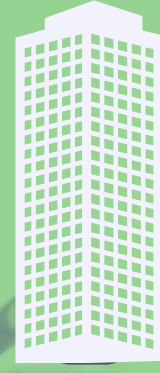


RETROFIT:

FOR THE FUTURE



**FUEL
POVERTY
ACTION**

GreenerJobsAlliance



ACORN



INTRODUCTION

The climate emergency demands urgent action to reduce reliance on fossil fuels, and decrease carbon emissions and overall energy consumption. Retrofit-upgrading and improving existing homes is a key part of this response. If properly implemented, retrofit can also help lower energy bills, create warm and comfortable homes, and contribute to a fairer, more sustainable future including entering and employed in the construction industry.

In England alone, 52% of homes—equivalent to 13.1 million properties—require energy efficiency upgrades to meet national standards. While the government's Warm Homes programme aims to address this, its budget is insufficient to meet the scale of the challenge.

Previous government schemes designed to improve housing efficiency have often led to unintended problems due to poor workmanship and a lack of proper planning. For example:

- Installing heat pumps without increasing insulation and without a properly trained workforce can result in higher energy bills.
- Injecting cavity wall insulation into poorly constructed walls can cause damp and mould issues.
- Draughty doors and windows, left unaddressed, lead to significant energy waste.

Demolishing and rebuilding homes is expensive, disruptive, carbon intensive and damages communities. Instead, we need a well-planned, nationwide programme to repair and upgrade existing housing. This must be assessed, coordinated, and delivered locally by a properly qualified and committed workforce.

There is no single solution to retrofitting Britain's housing stock. Large scale programmes are needed, requiring tailored, whole-house solutions rather than piecemeal fixes.



HEALTHY HOMES

UK homes are so poorly insulated that they lose heat three times faster than those in Northern Europe, meaning that 1 in 4 pounds spent on heating is wasted. Energy bills remain 65% higher than at the start of the energy crisis, leaving 8.3 million people in cold, damp homes and driving £3 billion in energy debt in 2023 alone.

Poor insulation leads to cold, damp and mouldy homes which can trigger asthma, respiratory infections, cardiovascular issues, dementia, and mental health problems. Tragically, the 2020 death of two-year-old Awaab Ishak highlighted the devastating consequences of mould exposure.

Tackling cold homes could save the NHS £540mn per year. Additionally, estimates have shown that investing in solutions to tackle the crisis of cold homes would be paid back in under 8–12 years (depending on housing type) when considering costs to the NHS. The costs to society and the NHS are likely to be an underestimate, therefore the costs could be paid back even sooner. Research by Citizens Advice estimates that upgrading 13 million of the most energy-inefficient homes to EPC C would stop 670,000 children from developing asthma.

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As well as retrofitting to the scale that is needed, we need to ensure this is done in a way that prioritises safety, quality, and health. It is important to learn from schemes in the past that have been poorly implemented and had negative impacts on people. For example, evidence shows that in order to feel the full health benefits of retrofitting schemes, ventilation needs to be incorporated into the insulation.

Retrofitting also provides an opportunity to create new jobs, critical to reducing health inequalities. Over 2 million jobs could be created by 2050, tackling health and wealth inequalities in struggling areas like coastal communities and former industrial hubs.

Lastly, retrofitting programmes must be accompanied by stronger protections for renters so they can feel the full benefits of warmer homes and the desired health outcomes are achieved.

A WORKFORCE SKILLS PLAN

More Vocational Education and Training (VET) is Needed

The UK construction sector employs 2.2 million workers, the majority of whom are white males, and there is a critical shortage of training for retrofit.

Vocational Education and Training (VET) in Britain has been held back by the lack of a work-based training infrastructure, because the construction labour market is fragmented across micro firms and the majority of the workforce is self-employed, without the capacity or portfolio of future contracts to take on apprentices or monitor work-based experience. There is a need for more educational resources to upgrade existing trainers, Further Education (FE) college lecturers, and workers' knowledge, competences and skills, including through:

- Expanding locally delivered construction VET to include retrofit skills.
- Embedding climate and energy literacy in VET programmes with trainees acquiring a holistic understanding of buildings and the interfaces between different occupations.
- Establishing retrofit VET programmes that encourages wide participation from women and ethnic minorities.
- Equipping FE Colleges with workshops demonstrating insulation and renewable technologies, including heat pumps
- Providing specialist courses in retrofitting for lecturers in FE and Higher Education (HE), enabling them to pass this knowledge on to students.



