support with how to make accurate assessments about current heat loss and what they can do to address this. They then need to be advised on what the most effective and efficient solution for them is. For this they need independent, trusted advice.

- **Confused messages around conservation and sustainability** in the light of the climate emergency. Participants suggest that much more joined-up thinking between parts of the Council (trading standards, planning, building control, climate team, and communications team) is needed.

Key messages for Lewisham Council

- Lewisham needs to **think deeply about the notion of conservation**. What is it that we want to conserve - the history and architectural features of buildings or the local community that is invested in addressing the climate emergency? (One example given: the resistance to permit mansard extensions in conservations areas has meant that many people have moved out of the area, but 'much of what we want to do is in line with what Lewisham wants in terms of expanding housing, retrofitting, etc., whilst also respecting conservation areas.') There is a need for meaningful conversations.
- **Who does the Council listen to** when it comes to building regulations in conservation areas? There are very real tensions between heritage and Article 4 directions for most of Lewisham's conservation areas on the one hand, and retrofitting and sustainability on the other, and this tension will need to be resolved. There is a need for democratic, inclusive consultation.
- The Council needs to be **lobbying central government hard for financial incentives** and addressing irregularities: ideas include introducing a graded stamp duty depending on the EPC rating of a home as a way of linking the rating to the value of the home; not charging VAT for retrofitting rather than (or at least in the same way as) for new builds. More local incentives, including not paying the council tax for a year, should also be considered.
- Lewisham needs to be careful about recommending wall insulation and heat pumps as these are complex issues and need specialist assessments for each individual home. The Council must **provide independent, neutral advice** and highlight challenges, including noise levels and efficacy when it's very cold for heat pumps and condensation as a result of insulation for example, rather than push a particular agenda. The importance for unbiased and evidence-based information can't be overstated.
- It is clear that expertise is required and that it takes a lot of thought to produce bespoke retrofit recommendations. Lewisham needs to **think carefully about the skills shortage and supply chain** of qualified and certified contractors, but also about promoting existing roles, such as retrofit co-ordinators, that few seem to know about.
- Lewisham needs to **support its residents who want to do the right thing** and provide clear advice on how they can retrofit to the correct standards. It can't be right that after they pay for advice about how to draw up their plans, these are then rejected and require re-modelling at huge cost. Lewisham does not seem to have clarity with regards to planning and is often contradictory in their advice. Much more clarity is needed about what is allowed and what isn't. There was also a sense that if residents have expensive solutions as their only option due to directives, they need to then be given financial support.
- Residents know and accept that the Council is limited by central government and the lack of funds. However, the **Council has in its power to address issues** with regards to Planning, Building Regulations, and certain policies in conservation areas (one example mentioned was that bike storage at the front of terraced houses is being rejected, but not the many cars that equally spoil the view!). Many of these arrangements could be adjusted with little additional cost and this is where Lewisham's focus should be.
- There were **specific concerns** raised about Planning and Building Control. Participants were not convinced that Building Control always fulfilled its duty to ensure that building work was completed to high standards beyond a 'great finish' as far as draft proofing, lagging, etc. was concerned. It could undermine trust in the Council. The planning application process for double-glazing in conservation areas was singled out as being overly complicated and unnecessarily restrictive. ('If you live in a flat in a conservation area – no contractor will do the planning process for you'.) Planning permissions should also be more nuanced and for example allow lime-based mineral rendering but not silicone-based

rendering, rather than to have blanket bans. There is a perception that planning officers 'are behind the curve, they don't seem to know latest technological advances'.

