10 Tips for Building Retrofits

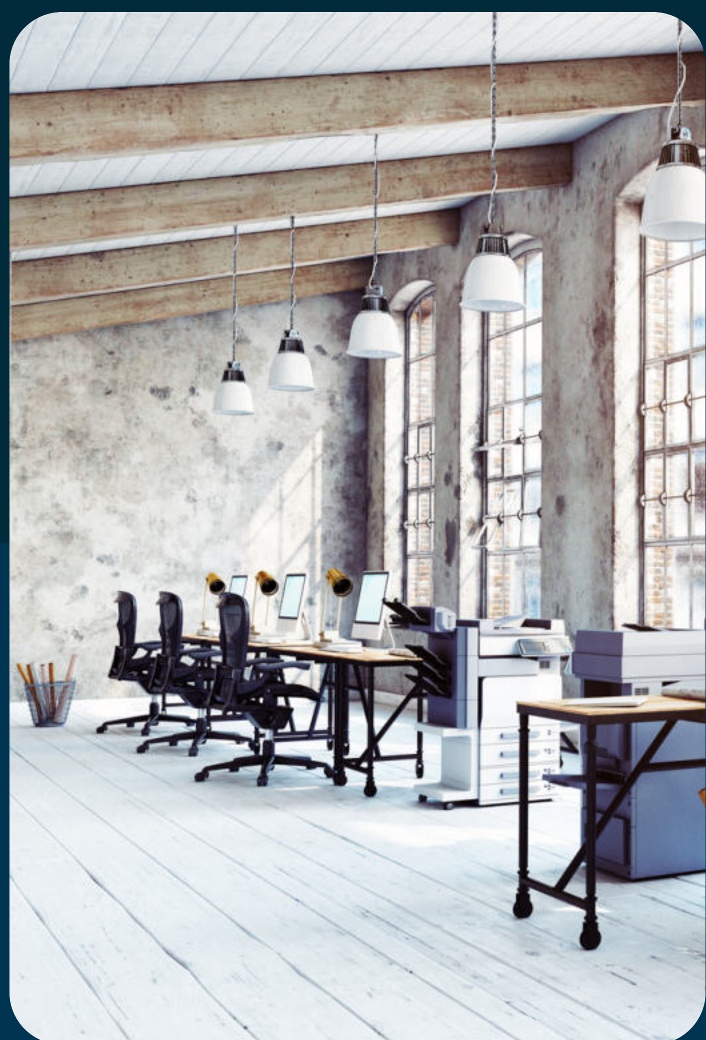
A joint guide by Eight Versa & Building Atlas

Introduction

The UK retrofits roughly 1–1.5% of its commercial building stock each year. To meet net zero targets, that rate needs to more than double. With stranded asset risk rising and retrofit costs increasing, the window for cost-effective action is narrowing. This guide combines Building Atlas's data-driven modelling capability with Eight Versa's 18 years of energy consultancy for the built environment. Ten evidence-based tips to help you prioritise intelligently and maximise your return on retrofit investment.

Redirect investment to your ‘boring’ buildings

The greatest retrofit ROI isn’t in flagship assets, it’s in the long tail of suburban offices, retail parks and regional warehouses. These overlooked buildings typically offer superior financial and carbon returns per pound spent, precisely because they’ve had less attention to date. Prioritise the portfolio, not the profile.

