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GOOD PROGRESS BUT NOT FAST ENOUGH: DECARBONISING INFRASTRUCTURE

The Infrastructure Carbon Review (ICR) was published in November 2013 with the call to action to 'reduce carbon, reduce cost'. Seven years on, and with the UK Government committed to achieving net-zero emissions by 2050, the Green Construction Board - the net zero and sustainability technical lead for the Construction Leadership Council - has assessed industry's progress to date on decarbonising infrastructure. Using case studies it identified areas of progress and increasing maturity of decarbonisation in infrastructure projects. However the current rate of progress is unlikely to get us to the net zero carbon transition in time for 2050.

The ICR highlighted that infrastructure is responsible for more than half of the national carbon footprint. UK infrastructure can play a pivotal role in accelerating decarbonisation towards the net-zero aspirations. Since the inception of the ICR more than 70 organisations have made carbon reduction commitments. Innovations have been brought to market and are being scaled. An international standard for managing infrastructure carbon, PAS 2080:2016, has been created, providing a common whole life carbon management framework necessary for any organisation in the industry to realise the benefits.

This stocktake report highlights the significant blockers to faster implementation of decarbonisation; and sets out key recommendations for a net zero carbon era.

Traditional procurement and commercial solutions continue to incentivise lowest capital cost holding back progress in meaningful decarbonisation in project delivery.

- Cross-sector collaboration is essential to maximise carbon reduction opportunities and avoid silo working.
- Effort has focussed on capital carbon reduction, without an appreciation of the capital carbon investment needed to unlock the much bigger operational and user carbon savings required to decarbonise infrastructure systems.
- Systemic thinking is yet to be reflected in the maturity of our decarbonisation efforts. The case for integrated infrastructure needs to be made.
- PAS 2080 has been highly effective by providing a consistent framework to carbon management, including the requirement for strong leadership. However, few organisations have truly embedded the principles of PAS 2080 into their investment decision-making and more leadership on collaboration to reduce carbon is needed and PAS 2080 uptake is still slow.
- We still need an exemplar programme that drives decarbonisation behaviours for whole-life step-change.
- More consideration on retrofitting existing infrastructure to be fit for net-zero carbon.
- Regulators need to align sector-level price control with the net-zero carbon requirement.

Through our industry change programme, CO2nstruct Zero, we will work with the industry to support and drive the change needed in our Construction Activity priorities and set transparent goals and clear actions to achieve our net zero goals and decarbonise infrastructure through these recommendations.

Construction Leadership Council chairman Andy Mitchell: *'This report highlights the work this sector has and is doing to decarbonise infrastructure. However, it also highlights that there is much more to be done if the sector is to transition and align to net zero ambitions. The CLC will work with the industry to address and unlock the steps it needs to make to improve progress; and ensure that our industry is doing what is needed to meet our 2050 net zero target.'*

ENDS

Notes for editors

1. A copy of the Infrastructure Carbon Review 7 Years On report is available at: https://www.constructionleadershipcouncil.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Infrastructure-Carbon-Review-seven-years-on_March-2021.pdf
2. The Infrastructure Carbon Review (ICR) was a watershed document published in 2013 setting out actions for government, clients and suppliers to reduce carbon from the construction and operation of infrastructure.
3. CO2nstruct Zero's Construction Activity priorities cover:
 - Implementing carbon measurement, to support our construction projects in making quantifiable decisions to remove carbon.
 - Become world leaders in designing out carbon, developing the capability of our designers and construction professionals to develop designs in line with circular economy - reducing embedded and operational carbon, shifting commercial models to incentivise and reward measurable carbon reductions.
 - Support development of innovative low carbon materials (prioritising concrete and steel), as well as advancing low carbon solutions for manufacturing production processes and distribution.

About the Construction Leadership Council (CLC)

The CLC's mission is to provide sector leadership to the construction industry. The expanded CLC has twelve workstreams that operate collaboratively to address the biggest issues facing the sector, focused on the Industry Recovery Plan. Workstreams include skills and inclusion, building safety and business models. The CLC is co-chaired by Ann-Marie Trevelyan MP, Minister for Business and Industry, and Andy Mitchell CBE, CEO of Thames Tideway.