

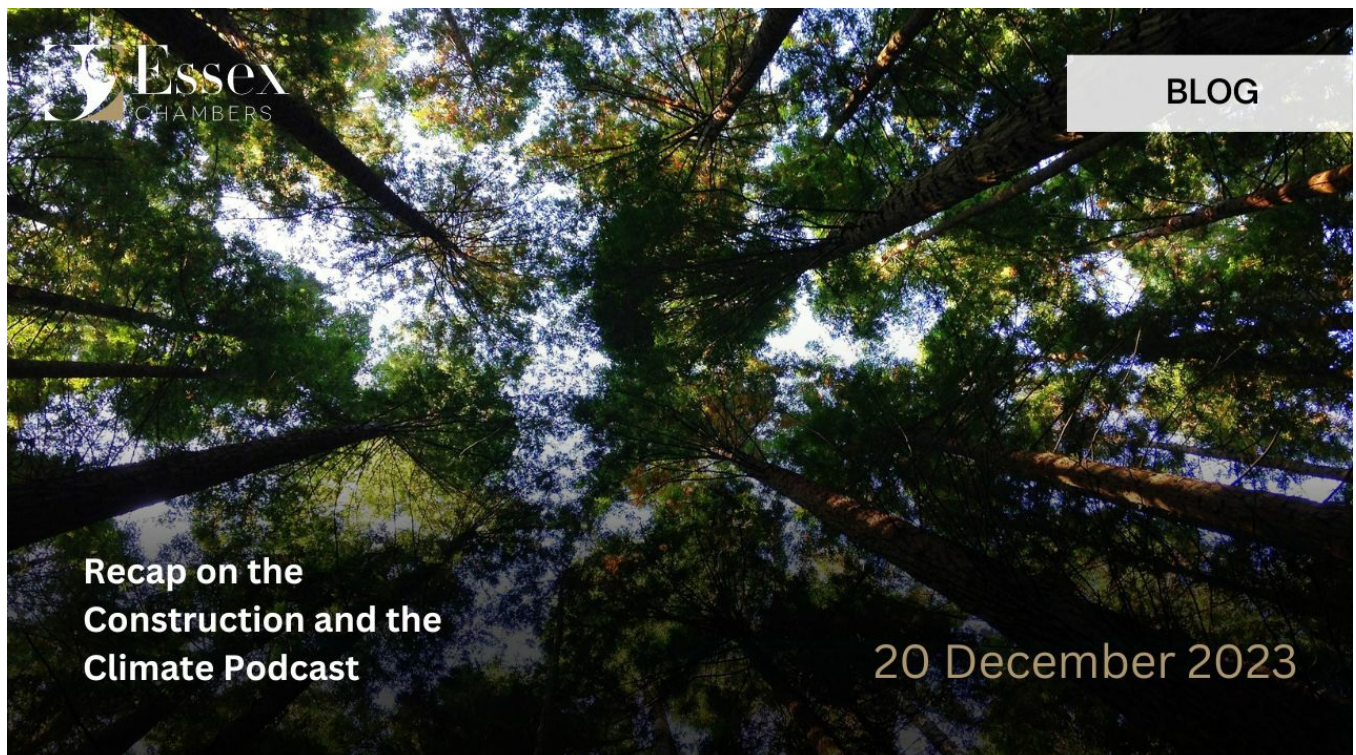
Recap on the Construction and the Climate Podcast

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Construction



In this [podcast](#), [Camilla ter Haar](#), [Ruth Keating](#) and their invited guests discuss the key climate change issues relating to the construction sector.

The built environment and construction sector accounts for 38% of global carbon emissions and it has been estimated that globally every week we build the equivalent of a city the size of Paris. The building sector is therefore well-positioned to have a significant impact on emissions reductions – future legal requirements and case law will reflect this.

This podcast focusses on what the trends in climate change related litigation, legislation and guidance mean for our construction sector clients.

In this blog post, we look back at three recent episodes.

Retrofitting and the RetroFirst Campaign

In this podcast episode, Camilla and Ruth are joined by Will Hurst, Managing Editor of [Architects' Journal](#) (AJ). Will is an award-winning journalist who has spent his career writing about architecture and the built environment. In particular, he has written extensively about the sector's contribution to the climate crisis and is currently leading the AJ's anti-demolition campaign [RetroFirst](#).

The RetroFirst campaign was launched in the wake of the 2018 Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) Report, and its "deafening wake-up call" to radically bring down carbon emissions. Will

explained that AJ considered the impact – and role – of architects, whose role includes the specification of materials, particularly in the context of the carbon intensity of the production of some materials, in particular, for example, steel and concrete.