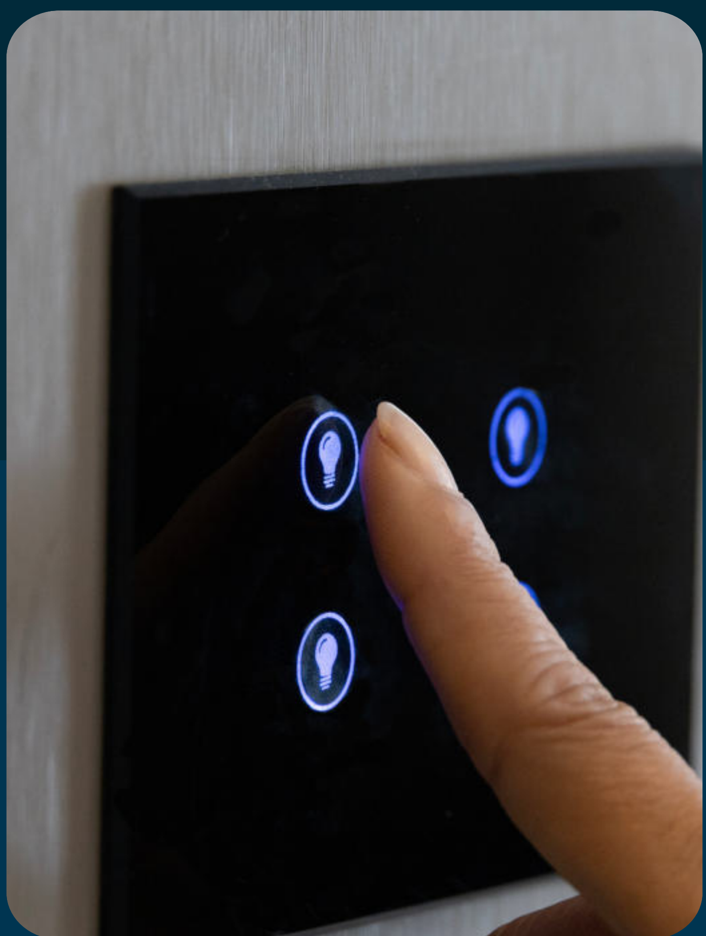


Factor in the brown discount

Buildings rated EPC D or below face measurable value erosion, with industry estimates suggesting a 10–20% discount compared to higher-rated equivalents. When you model retrofit ROI, energy savings alone understate the case. The avoided brown discount, the value you protect by improving the rating, should be part of every investment appraisal.

Act now as retrofit costs are rising

Building costs are forecast to rise around 15% by 2030 (BCIS, October 2025), driven by skilled labour shortages and material price inflation. Every year of delay means higher delivery costs against a backdrop of tightening regulatory requirements. The financial case for early action is straightforward: today's prices are the cheapest you'll get.



Don’t treat quick wins as a retrofit project

LED lighting, smart thermostats, pipe insulation, intelligent controls, these aren’t retrofit measures. They’re facilities management. They typically deliver 20–40% energy savings with 2–5 year paybacks, and most can be installed tomorrow without a business case, a modelling exercise or a board paper. If your organisation is waiting for a strategic retrofit programme before replacing T8 fluorescents, you’re burning money while you plan. Make Tier 1 upgrades standard operational practice, not a line item in a capital programme.

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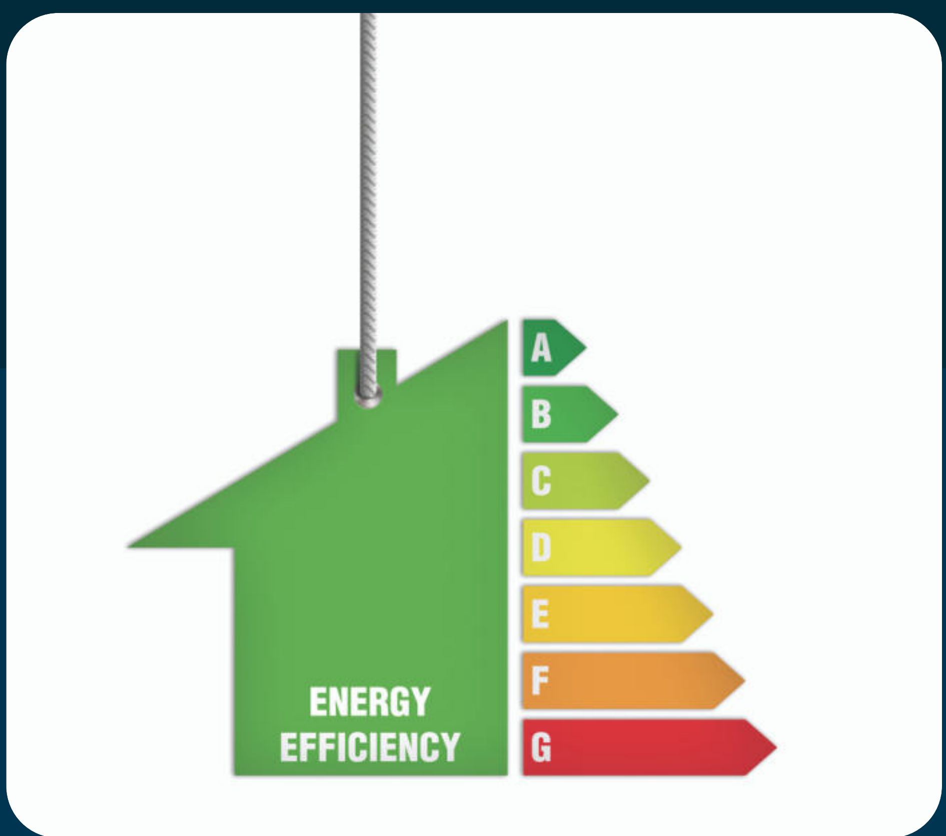
Know your data before you trust your model

