

Construction: A Greener Future

New builds or renovation, plumbing or plastering, roofing or heating – Cornwall's construction industry has long played a huge part in our economy. Now it's ready to turn green. With the UK's green agenda at the fore, the transition to a low carbon economy means prime opportunities for construction in Cornwall.

Over the next 10 to 15 years, we want to help Cornwall's construction industry connect, collaborate, incubate and excel with access to the skills development they need, when they need it.

And our plans for building green are already taking shape.

Today's Skyline

Construction has long been one of the UK's most vital sectors. It fuels our economy, provides millions of jobs and stimulates other sectors too – literally building the foundations for growth. Home to over 280,000 businesses and a workforce of almost three million, construction UK stands solid and strong.

Construction UK: The Facts

- £90bn contribution annually to the UK economy
- 280,000 businesses
- 2.93 million workforce
- 10% of total employment

Construction Cornwall: The Facts

- 16,700 workforce
- 7% of total employment

Construction in Cornwall is just as valuable to the county, providing over 16,500 jobs across a range of specialisms. But recent years have been tough, to say the least. The recession of 2008 saw development and growth in the wider economy grind to a halt – downing tools across the construction industry that depends on it.

Despite these huge challenges, the future looks bright – full of potential and opportunity. And it looks a vibrant shade of green, too.

Legislative and policy targets to lower carbon emissions mean our homes, offices and other buildings of the future need to be efficient, sustainable and have the lowest possible impact on the environment. So the ever-increasing demand for renewable construction skills means many new opportunities for Cornwall's construction industry.



The industry has always been keen and adaptable; happy to train and upskill if there's proof that the demand is there. Exciting projects such as the St Austell and Clay Country 'Eco-Communities' – sustainable residential and commercial developments to be built – show that not only is the demand there, but also that Cornwall can lead the way in constructing a future that builds on the UK's green vision.

Laying the Foundations

To make the most of the opportunities that the move to a low carbon economy presents, we need to ensure our construction workforce has the relevant skills and know-how.

“From renewable technologies such as solar PV, micro and small-scale wind turbines to micro-combined heat and power, solar thermal and biomass boilers, we'll need to equip our workforce with specific skills.”

It starts with awareness. We'll need to promote not just the green agenda, but the opportunities it opens up for Cornwall's construction industry. We'll need to convince the industry that any investment they make – in both time and money – will be well spent. And as many of our construction businesses are sole traders and micro-business that often face financial hurdles, we'll need to make sure they understand the potential and have the appetite to invest.

Giving them the facts and communicating the opportunities clearly are vital. Making sure our construction industry knows about the many government initiatives that can help them will be key. Schemes like the Green Deal will really boost the sector – but we also need to lift any uncertainty or wariness among our construction workforce.

From renewable technologies such as solar PV, micro and small-scale wind turbines to micro-combined heat and power, solar thermal and biomass boilers, we'll need to equip our workforce with specific skills. Knowledge of these areas isn't just about installation in new buildings – energy advice and assessment to property owners and maintenance will be essential roles that need filling, too.

We also need to encourage more construction businesses to take on apprentices and trainees. Currently, 80% of employers surveyed for the Identification of Renewable Construction Skills Needs in the China Clay/St Austell Area Report (April 2013) don't employ a trainee or an apprentice – so, all too often, any renewable skills that currently exist within a business aren't passed on. But the good news is that the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) has pledged to expand adult apprenticeships by 75,000 over the next two years alone.

Spreading the word about the huge potential and exciting opportunities that renewable construction means to Cornwall should also reach beyond the industry itself. The county's colleges and universities are home to a hotbed of young talent that could help deepen the skills pool and go a long way to building a brighter and greener future for Cornwall.

The Building Blocks

Awareness. Skills. Support. Developing our construction industry depends on how we help businesses grow and to take full advantage of the opportunities the transition to a low carbon economy offers; through the people they recruit and the new skills they learn.

To make this happen, there are a number of steps we can take. These will help us to better match skills with the renewable construction's specific demands.

“A shift to a low carbon economy affects the entire construction chain, from energy technology start-ups to architects to plumbers. The industry in Cornwall needs to work together to make the most of the opportunities in the pipeline.”

The current workforce is familiar with the 'green agenda', so we need to use this term across a range of marketing and educational tools, from newsletters to websites, and promote it across the industry.

To get started, we should focus on these specific areas:

- **Strengths:** by building on Cornwall's established construction industry, we'll ensure that the move to a greener way of building will be set on firm foundations, rooted in experience and tradition.
- **Skills:** renewable construction demands specific skills. By supporting businesses to undergo relevant training and upskilling, we'll help them grow – and help Cornwall become an important part of the UK's green vision.
- **Collaboration:** by encouraging businesses to learn from each other, we'll better equip the industry across the entire construction chain – so the whole sector is ready to embrace the green agenda's challenges.

What's Next?

Cornwall's construction industry has always been key to our economy, providing year-round employment across a range of trades. But as the UK economy continues shifting towards a low carbon approach, the Cornish sector is changing, too. We want to ensure that Cornwall is part of this exciting change and that our long-established construction industry is ready to reap the rewards.

Find out more about the thinking behind this Skills Action Plan and read the full report by visiting <http://www.cornwallandislesofscillylep.com/employment-and-skills.html>