

As you will read in one of the attached articles, The Welsh government has recently issued a new standard for social housing that requires an embodied carbon assessment, favours timber-based offsite construction and bans fossil fuel boilers. Whilst these standards initially affect only publicly funded affordable housing, the article suggests that the standard might be extended to all housing.

As someone who has worked in the construction industry for nearly half a century, these aspirations to reduce energy consumption and the associated emissions seem to me entirely laudable, but they also led me to contemplate two issues which arose in my mind.

Firstly, I reflected on the rate of progress towards these standards. When I first started working in architectural practices in the 1970s, we were working to the standards of - I think - the 1975 Building Regulations, in which the requirements for the thermal performance of buildings was, by today's standards, almost laughably poor. As I recall, back then there was no requirement even to insulate cavity walls. As an industry, I pondered, could we - should we - have moved more quickly towards designing high-performing buildings such as these new standards will require?

Secondly, it's interesting to observe that - yet again - raising the standards of housing begins with the public sector and not the private sector. I recall in my early career being required by private sector clients to design houses smaller than what used to be known as 'Parker Morris' standards, the minimum standards to which all public-sector housing was then designed. Back then - as now - it seems that the 'poor relation', e.g. the public sector tenant, was actually enjoying higher standards in his or her accommodation than the private buyer.



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