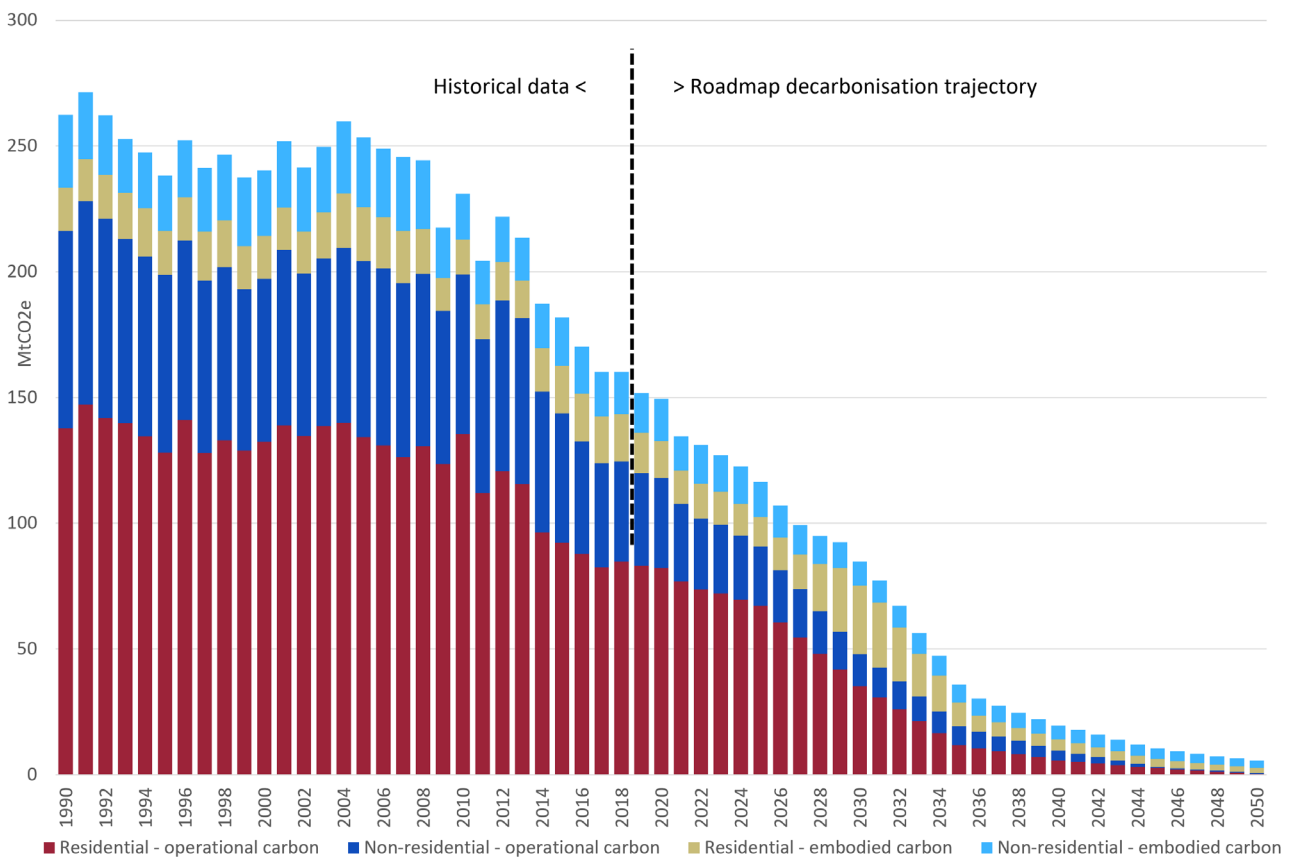


Urgent action needed to decarbonise UK buildings

The UK will not meet its climate targets without reducing carbon emissions from buildings

Through its Nationally Determined Contribution and the *Climate Change Act 2008*, amended in 2019, the UK committed to reduce its carbon emissions by at least 68% by 2030 (compared to 1990 levels) and to reach net zero carbon by 2050. Buildings play a significant role in reaching these targets since they currently produce about a quarter of all UK emissions. The dramatic extent of the reductions needed in both operational and embodied carbon emissions for buildings is shown in this [UK GBC roadmap trajectory](#):



Existing policy is insufficient to address this problem

- The UK has not set decarbonisation targets for any industry subsector (e.g. residential) nor for individual buildings.
- The metrics used to assess building performance make it difficult to understand whether the planned updates to building standards and regulations will achieve the necessary carbon reductions.
- Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland are working to develop retrofit programmes, but support in England for retrofit measures in existing buildings is limited. Improving existing stock is essential for reducing carbon emissions from real estate. Buildings that are too costly for retrofitting without financial support will continue to emit large quantities of carbon. Failing to retrofit also means that households and businesses continue to pay high energy bills.
- A lack of policies that incentivise energy management during the use stage risks undermining efforts to construct and retrofit energy efficient buildings. Well-designed buildings must be efficiently operated to close the 'performance gap' and deliver carbon savings.
- The absence of embodied carbon regulations means a significant part of these emissions are uncontrolled and unmeasured. With sparse data on embodied carbon levels in buildings, there is very little incentive to reduce them.

What RICS recommends

To address the gaps and meet national climate targets, the government should:

- **Define science-based decarbonisation targets for UK real estate at the subsector and individual building levels**, engaging with industry and academia through the [Net Zero Carbon Building Standard](#) initiative.
- **Demonstrate how the Future Homes and Future Buildings standards will deliver the reductions needed to reach the decarbonisation targets of 2030 and 2035.** Mandate net-zero carbon emissions for all new buildings as soon as possible, and any delay must be justified with solid evidence.

- **Improve the EPC scheme to make it fit for the different purposes that it serves.** Besides implementing the recommendations of the [Making SAP and RdSAP 11 fit for Net Zero](#) report, significant improvements can be made to the way EPCs are calculated, presented and used.
- **Establish a national programme to fund retrofit projects**, following the direction contained in the [National Retrofit Strategy](#) developed by the Construction Leadership Council. In the current context of rising energy bills and supply uncertainty, driving energy improvements in existing stock on a large scale carries several benefits: reducing emissions and energy bills, lowering energy demand nationally, improving indoor conditions and asset value, and creating employment.
- **Accelerate the development of a national performance-based rating scheme based on the NABERS UK system**, ensuring that final energy use and carbon emissions are publicly available metrics. The government should progressively mandate performance monitoring and disclosure for all non-domestic buildings, then develop fiscal policies to stimulate improvements in building operations by 2030.
- **Introduce embodied carbon requirements in a new section of the Building Regulations as proposed by the Part Z initiative.** This means adopting the RICS standard [Whole life carbon assessment for the built environment](#) as a national methodology, mandating embodied carbon assessments to be conducted at design and completion stages, and introducing maximum limits for embodied carbon.

For a full list of recommendations and a detailed discussion of policy role and gaps, please see the RICS report *Decarbonising UK real estate*.