Quick wins and more ambitious initiatives

- Participants shared a range of **low key and low cost solutions** that don't impact on the fabric of the building and **should be more widely promoted**: air balloons in chimneys help with drafts; lined curtains and carpets are warmer; masonry protection creams protect brick walls; smart, programmable heating reduces cost; etc.
- Participants asked for information about a clear '**hierarchy of solutions**' in order of impact and **with a clear cost/benefit analysis**, e.g. tackle draft proofing; insulating lofts/under the floor and double glazing long before wall insulation and heat pumps? It might also be possible to develop an online tool along the lines of 'how much better would it be if you would do this....' for interested home owners to explore their options.
- **Demonstrating** to home owners **where heat loss occurs** in their individual homes ('to see where real cold-spots are, not theoretical ones told to you by companies trying to sell their products') via thermal cameras is known to be a huge motivator for those home owners to then address the problem. Lewisham could make this technology available at a subsidised rate.
- The Council could do much more about **generating positive publicity** and informing the public about what has already been done and what individuals CAN do. One example given is putting up signs in the Brockley Rise Adult Education Centre explaining the retrofitting work that is taking place there. Also - Have a Retrofit party! Develop a Retrofit Award! Use Lewisham Life more!
- The Council could set up a 'word of mouth' website/blog where **residents can share their experiences and expertise and lessons learned locally**. Lewisham can and should draw on the huge skills set of some of the invested people, including those who live in conservation areas. Can the Council facilitate 'retrofit champions' who have been through the process and can give advice?
- It would be very helpful to have a **website with exemplifications of types of homes** (Victorian, 30s, 70s...) that are prevalent in Lewisham. The case studies should include what is permissible, what not; what can be achieved with clever adaptations; what the main issues and difficulties are likely to be; whether there were unexpected benefits (i.e. learning that the right kind of underlay makes a huge difference; that insulation also helps to reduce noise from next door). [Climate Emergency Retrofit Guide | LETI](#) exemplifies this kind of work, as does [Residential Retrofit: Twenty Case Studies | RIBA Books](#).
- Lewisham should get involved in the **Building Renovation Passports (BRPs)** initiative and set up some pilots along those lines: <https://www.greenfinanceinstitute.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/GREEN-FINANCE-BUILDING-RENOVATION-final.pdf>
- There are really good products out there, for example solar slates that look very similar to conventional slates – and it would be excellent if the Council were prepared to **test and showcase some of those products** on buildings for residents and the planning department to get a good look and also then to 'take the temperature' of local residents. Solar 'tiles' instead of solar panels might be more acceptable in conservation areas and need to be investigated and tested locally.
- For individuals to invest their own money, **trusted traders are crucial**. The Council can support this by developing an approved list backed by guarantees if any projects need rectifying. The Council should also explore how [TrustMark - Homeowners HUB - Improving Consumer Protection](#) can be better utilised by residents.
- The Council should **consider how to make the most of economies of scale** and its purchasing power for community distribution projects. Can the Council 'rent my roof' and install solar panels? There may be a real advantage of the Council doing this rather than allowing private companies to profit. Can the Council set up an energy centre for a small neighbourhood area, rather than push for individual heat pumps?

Additional sources

Ecofurb – retrofit for owner occupied homes

<https://www.ecofurb.com/>

Gov.uk: costs of retrofitting homes

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/domestic-cost-assumptions-what-does-it-cost-to-retrofit-homes>

Gov.UK: costs of insulation

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/determining-the-costs-of-insulating-non-standard-cavity-walls-and-lofts>

Gov.uk guide to making retrofit work

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/retrofit-for-the-future-a-guide-to-making-retrofit-work>

Greater London Authority

[Social Housing Retrofit Accelerator](#).

Historic England: energy efficiency and historic buildings

<https://historicengland.org.uk/advice/technical-advice/energy-efficiency-and-historic-buildings/>

National Housing Federation

<https://www.housing.org.uk/news-and-blogs/blogs/alan-boddy/uk-targets-carbon-emissions-retrofit/>

Retrofit academy

<https://www.retrofitacademy.org/>

Retrofit Playbook:

<https://www.ukgbc.org/ukgbc-work/driving-retrofit-of-existing-homes/>

RICS: decarbonising the housing stock

<https://www.rics.org/globalassets/rics-website/media/news/news--opinion/retrofitting-to-decarbonise-the-uk-existing-housing-stock-v2.pdf>

South East London Community Energy

<https://selce.org.uk/>

UK Green Building Council: capturing the benefits of building renovation:

<https://www.ukgbc.org/ukgbc-work/build-upon-framework-capturing-the-benefits-of-building-renovation/>

UK Green Building Council: consumer insights into motivating whole building retrofit:

<https://www.ukgbc.org/news/ukgbc-publishes-new-insights-into-home-retrofit/>

UK Parliament. Government response to the Housing, Communities and Local Government select committee report on 'local government and the path to net zero':

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/local-government-and-the-path-to-net-zero-government-response-to-the-select-committee-report/local-government-and-the-path-to-net-zero-government-response-to-the-select-committee-report>