A WORKFORCE SKILLS PLAN

Retrofit Will Create New Employment

The shift to retrofit creates opportunities in existing, new and emerging occupations. Many more construction workers need to be trained and employed, including as insulators, heating and ventilating engineers, plumbers, electricians, scaffolders, and carpenters. In addition, there is a growing need for coordinators, software, environmental and quality engineers, and specialists in assessment and project management.

The Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA) has already identified new career pathways for retrofit assessors and coordinators, highlighting the need for dedicated qualifications and training programmes to support these roles.

Who Should Provide the Training?

Local councils are well-placed to coordinate and deliver retrofit training. As stable institutions, they can effectively collaborate with FE and HE providers to develop apprenticeships and training schemes. Ireland's Waterford and Wexford Education and Training Board provides an example of how this can be done successfully.

By pooling resources and working together, local councils can equip young people - women and men - with the qualifications required for retrofitting and set an example for the private sector, which has so far failed to provide the comprehensive and inclusive VET needed.



A WORKFORCE SKILLS PLAN

Our Demands

To meet the scale of this challenge, we call on the government to:

1. Develop a nationally recognised VET programme, in partnership with trade unions, local authorities, construction firms, FE and HE, and professional bodies.
2. Establish a dedicated funding stream for FE and HE Institutions, enabling them to:
 - Provide specialist training for lecturers and for assessors and coordinators in retrofit, energy and climate literacy.
 - Expand construction courses including apprenticeships to incorporate retrofitting, energy and climate literacy, and develop a holistic approach to building for new entrants and the existing workforce.
 - Develop new qualifications including for EPC assessors.

3. Ensure professional and trade organisations incorporate retrofit expertise into their required qualifications.

4. Commit to a minimum three-year funding programme for VET programmes, including work-based experience, ensuring long-term investment in a well qualified workforce capable of delivering retrofit at scale.

A well-trained workforce is essential for delivering an effective, sustainable retrofit programme. Research across Europe has shown that the better the construction VET system, the higher the productivity of the workforce and the quality of the building work.

Without urgent action, the UK risks missing a crucial opportunity to tackle the climate crisis, lower energy bills, improve the housing stock, and create secure, skilled occupations and a future for young people. It's time for the government to step up and invest in the training and education needed to build a greener, more energy-efficient Britain.



PROTECT PRIVATE RENTERS FROM RENOVICTIONS AND RENT RISES

The private rented sector is the section of our housing that is in greatest need of retrofit. 21% of privately rented homes in England don't meet the decent homes standard, compared to 10% in the social rented sector and 14% that are owner occupied. (Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government 2025) Private tenants have the least security and the least control over what happens to their home - they can't decorate or carry out changes to the building. (Lally and McNally 2024)

Many tenants are hesitant to raise routine repair issues for fear of eviction or rent rises. Our research found that over half of private tenants chose not to raise a problem with their landlord for fear of being evicted, and 11% were issued an eviction notice after raising a repair issue. (Cullum 2022)

Even with changes to the law which will see Section 21 'no fault' evictions outlawed, with landlords still able to evict tenants in order to sell their properties (or to move in themselves), many will still feel wary of pushing for retrofit measures - worrying that their landlord might choose to sell the home after renovation increases its value.

Another concern is rent rises. A survey by ACORN found that 57% of respondents had a rent rise in the previous 12 months, and of them 22.8% had to relocate as they could no longer afford to live in their homes. (Leonard 2023)

In a survey we conducted at the end of 2024, nearly all private renters were concerned that if they asked for retrofit measures they would either be evicted or their rent would go up.



PROTECT PRIVATE RENTERS

“our landlord wants to spend as little as possible to maintain the property and would likely rather re-rent as a much higher cost to new tenants than keep us on.”

“(I) would be concerned about rent increases greater than energy bill savings.”

“(The Landlord) would put the rent up to cover the cost, meaning we'd have to move out as we're at the limit of what we can afford.”

“I am always scared my landlord will evict me as that's just what they do, either when the flat is falling apart enough that they realise they should just sell it or do it up and get new (higher paying) tenants in.”

