



**Temporary Works
forum**

Promoting best practice in
the construction industry.

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Blog: Temporary Works Forum (TWf)

Government: Reducing embodied carbon in Temporary Works?

Is the government 'asleep at the wheel' or just sleeping at COP26? With some 40%¹ of UK construction being public sector, central government is by far the construction industry's biggest client and a hugely influential asset owner.

The government's ability to influence the construction sector remains profound and its focus on the key issues of payment times, building information modelling (BIM), whole-life costing and project bank accounts have been largely positive. This fiscal progress, however, needs to put on hold for now to halt our sleepwalk into climate catastrophe².

As a government, more focus on funding for research by SMEs, more focus on carbon and not cost, and a modern apprentice scheme might allow contractors the confidence to research and implement modern and carbon efficient methods of construction. Government should fund the British Standards Institution (BSI) to allow more sharing of information relating to novel materials and testing, allowing standards to be developed in a timelier fashion from Publicly Available Specifications (PAS) and aid the implementation of novel low carbon materials in temporary works.

As a regulator, there should be swift and robust action to support innovation. Although a free market and perfect competition may seem idyllic, those cutting corners should not prosper. Poor regulation is perceived as preventing large firms investing in research and development (R&D) due to fears that their innovation will be stolen. SMEs can't even afford the research in the first place.

Better regulation should be combined with grants to allow R&D to be given away or sold internationally. 40% of discoveries taken up on a worldwide basis originated in the United Kingdom³. If Britain is to continue being a Global Player we need a more creative workforce in both secondary and higher education.

Progress made on carbon discoveries in the UK should also benefit other countries worldwide. They should be an 'open source' alternative the funding of poor and developing countries. This is not optional, but a duty to the lowest carbon contributors who are worse effected by the crisis.

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1

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/61152/Government-Construction-Strategy_0.pdf

2

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/science-environment-58130705>

3

<https://www.historic-uk.com/CultureUK/Great-British-Inventions/>

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By far the biggest carbon effect on the construction industry will be an appreciation for the differences between virgin materials and those that are re-used. Perhaps a future where fiscal incentives for products that can be reused and remanufactured - such as reduced VAT coupled with a carbon tax - might change the tide for carbon in temporary works.

Action

In summary, government should:

- prevent illegal commercialization; protecting customers whilst not stifling innovation.
- introduce VAT incentives for the buy-back of proprietary equipment (or introduce single-use punishments) and carbon tax(es).

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