Will discussed why the retrofitting and refurbishment of buildings is still not the default option in our current system of property development, where buildings are still ultimately disposable, and where the biggest profit often comes from densification rather than refurbishment.

The RetroFirst campaign seeks to address the policy deficit which fails to push developers and landowners towards more sustainable development.

During this episode, we learned more from Will about the demands of RetroFirst:

1. Tax: Cut the VAT rate on refurbishment, repair and maintenance from 20% to 5% or below;
2. Policy: Promote the reuse of existing building stock and reclaimed construction material by introducing new clauses into planning guidance and the building regulations; and
3. Procurement: Stimulate the circular economy and support a whole-life carbon approach in construction by insisting that all publicly funded projects look to retrofit solutions first.

How to Measure Embodied Carbon

In this episode Camilla and Ruth discuss 'How to Measure Embodied Carbon' with Sean Clemons, the UK Managing Director of [MGAC](#). Sean has a wealth of project experience both as a chartered quantity surveyor and as a project manager on the full spectrum of construction projects and specialising in major mixed-use development, higher education and complex public-private regeneration initiatives.

In this podcast episode Sean discussed embodied carbon (all the CO₂ emitted during the construction of a building, which would include the extraction of raw materials, the manufacturing and transportation of materials as well as the construction process itself). Sean explained that for many years the industry has been focussed on driving efficiency, with the aim of reducing operational carbon emissions (the CO₂ emitted during the operation – or use – of the building), but, as the industry is finding ways to improve efficiency in relation to operational carbon, the built environment sector is now looking at embodied carbon emissions across the life of the building including the end of life of the building.

It is no surprise that the industry is looking at embodied carbon as, according to [Architecture 2030](#), globally, embodied carbon is responsible for 11% of annual GHG emissions and 28% of building sector emissions. On top of this, Sean explained to us that embodied carbon is an “upfront cost” – so steps taken to reduce it has an immediate effect on our efforts to mitigate climate change.

The good news is that while there is a perceived difficulty in measuring embodied carbon (and this is still a developing area) it is possible to measure. RICS produced a second edition of its [Whole Life Carbon Assessment \(WLCA\) Standard](#) in November 2023, which will become effective from 1 July 2024, which gives guidance on this area. London is leading the way in relation to requiring the measurement of carbon: for example the GLA has produced [Whole Life-Cycle Carbon Assessments Guidance](#) and [Circular Economy Statement Guidance](#).

Sean explained that the first important step is understanding the carbon cost of different materials: suppliers have started to give Environmental Product Declarations (EPD) – documents which demonstrate the material's environmental impact. Whilst these are voluntary, they are increasingly gaining weight.

In addition to this, when measuring embodied carbon, a construction professional should look at the construction process itself, practices on site, the transportation of materials, the minimisation of waste of materials, the carbon cost of replacement of materials as well as end of life of a building. End of life considerations would include minimising carbon release by looking at reusing, repurposing or recycling a building or its elements. The additional benefit will be that by minimising waste, money is likely to be saved at the same time as well as creating an attractive sustainable story around a building.

In this episode, Ruth Keating and Camilla ter Haar are joined by [Audrey Nugent](#), Director of Global Advocacy at the World Green Building Council. Ruth, Camilla and Audrey discuss what to expect at COP28 in relation to the built environment; the Building to COP Coalition, the Global Stocktake, the Buildings Breakthrough and the Circular Built Environment Playbook.

The [Building to COP Coalition](#) is a group of sustainability focussed built environment organisations, working with the [High Level Champions](#) to put the built environment front and centre at COP, to catalyse the change needed in the sector. The built environment has an enormous impact in terms of both carbon emissions and resource extraction, so there is an opportunity here to make a difference through the industry.

This year, Audrey explained, is a pivotal year when it comes to climate, as it is the first time a [global stocktake](#) has been taken – a sense check in measuring progress (across countries and initiatives) against the goals of the [Paris Agreement](#). The message from September's [synthesis report](#) is that we are off track, however there is a role, and opportunity, for the building sector to play in closing that gap.

Audrey was looking forward to COP28 and a potential negotiated outcome with adequate recognition given to the solutions in the built environment, such as energy efficiency, whole life carbon, embodied emissions and resilience.

Audrey explained the launch of the [Buildings Breakthrough](#) as a delivery mechanism to respond to the global stocktake. The aim is to make near-zero emissions and climate resilient buildings the new normal by 2030.

Watch this space for our report on the outcomes of COP28.

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