We asked to repair a door and windows externally last year, he [the landlord] put our rent up by £250 per month...

If the government is serious about improving homes for millions of renters then it must introduce a moratorium on eviction grounds where the tenant isn't at fault during the retrofit process and for 2 years following improvements being made; and a freeze on rent increases during the retrofit process and for 2 years following improvements being made, raising to 6 years if a public grant has been accessed - this is because it will take the average renter 6 years to see the reduction to their energy bills equivalent to the amount of the grants available through ECO4 (one of the most common grants available to low income households and their landlords for improvements).

Without these measures, renters risk bearing the brunt of the inconvenience of having renovations made to their home and without seeing benefits. Pausing rent rises and evictions is essential to ensure that private renters are not inadvertently having to pay for improvements to a home they do not own, and that they are able to enjoy the improvements - potentially lower bills and a more comfortable environment. This also prevents landlords from capturing the value of public grants in order to then sell or rent their properties at an increased price. It is important to acknowledge that tenants are actors in the project to retrofit Britain, and policies need to be put in place to protect them.



ACCOUNTABILITY FOR RETROFIT

The UK has faced systemic failures in the retrofit sector in monitoring and holding installers to account. Structural incentives prioritise quick and easy retrofits over quality and need, building in shoddy workmanship. Home improvements should deliver improved warmth, comfort and safety. Instead, cowboy contractors - large and small - leave people's homes with hanging wires, ill-fitting windows, inadequate ventilation causing damp and mould, and other consequences of unaccountable work.

The bodies charged with doing inspections and holding insulation installers to account are deeply discredited. Ofgem and TrustMark are both well known to favour businesses over residents; as MPs said in a parliamentary debate this year, TrustMark is "inherently ill designed" and "simply side[s] with the contractor". Ofgem has introduced lots of paperwork but very limited checks that the promised quality, warmth and annual bill savings are actually being delivered.

In a sector riven with financial dependencies, revolving doors and unspoken relationships (extending sometimes to outright corruption), there is only one reliable consumer protection. That is, empowering residents themselves to hold to account those responsible for work on their homes, including not only contractors but social and private landlords. We want to see this explicitly written into national and local government policies, laws, regulations and contracts.

The intention is to guarantee energy savings, stopping profiteers, both large and small, soaking up huge sums of public money while leaving the UK's housing stock the worst in Europe. We need to move to a system where contractors are responsible for actually delivering the annual bill savings and improved comfort that they promise when they bid to get the funding. Payments should be based on reasonable costs, and money should be withheld if quality and performance standards are not met.



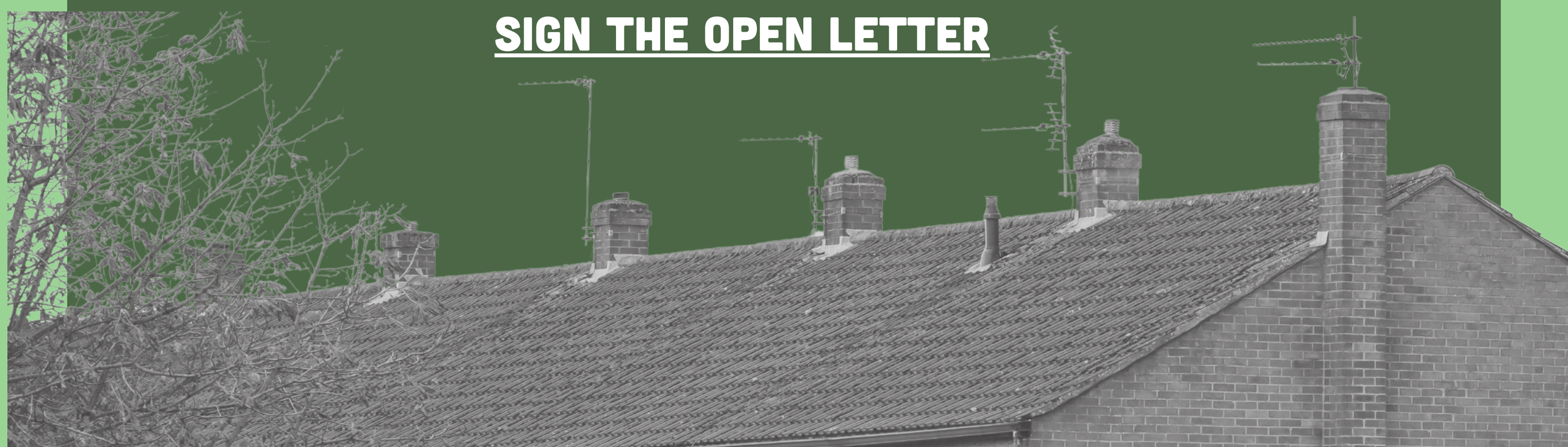
ACCOUNTABILITY FOR RETROFIT

We need full accountability to residents, with all contracts to include prompt rectification and compensation when the retrofit does not achieve the promised results.

