



Taking action for a living planet

**WWF-UK**

Panda House, Weyside Park  
Godalming, Surrey GU7 1XR  
Britdoc DX 58352 Godalming 2  
t: +44 (0)1483 426444  
f: +44 (0)1483 426409  
[www.wwf.org.uk](http://www.wwf.org.uk)

# Sustainable and Secure Buildings Bill

## SUMMARY

- **The current building regulations are not designed to address sustainability – meaning that England and Wales lag far behind Scotland and the rest of Europe in addressing the impact that buildings have on the environment**
- **This Bill will give new powers under the Building Act 1984 to address sustainability for the first time, for example by tackling the environmental impact of materials used.**

## INTRODUCTION

This Bill is a Private Member's Bill to be introduced by Andrew Stunell MP and supported by all-party sponsors. The Bill aims to make buildings 'greener' and 'safer' by strengthening the regulations on new, extended and altered buildings to require sustainability and crime reduction measures to be applied as a matter of course.

WWF is supporting this Bill as part of its One Million Sustainable Homes Campaign. Sustainable Homes are attractive, healthy, warm, cheap-to-run homes that are good for the environment and guaranteed to deliver a better quality life for millions of households across the UK.

## BACKGROUND

There are a number of examples of best practice in the UK that show that it is now possible to build houses which have zero carbon emissions. Water use is being radically reduced through innovative reuse and efficiency technologies. Renewable energy technologies are at a stage where they can play a major part in supplying domestic energy needs. New housing is being designed within communities that people like living in and which will be quality places to live for future generations.

That's the good news. The problem is that these examples are the exception rather than the rule when it comes to building new homes. Only through changes to the building regulations can we ensure that the significant amount of new housing which needs to be built in this country in the coming years adopts sustainability best practice and, in so doing, turn it into common practice.

The scale of the task is considerable. If everyone on the planet were to consume natural resources and pollute the environment as we currently do in the UK, we would need three planets to support us. The majority of new and existing homes in the UK have significant environmental impacts. For example, our homes contribute around 27 per cent of the UK's carbon dioxide emissions, and they have significant impacts in terms of use of natural resources such as timber and water. The overall "ecological footprint" of UK homes therefore represents a major impact on the global environment.

The government has gone some way towards recognising the environmental and social impacts of our homes. In February 2003 it released the *Sustainable Communities Plan: Building for the Future*<sup>1</sup>, which sets out a number of policy directions intended to create “thriving sustainable communities”. Similarly, in its *Energy White Paper*<sup>2</sup>, the government sets out its aspiration to reduce carbon emissions from homes by 4-6 million tonnes a year by 2020. However, the regulatory framework that governs how homes are built – the building regulations – is seriously inadequate for this purpose.

## **WHAT IS WRONG WITH THE CURRENT SYSTEM?**

The Building Act and Building Regulations deal with detailed issues on an individual building level. They aim to ensure the health and safety of people in and around buildings and deal with issues such as conservation of fuel and power, ventilation, fire safety and access for all.

Currently the Building Act does not provide the power to address sustainable development issues. This fact is recognised by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) in its recent response to the Select Committee report, *Planning for Sustainable Communities in the South East*.<sup>3</sup>

*“... the powers in the Building Act under which Building Regulations are made do not allow sustainability to be addressed. To extend the powers in this way would require primary legislation, and to date Parliamentary time has not yet been found for this.”*

As a result England and Wales lags far behind Scotland and the rest of Europe in terms of addressing the environmental impact of our buildings. This is why Andrew Stunell is introducing the Sustainable and Secure Buildings Bill and why WWF is offering its full support.

## **WHAT WILL THE BILL DO?**

The Bill will give new powers under the Building Act 1984 to address sustainability for the first time, for example through addressing the environmental impact of materials used.

The Bill will also:

- Give new powers to improve the crime-resistance and security of buildings, where there are at present no statutory requirements to comply with police advice
- Give powers to require that in certain circumstances large scale repair and renovation work should comply with the same standards of sustainability and crime resistance as equivalent new building work (at present it must simply be to no worse a standard than before repairs)
- Bring into the scope of building regulations certain types of building that are currently exempted, including schools and operational buildings owned by public utilities

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<sup>1</sup> Sustainable Communities: Building for the Future, ODPM, February 2003 [www.odpm.gov.uk](http://www.odpm.gov.uk)

<sup>2</sup> Our Energy Future - creating a low carbon economy, February 2003 <http://www.dti.gov.uk/energy/whitepaper/ourenergyfuture.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> Government response to ODPM Select Committee Report on Planning for Sustainable Communities: Planning for sustainable communities in the South East, ODPM, July 2003. [www.odpm.gov.uk](http://www.odpm.gov.uk)

- Place a duty on the Government to report to Parliament at intervals on the progress made in making the building stock more sustainable and crime resistant, and improve the accountability for making sure building standards are kept.

As well as addressing the sustainability of building regulations, the Bill will also address the security of buildings, providing better regulations for households threatened with burglary and theft. WWF's definition of a sustainable home goes way beyond the physical effect of the building on the environment (as significant as that is) – it is also about providing families with safer and secure homes. Above all, this Bill will offer greater choice for all: a choice to live safely and sustainably, something which is currently beyond the reach of most.

The Bill was presented on 6<sup>th</sup> January and will receive a Second Reading on the 30<sup>th</sup> January.

*For more information about the Bill or WWF's One Million Sustainable Homes Campaign please contact Dr Stuart Poore on 01483 412374.*