# Emphasising sustainable practices in the Ministry of Defence



Emma Fitzgerald, the UK and Ireland defence director at AECOM, is emphasising the importance of integrating sustainability into the operations of the Ministry of Defence (MOD) as a means to boost resilience and ensure long-term growth within the sector. As the pressures of decarbonisation increase, she asserts that the defence estate presents a significant opportunity for the MOD to not only reduce its carbon footprint but also to create a competitive advantage in the process.

Fitzgerald, speaking to UK Construction Online, outlined the MOD's 'Adapt to win' mantra as a guiding principle that can be applied to its real estate holdings. This perspective highlights the dual threats that the world faces today—geopolitical conflict and climate change—and underscores the need for the defence sector to contribute to the UK's ambitious net zero target. The government has made its intentions clear, setting a goal to reduce carbon emissions by 81% by 2035, a focus that the defence estate, which accounts for half of the central government's carbon emissions and 1% of the UK's total emissions, will inevitably have to confront.

Historically, investment in reducing carbon emissions has been a secondary focus for the MOD, often overshadowed by field success. However, Fitzgerald advocates for a shift in viewpoint, suggesting that sustainability should be considered as a key ally. Implementing measures for decarbonisation, waste management, and materials recycling can lead to a variety of advantages, including cost reductions and enhanced long-term energy security.

The Defence Estate Optimisation Portfolio, established by the Defence Infrastructure Organisation, aims to modernise and enhance the sustainability of the defence estate, with a budget of £5.1 billion allocated for 2023 to facilitate the transition towards a low-carbon infrastructure. AECOM has been designated as a Regional Technical Service Provider for Scotland and the North of England, offering technical oversight for design and construction at various MOD sites.

One notable example of sustainable practice in the defence sector is RAF Marham in Norfolk, which has nearly transitioned to operating on green electricity. The base produces 95% of its energy from a biogas plant that processes locally sourced crops, resulting in annual savings of approximately £300,000 for the MOD and a significant decrease of 14,000 tonnes in carbon emissions each year. AECOM played a pivotal role in the design of the airfield's regeneration, aligning it with sustainability goals by ensuring that 100% of excavated materials were recycled, as recognised by the BREEAM Outstanding rating.

Moreover, Fitzgerald highlights the potential of heat networks, which transport waste heat from manufacturing facilities to barracks and other buildings. The incorporation of renewable energy solutions such as solar panels, wind turbines, and heat pumps across military estates is also noted for enhancing energy efficiency and security.

The scope for sustainability extends beyond core military operations, with Fitzgerald pointing out the integration of health services, exemplified by the Catterick Integrated Care Centre. This comprehensive healthcare facility, supported by both the MOD and NHS, will be constructed to high sustainability standards, featuring solar panels and energy-efficient systems.

Through a structured approach to sustainability within both military and auxiliary operations, Fitzgerald argues that the MOD and its contractors can not only meet the UK's climate targets but also experience operational efficiencies. By securing long-term energy independence and reducing operational costs, this commitment to sustainability positions the defence sector favourably in the context of climate change while enabling reallocation of resources for vital defence needs. The outcome is anticipated to be a strategic advantage for the MOD in its ongoing operations and future initiatives.

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

## References

* <https://www.wherewomenwork.com/Career/5160/AECOM-Client-Account-Manager-Emma-Fitzgerald-defence> - Provides background on Emma Fitzgerald, her role at AECOM, and her involvement in the defence sector, including her focus on sustainability and client needs.
* <https://www.defenceonline.co.uk/2024/06/28/the-lived-experience-in-2030-and-beyond-ensuring-life-on-base-supports-recruitment-and-retention-in-the-armed-forces/> - Discusses Emma Fitzgerald's views on sustainability in the defence sector, the importance of the lived experience for service personnel, and the integration of sustainable practices.
* <https://www.defenceonline.co.uk/2024/12/20/homeland-dasa-links-innovators-to-defence-and-security-investors/> - Mentions the Defence and Security Accelerator (DASA) and innovation in the defence sector, which aligns with the broader context of modernizing and sustaining the defence estate.
* <https://www.defenceonline.co.uk/2024/12/19/homeland-defence-secretary-launches-new-strategy-to-boost-uk-jobs-and-growth/> - Details the Defence Secretary's strategy to boost UK jobs and growth, which includes aspects of sustainability and modernization in the defence sector.
* <https://www.defenceonline.co.uk/2025/01/06/how-boosting-sustainability-bolsters-resilience-and-creates-a-competitive-advantage/> - Explains how making sustainable changes to the defence sector estate can boost resilience and create a competitive advantage, as discussed by Emma Fitzgerald.
* <https://www.wherewomenwork.com/Career/5160/AECOM-Client-Account-Manager-Emma-Fitzgerald-defence> - Highlights AECOM's involvement in various defence projects, including the regeneration of RAF Marham, which aligns with sustainability goals.
* <https://www.defenceonline.co.uk/> - Provides a general context of the defence sector's initiatives and innovations, including those related to sustainability and infrastructure modernization.
* <https://www.defenceonline.co.uk/2024/06/28/the-lived-experience-in-2030-and-beyond-ensuring-life-on-base-supports-recruitment-and-retention-in-the-armed-forces/> - Discusses the integration of health services and sustainable practices in military estates, such as the Catterick Integrated Care Centre.
* <https://www.wherewomenwork.com/Career/5160/AECOM-Client-Account-Manager-Emma-Fitzgerald-defence> - Mentions AECOM's role in the Defence Estate Optimisation Portfolio and their technical oversight for design and construction at MOD sites.
* <https://www.defenceonline.co.uk/2025/01/06/how-boosting-sustainability-bolsters-resilience-and-creates-a-competitive-advantage/> - Details the potential of heat networks and renewable energy solutions in enhancing energy efficiency and security within the defence sector.