Movements can show support by adding their signature to our open letter to Miatta Fahnbulleh MP (Junior Minister in the Department of Energy Security and Net Zero), demanding the following:

- Listen to residents, and offer the support and the channels to make this real
- Establish a robust system of standards, regulations and independent inspections
- Measure effectiveness, with the results made public and guaranteed and automatic compensation and remediation where savings and standards are not met. Contractors should be paid a fair amount for the work done, not the distorted ABS system based on unreal energy savings
- Invest in skilled workers and get feedback from them on site visits after the completion of projects
- Ensure compensation for residents, proportionate to losses and suffering and straightforward to obtain
- Implement effective sanctions, with checks to ensure firms do not dissolve and re-form
- Beyond solid walls, urgently extend commitments to other forms of retrofit, to draw a line under the disastrous systems inherited from the previous government

SIGN THE OPEN LETTER



CONCLUSION

Carried out properly, investing in retrofit is a win-win for government, local authorities, tenants, residents and workers in construction, engineering and other occupations. It will answer many pressing needs which require action now. Britain's housing stock must not be left to deteriorate any further. With retrofit, tenants and residents will be able to enjoy healthy, comfortable homes, with more money in their pockets as they pay less for their energy costs. The environment benefits too, with reduced CO2 emissions. The country can enjoy greater energy security, as dependence on gas and other fossil fuels goes down. A better educated and skilled workforce will boost the economy, gain greater job satisfaction and create a virtuous circle for the economy with increased contributions to the public purse from higher wages and increases in spending.

The private sector has demonstrated that they are not equal to the challenge. This is not about a few dodgy builders but about fragmentation of the industry and exploitation in the housing market. To get the benefits that a well-structured retrofit programme will give, there must be consistent funding and well-thought through planning. Government needs to provide the resources for local authorities to run programmes that will give opportunities for on the job training for an in-house unionised workforce. Investment in FE and HE is vital for a substantial and coherent input to VET. Rather than cutting red tape, Government should be increasing regulation to protect residents and tenants, to ensure that they get the benefits of improvements in their living conditions. Residents must be at the heart of retrofit and be shielded from displacement or rent rises. Retrofit offers the brighter prospects to so many, it is a movement for the future, to be (retro)fit.

TAKE ACTION NOW

retrofitforthefuture.co.uk



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

FUEL POVERTY ACTION

Fuel Poverty Action is a grassroots group campaigning to protect people from fuel poverty, by challenging rip-off energy companies and unfair policies that leave people to endure cold homes. They take action for warm, well-insulated homes and clean and affordable energy, under the control of people and communities, not private companies.

ACORN

ACORN is a community union advocating for their members campaigning in support of renters rights and against evictions. They have branches across the UK and are part of an international collective with over 250,000 members, campaigning on issues that matter to their members.

PEACE & JUSTICE PROJECT

The Peace & Justice Project was founded in 2021 by former leader of the Labour Party, Jeremy Corbyn. It brings people together to campaign on issues of social and economic justice, peace and human rights in Britain and across the world

GREENER JOBS ALLIANCE

The Greener Jobs Alliance promotes skills training and job creation to grow low carbon sectors and green the whole economy. They liaise at a national and local level to build the broadest possible support for the policies needed to drive the transition to a low carbon economy

CAMPAIGN AGAINST CLIMATE CHANGE

The Campaign against Climate Change (CCC) exists to push for the urgent and radical action we need to prevent the catastrophic destabilisation of global climate. Founded over 20 years ago, their trade union group campaigns on the potential for climate jobs in transport, energy, buildings, food, education and more to tackle the climate crisis and build a fairer society.

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JOIN THE CAMPAIGN

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