

Ten steps councils can take for a resilient low carbon future

30 January 2018

Phew! 2018 has been a thermometer-busting scorcher so far. As I write this, in between meetings with top Government officials in Wellington, this month looks set to be the hottest January in New Zealand on record. It may top that, and could even be the warmest month ever recorded in Aotearoa. This week, droughts were declared in Otago and Southland, joining those already in the lower North Island and the Mainland's West Coast.

Although perhaps many of our media outlets haven't mentioned climate change when reporting our sizzling summer, it's pretty difficult for me, and many of you, I'm sure, not to think about it right now. Top climate scientist Professor James Renwick of Victoria University [said recently](#) that "what we've seen this summer is very consistent with climate change".

Our councils and local authorities have hugely important roles in the fight to tackle climate change pollution. And, [in a major new initiative](#), they're starting to fill those roles.

In a new policy document, the heads of New Zealand's local governments have promised to:

- Lead the conversation with the public and stakeholders on how to address the local impacts of climate change
- Develop local strategies for adaptation action
- Incorporate climate change considerations into long term planning, infrastructure and funding decision making processes
- Take steps to ensure its activities contribute to a reduction of green house gas emissions

And they have also called on central Government to address the risks, challenges and opportunities of climate change.

What does this mean for us? Well, homes and buildings produce around 15-17% of New Zealand's climate change pollution. If we get our built environment right we are well on the way to adapting to our changing climate reducing the costs and impacts of floods, overheating and water shortages.

Policy documents like this are useful. But here are also a number of key steps that councils could and should take right now.

So here is my top ten list of the steps councils can take to incentivize better buildings using their regulatory, financial and education options.

Regulatory options

- 1) Reduced cost (fees) for consenting buildings.
- 2) Provide greater flexibility on height restrictions to buildings that have Green Star – this is what Hamilton City Council offers.
- 3) Enable greater density for homes built to Homestar – this is what Queenstown Council are looking to do in their plan.
- 4) Provide greater consenting support to applicants undertaking projects with a 6 Homestar rating or higher.

Financial policy

- 5) Reduced development contributions for sustainable buildings or homes – this is what Wellington City Council has in their Development Contributions Policy.

Education

- 6) Where a Homestar rating has been achieved, include this information in the property file.
- 7) When a LIM report is requested, include information on the Homestar rating (or if a building - Green Star).
- 8) Publish data on buildings that achieve Homestar (or if a building - Green Star) accreditation to raise awareness.

Councils taking the lead

- 9) Councils own buildings – Council could rate their own existing buildings using Green Star Performance - this is what Auckland council is doing.
- 10) Water provider - The water provider, in some cases, council could reduce the Infrastructure Growth Charge for homes or buildings that verify they are water efficient using Green Star or Homestar – this is what we are discussing with some water providers.

The policy options outlined here are within the remit of councils, and the benefits to New Zealanders are significant. It's time for councils to get cracking to ensure our built environment delivers the future New Zealanders deserve.

As I mentioned earlier, I'm writing this from Wellington, where I'm meeting top politicians and government officials, to discuss how to make our buildings better. This type of advocacy is just one way the New Zealand Green Building Council works. And, as a member, you have a chance to influence how we work right now. Please do share your knowledge and insights with us in our [members survey here](#).