Every portfolio has data gaps; missing floor areas, estimated energy consumption, outdated EPCs. The critical step most analysis skips is quantifying where the data are strong and where they're weak. A model that tells you "retrofit this building" without flagging that the recommendation rests on estimated rather than metered energy data isn't decision-ready. Confidence indicators alongside recommendations are essential.



Treat buildings as attributes, not archetypes

Same EPC rating, different actual energy use. Same building type, different fuel mix, glazing and orientation. A one-size-fits-all retrofit strategy based on building archetypes leads to underperformance, over-engineering and wasted capital. Every building needs its own analysis, grounded in its specific physical characteristics and operational context.

Think portfolio, not building-by-building

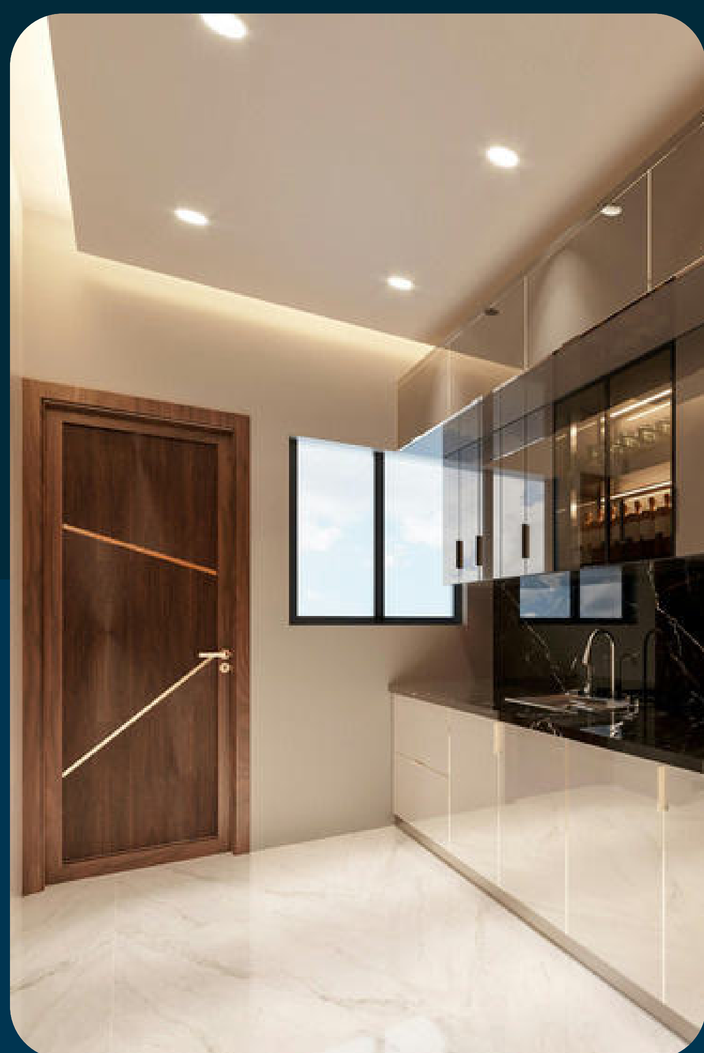
Forty-five targeted interventions spread across a portfolio can match the carbon savings of a single flagship deep retrofit, with payback periods of 1–2 years rather than 8–15. Compounding small wins across many assets is where the real climate and financial impact lies. Don't extrapolate from a handful of surveys; heat pumps need electrical capacity, conservation areas restrict façade changes, and without building-level data you risk specifying the wrong measure in the wrong place.

Weigh embodied carbon before you commit

Every retrofit intervention carries an embodied carbon cost i.e. the emissions associated with manufacturing, transporting and installing new materials and systems. In some cases, particularly marginal upgrades to already-reasonable buildings, the embodied carbon can outweigh the operational savings over the modelling period. A simple payback comparison; years of operational carbon saving needed to offset the embodied cost, should inform every prioritisation decision. Sometimes the right answer is “not yet”, and sometimes “not at all”.

