# Brothers warn many new UK homes are unsustainable despite renewable tech



Two brothers and co-founders of a home development company in Britain have raised concerns about the sustainability of many newly built homes, arguing that a significant number are "unsustainable" even before being inhabited. Damien and Michael Wynne, who established Q New Homes, highlighted the reliance on materials such as concrete and steel in contemporary construction, describing these as major contributors to carbon emissions.

Speaking to This is Money, the Wynne brothers emphasised that many new houses, despite being equipped with renewable technologies like air-source heat pumps and solar panels, often fall short where fundamental energy efficiency and insulation are concerned. "Too many new homes are being fitted with renewable tech—like air-source heat pumps and solar panels—without getting the basics right first," they remarked. This, they noted, results in future residents believing they have made environmentally conscious choices without seeing meaningful reductions in their energy bills.

The brothers critiqued the prevalent "volume over values" approach in housebuilding, which they said prioritises cheap materials, provides minimal insulation, and lacks consideration for long-term sustainability. Specifically, they pointed to the use of steel and concrete as significant carbon offenders, combined with plastics and synthetics that are cheap and difficult to recycle, creating homes that are unsustainable from the outset.

As a counterpoint, Damien and Michael Wynne cited their latest development, Hartdene Barns in Kent, which they claim is "15 years ahead of what current building regulations require in terms of energy efficiency, insulation and sustainability." The project consists of nine homes constructed largely with structural insulated panels and glulam beams instead of steel, alongside low-carbon concrete. The panels are hermetically sealed to enhance heat retention and reportedly emit 40% less carbon compared to conventional materials.

The homes at Hartdene Barns feature underfloor heating powered by air-source heat pumps, replacing traditional gas boilers, and are fitted with up to 32 solar panels each. Q New Homes asserts that these innovations will provide sufficient power to heat and light the houses "for free virtually all year round," meaning residents will avoid electricity bills, paying only for water and broadband. The development also includes communal no-dig allotments, enabling residents to cultivate their own produce with zero food miles.

Located near Cowden—a historic village situated close to Kent, East Sussex, and Surrey—the Hartdene Barns development was built with an emphasis on long-term comfort, reduced running costs, and lasting environmental benefit. The Wynne brothers stressed that every material in a typical home can be replaced with carbon-neutral alternatives, citing even concrete as having sustainable substitutes.

"Hartdene Barns is net-zero by design—not just in energy use, but in how we source materials, reduce waste, and plan for the future," the brothers said. "It’s proof that when sustainability is the starting point, not an afterthought, we can build homes that work for families and the planet." They further commented: "It’s time to stop building homes that become problems the minute people move in—too cold, too costly, too wasteful. Greener homes are simply better homes."

Prices at Hartdene Barns start at £1.25 million for a three-bedroom terraced house and rise to £2.5 million for a four-bedroom link-detached barn. The homes align with the targets of the Royal Institute of British Architects’ Climate Challenge.

In the broader political context, the UK government under Energy Secretary Ed Miliband has reaffirmed its commitment to achieving net zero carbon emissions by 2050, with Labour aiming to build 1.5 million new homes by the end of the current parliament. Miliband recently announced plans to strengthen environmental policies, including proposals to increase electricity charges in southern regions—a move critics have flagged as potentially creating a “postcode lottery.”

Labour’s green agenda also includes requirements for landlords to ensure all privately rented homes achieve a minimum Energy Performance Certificate rating of C by 2030, up from the current E rating mandate. This measure is expected, according to Labour, to reduce tenants’ energy bills by approximately £240 annually while improving rental housing quality.

The Wynne brothers’ development is an example of the practical implementation of ambitious ecological construction principles, illustrating potential pathways towards more sustainable housing stock in the UK. Their critique and innovations reflect ongoing debates within the construction and environmental sectors regarding the best approaches to meeting the nation’s carbon reduction targets while providing quality homes.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.qnewhomes.co.uk/ribas-climate-challenge/> - Details Q New Homes' Hartdene Barns development meeting RIBA Climate Challenge 2025 standards for embodied carbon, operational energy, and water consumption, corroborating claims about net-zero design and advanced sustainability practices.
2. <https://www.qnewhomes.co.uk> - Supports the description of Q New Homes' focus on sustainability, natural materials, and future-proof designs, aligning with the brothers' critique of conventional construction methods and their emphasis on long-term environmental benefits.
3. <https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2025-04-07/debates/2AA3CD2F-F792-4A42-93C7-035959CDC4F3/NewHomesSustainability> - Documents UK government commitments to sustainable housing, including plans to amend building regulations for energy efficiency, which contextualizes the policy environment referenced in the article.
4. <https://www.buildpass.co.uk/blog/new-build-vs-re-use-whats-better-environmentally/> - Corroborates the broader critique of new-build sustainability by highlighting the environmental drawbacks of conventional construction materials and processes compared to refurbishments.
5. [https://www.birmingham.ac.uk/research/climate/climate-publications/built-environment/the-green-belt-sustainability-and-england's-housing-crisis](https://www.birmingham.ac.uk/research/climate/climate-publications/built-environment/the-green-belt-sustainability-and-england%27s-housing-crisis) - Reinforces the article's discussion of sustainability challenges in UK housing, particularly the tension between development needs and environmental goals.
6. <https://www.qnewhomes.co.uk/ribas-climate-challenge/> - Further supports claims about Hartdene Barns' use of structural insulated panels, glulam beams, and solar panels to achieve near-zero running costs, as described in the article.
7. <https://news.google.com/rss/articles/CBMiggJBVV95cUxPTEZYanlSRU1uT1o0Q2s2UzY2ZTlFNzNoQ1hvSDF4dF9YbUwyam4zZ04wVnozUEc4a00yZmRCY1EyeTMyWERldi1ZanJMaHE1a04zR3gzZUl4M0xqZEhEWTkteS0zZjYzTjZrNnRHOGRFaUJKMzBHZU12ZXA1bTRRWmlqV282R2xFTVR4RDNFTWlMNGlFOGFEbGJaUENFdDBkcVhFRUpzd1hIT1BPdkw0ZHRjbHUyUlNOUkxYWTZsNUpLWXlqNmhjNmlqc3c4aUFtTExHSzVTNE9GTDJ6RjJCd2ZmU21kRXBEU29xcXllOE1BcUczTnV5VnJwcHd1aWlIT0HSAc8BQVVfeXFMTUtzdUxlRE96RExDb1plQ2VfV0Y5ZXJXR1ZrMUFRRENWSTlWRU1oaUZVT2Y1RW9ZcWk5MU41ZFBBZHNvczNWRm1uQTlpNlhvQjBlLTdNNVRBOGtBR1daWXFBZTh0dUtqWFdOX0lzc2pSTjVxSzJ2dXpMcUtXZWxUS2EyeDVKd0o5MlNnZkp0YTNUQURKc0xRbm9jeEhIdzNZV1Jyc3hycjNjUmpoVUZLdnc1eTN6dlVSQzJrakozejdub0wtZDVJaGJ0azZmaFR3?oc=5&hl=en-US&gl=US&ceid=US:en> - Please view link - unable to able to access data