What Is the Code for Sustainable Homes?

A NEW NATIONAL STANDARD

The Code for Sustainable Homes has been developed to enable a step change in sustainable building practice for new homes. It has been prepared by the Government in close working consultation with the Building Research Establishment (BRE) and Construction Industry Research and Information Association (CIRIA), and through consultation with a Senior Steering Group consisting of Government, industry and NGO representatives.
The Code is intended as a single national standard to guide industry in the design and construction of sustainable homes. It is a means of driving continuous improvement, greater innovation and exemplary achievement in sustainable home building.
The Code will complement the system of Energy Performance Certificates which were introduced in April 2008 under the Energy Performance of Buildings Directive (EPBD). The EPBD requires that all new homes and other homes, when they are sold or leased, have an Energy Performance Certificate providing key information about the energy efficiency/carbon performance of the home. Energy assessment under the Code will use the same calculation methodology therefore avoiding the need for duplication. Although it is voluntary to design and build a home to Code standards, all new homes from 1st May 2008 will require report on its sustainability (a Code certificate) when they are sold but for the moment a home can have a nil-rated certificate.

A SET OF SUSTAINABLE DESIGN PRINCIPLES

The Code measures the sustainability of a home against design categories, rating the 'whole home' as a complete package. Those familiar with building regulations, will recognise this as a major and welcome departure from current practice.

The design categories included within the Code are:

● energy/CO2	●pollution
● water	●health and well-being
● materials	●management
● surface water run-off	●ecology
●waste	

A STANDARD WHICH BUILDS UPON EXISTING SYSTEMS

The Code for Sustainable Homes has been developed using the Building Research Establishment's (BRE) EcoHomes System, which has already achieved success in reducing the impact of affordable housing projects, in particular within the social housing sector.
The Code builds upon EcoHomes in a number of ways, for example:
● the Code introduces minimum standards for energy and water efficiency at every level of the Code, therefore requiring high levels of sustainability performance in these areas for achievement of a high Code rating;
● the Code uses a simpler system of awarding points, with more complex weightings removed;
● the Code includes new areas of sustainability design, such as Lifetime Homes and inclusion of composting facilities;
BRE will continue to maintain and operate the EcoHomes scheme during the transition to the Code. The Code sits alongside the planning system which guides sustainability in broader locational and aesthetic issues.

A MARK OF QUALITY

In this era, with a more environmentally-conscious public, aware of the urgent need to limit their effects on climate change, there is a growing appetite amongst consumers for more sustainable products and services. With
greater demand for homes that offer reduced environmental impact, lower running costs and features that enhance health and well-being, there is an increased need for home builders to demonstrate their capacity in sustainable home building, and to market the sustainability of their homes to homebuyers. The Code for Sustainable Homes offers a tool for home builders to demonstrate the sustainability performance of their homes, and to differentiate themselves from their competitors.

A SIGNAL FOR THE FUTURE

The Code is closely linked to Building Regulations, which are the minimum building standards required by law. Minimum standards for Code compliance have been set above the requirements of Building Regulations. It is intended that the Code will signal the future direction of Building Regulations in relation to carbon emissions from, and energy use in homes, providing greater regulatory certainty for the homebuilding industry.

How Does the Code Work?

THE SUSTAINABILITY RATING SYSTEM

The Code uses a sustainability rating system – indicated by 'stars', to communicate the overall sustainability performance of a home. A home can achieve a sustainability rating from one (*) to six (******) stars depending on the extent to which it has achieved Code standards. One star (*) is the entry level – above the level of the Building Regulations; and six stars (******) is the highest level – reflecting exemplar development in sustainability terms.

ACHIEVING A SUSTAINABILITY RATING

The sustainability rating which a home achieves represents its overall performance across the nine Code design categories.
Minimum standards exist for a number of categories – these must be achieved to gain a one star * sustainability rating. Energy efficiency and water efficiency categories also have minimum standards that must be achieved at every level of the Code, recognising their importance to the sustainability of any home.
Apart from these minimum requirements the Code is completely flexible; developers can choose which and how many standards they implement to obtain 'points' under the Code in order to achieve a higher sustainability rating.
The table below shows the nine design categories and the degree of flexibility afforded by each:

Flexibility of the Code	
Categories	Flexibility
Energy/CO2 Water	Minimum standards at each level of the Code
Materials Surface water run-off Waste	Minimum standard at Code entry level
Pollution Health and well-being Management Ecology	No minimum standards

So, in order to achieve a particular code level and the associated sustainability
rating, a home must integrate minimum standards, and additional points for other design features must be attained.

