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built environment



Carbon Offsetting & Pricing Guidance FAQ Document

This document acts as a supplementary document to UKGBC's [carbon offsetting and pricing guidance](#) released in June 2023. It provides responses to frequently asked questions that are being received in relation to the guidance.

UKGBC commits to regularly revisiting and updating this document to reflect emerging research and guidance around carbon offsetting and pricing as well as adding any further questions or queries that come in related to the guidance.

If you have any outstanding questions which are not covered in this document, please contact us at ANZ@ukgbc.org.

This document is set out in the following sections:

1. Carbon offsetting in general
2. Carbon offsetting and the net zero carbon building standard
3. Carbon offsetting and whole building life cycle assessments
4. Carbon offsetting and embodied carbon

Please note, the content of this FAQ document was current at the time of publication. Given the evolving nature of the carbon offsetting and pricing field some information may have since been superseded.

Carbon offsetting in general:

- 1. What would be the appropriate decarbonisation level that is aligned with 1.5C for a building? For organisations it's 90% according to the SBTi, but not sure how feasible it is for a building.**

CRREM provides science-based pathways for operational carbon and energy use intensity. Science-based embodied carbon and operational energy use intensity limits are being developed by the UK Net Zero Carbon Buildings Standard, specifically for the UK market. In the absence of science-based embodied carbon limits, best practice targets – such as those in the LETI Climate Emergency Design Guide and RIBA 2030 Climate Challenge – should be used.

- 2. If we know that short-lived carbon avoidance offsets are scientifically flawed in an approach to net zero, why would we still choose them? Are we not better off signalling to the market the need for better solutions?**

Long term solutions are not yet ready at scale, so the short-term options are important for accelerating the transition while the long-term solutions become ready.

- 3. Does UKGBC recommend companies already be buying carbon offsets from now until the target year or on the target year (e.g. 2040 if the target is NZC by 2040)?**

Effective decarbonisation is not just about achieving an end point target, but reducing emissions along a pathway that is aligned with a 1.5°C global warming scenario. I.e., cumulative emissions that are within a science-based carbon budget. Offsetting should not be used to achieve decarbonisation in line with that science-based pathway, but used to offset residual emissions to achieve net zero provided that pathway is already being met prior to any offsetting.

- 4. How can an organisations use offsetting before maximising its carbon reduction?**

Emissions reductions on site should be maximised, achieving a level in line with a science-based decarbonisation pathway as a minimum, prior to offsetting.

- 5. Should we wait until we know our residual emissions before offsetting?**

Offsetting can occur prior to confirmation of residual emissions, based on the best estimate for residual emissions available at the time. These are good arguments that investing in offsetting as early as possible is preferable. When residual emissions are confirmed, any deficit should be offset to achieve net zero.

Carbon offsetting and the net zero carbon building standard:

6. Do you see this guidance being used to support the work being done on the UK Net Zero Buildings Standard?

Yes, but the role of offsets within the Standard is still being discussed.

Carbon offsetting and Whole Building Life Cycle Assessment:

7. Given the fact that WLCA assessments at design stage can be very basic, based on generic EPD data or no EPD data at all (especially for M&E), isn't there a risk that avoidance offsetting would be based on carbon emission savings that may not exist?

Offsets should typically be done from the as-built assessments rather than design stage modelling. However, if an organisation wants to invest in offsets at design stage, this is acceptable, provided an as built LCA is conducted and any deficit between the offsets procured and the calculated residual emissions is mitigated by procuring further offsets.

Carbon offsetting and embodied carbon:

8. Is there a minimum disclosure template? p27-28 is a long list of questions, what is the minimum that should be disclosed to ensure consistency and robustness.

The UKGBC Net Zero Carbon Buildings Framework offsets should be disclosed in the minimum reporting templates found here <https://ukgbc.org/verifying-net-zero-buildings/> The type, cost, and registry link should be publicly available to verify the claim.