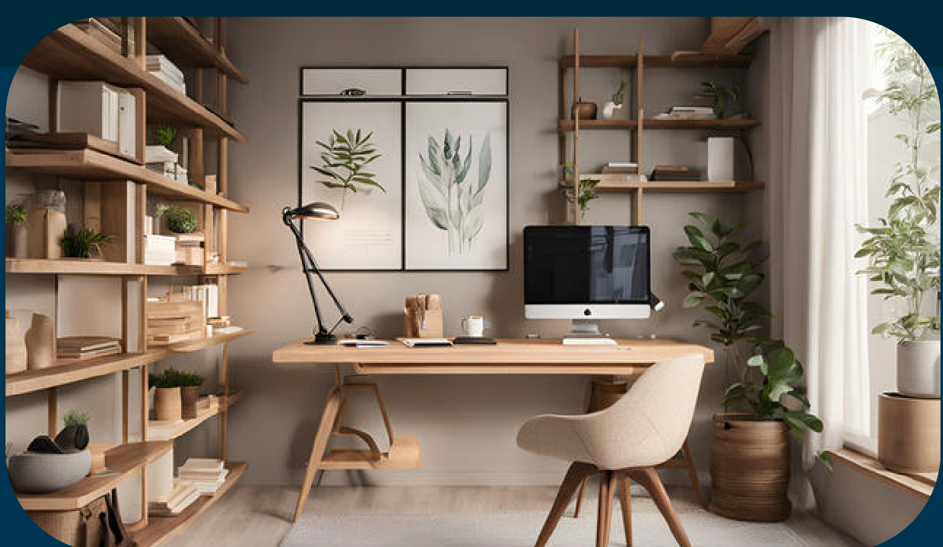
Retrofit while occupied: don’t wait for vacancies

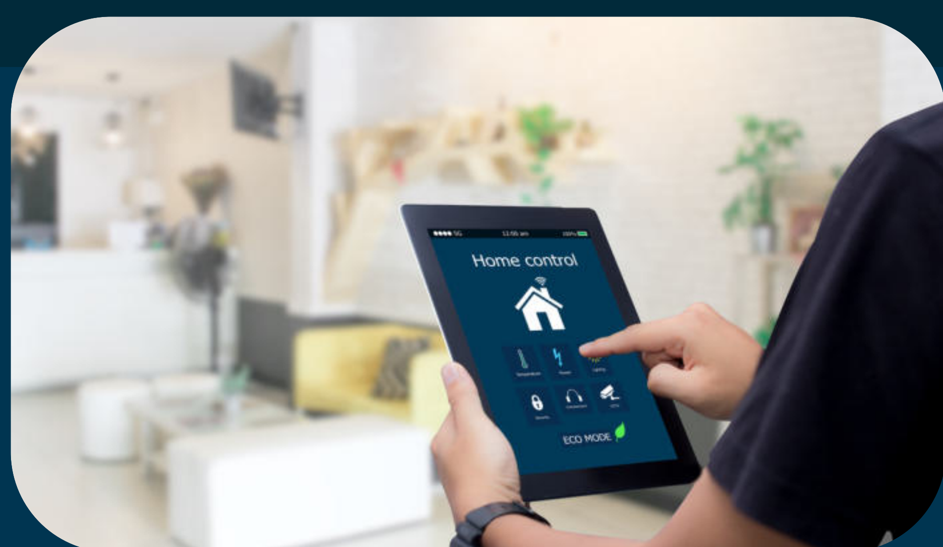
Many Tier 1 interventions such as smart thermostats, lighting upgrades, BMS optimisation, can be installed without disrupting tenants. Non-invasive measures start compounding savings from day one. Waiting for vacant possession costs years of potential savings and delays your trajectory toward compliance targets.



Use data and AI to prioritise, then validate the outputs

AI-driven energy models can process hundreds of building attributes to predict the right measures, energy savings, carbon impact and payback periods for every asset in a portfolio. That analytical power is transformative at scale. But a model is only as good as its assumptions. The outputs need to be validated against real-world delivery constraints, client priorities and sector-specific technical knowledge before they become recommendations. Technology sets the direction; consultancy makes it implementable.





Retrofit decisions shouldn’t be guesswork.

Building Atlas models the opportunities across your portfolio.

Eight Versa turns that insight into practical retrofit strategies that can actually be delivered.

The real question isn't whether to retrofit.
It's where to start.

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