The table below shows the minimum standards, and number of points required in order to achieve each level of the Code:

Achieving a sustainability rating					
Minimum Standards					
Energy			Water		
Code Level	Standard (Percentage better than Part L1 2006)	Points Awarded	Standard (litres per person per day)	Points Awarded	Other Points Required
1(*)	10	1.2	120	1.5	33.3
2(**)	18	3.5	120	1.5	43.0
3(***)	25	5.8	105	4.5	46.7
4(****)	44	9.4	105	4.5	54.1
5(*****)	100[2]	16.4	80	7.5	60.1
6(******)	A zero carbon home[3]	17.6	80	7.5	64.9

Notes
1. Building Regulations: Approved Document L (2006) – 'Conservation of Fuel and Power.'
2. Zero emissions in relation to Building Regulations issues (i.e. zero emissions from heating, hot water, ventilation and lighting).
3. A completely zero carbon home (i.e. zero net emissions of carbon dioxide (CO2) from all energy use in the home).
4. All points in this document are rounded to one decimal place.

ASSESSING THE SUSTAINABILITY RATING

Assessment procedures will be transparent and technically rigorous, whilst at the same time straightforward and beneficial to all parties.
The method will be similar to BRE's EcoHomes System which depends on a network of specifically trained and accredited independent assessors. BRE will retrain and accredit assessors for the new Code. Code assessors will conduct initial design stage assessments, recommend a sustainability rating, and issue an interim Code certificate. They will perform a post-completion check to verify the rating before a final Code certificate of compliance is issued.
A design stage assessment will only need to be carried out on each home type within any development – not every single home. Post-completion checks will be carried out on a sample basis.
Builders whose home designs and completed work are assessed under the Code will receive a certificate showing the overall sustainability rating for the home, and a breakdown of how that rating has been achieved.

Summary of Code benefits

BENEFITS FOR THE ENVIRONMENT

- **Reduced greenhouse gas emissions:** With minimum standards for energy efficiency at each level of the Code, there will be a reduction in greenhouse gas emissions to the environment. This will enable us to reduce the threat from climate change.

- **Better adaptation to climate change:** The Building Regulations (Approved Document L – 2006) already limit the effects of solar gains in Summer. With minimum standards for water efficiency at each level of
the Code, and other measures in the Code, including better management
of surface water run-off, our future housing stock will be better adapted to cope with the impacts of climate change which are already inevitable.

- **Reduced impact on the environment overall:** Inclusion of measures which, for example, promote the use of less polluting materials, and encourage household recycling, will ensure that our future housing stock
has fewer negative impacts overall on the environment.

BENEFITS FOR HOME BUILDERS

- **A mark of quality:** Increasing media attention and public concern over environmental issues, notably climate change, has given rise to a growing
appetite among consumers for more sustainable products and services.
The Code for Sustainable Homes can be used by home builders to demonstrate the sustainability performance of their homes, and to differentiate themselves from their competitors.

- **Regulatory certainty:** The levels of performance for energy efficiency indicate the future direction of building regulations, bringing greater regulatory certainty for home builders, and acting as a guide to support effective business and investment planning.

- **Flexibility:** The Code is based on performance which means it sets levels for sustainability performance against each element but does not prescribe how to achieve each level. Home builders can innovate to find
cost-effective solutions to meet and exceed minimum requirements.

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BENEFITS FOR SOCIAL HOUSING PROVIDERS

- **Lower running costs:** Homes built to Code standard will have lower running costs through greater energy and water efficiency than homes not built to the Code standard, so helping to reduce fuel poverty.

- **Improved comfort and satisfaction:** Homes built to the Code will enhance the comfort and satisfaction of tenants. Costs may be saved in dealing with complaints.

- **Raised sustainability credentials:** The Code will enable social housing providers to demonstrate their sustainability credentials to the public, tenants and funding bodies.

BENEFITS FOR CONSUMERS

- **Assisting choice:** The Code will provide valuable information to homebuyers on the sustainability performance of different homes, assisting them in their choice of a new home.

- **Reducing environmental 'footprint':** By asking for a new home which meets the Code standard, consumers will be able to encourage industry to build more sustainable homes, and reduce their own 'footprint' on the environment.

- **Lower running costs:** Homes built to Code standard will have lower running costs through greater energy and water efficiency than homes not built to the Code standard, so helping to reduce fuel poverty.

- **Improved well-being:** Homes built to Code standard will provide a more pleasant and healthy place to live, for example with more natural light, and adaptability for future needs.

The Healthy Home Limited is registered to assess dwellings under **EcoHomes** and **Code for Sustainable Homes**.

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