SUSTAINABILITY FORUM



GREENER HOMES FOR BIRMINGHAM

A Sustainability Forum on Greener Homes for Birmingham was held in the Council House on 27 June 2013. The Forum was attended by approximately 70 people and there were presentations from:

- Chris Hall, Birmingham Energy Savers & Carillion retrofitting Birmingham's buildings:
- Clive Skidmore, Birmingham Municipal Housing Trust (BMHT) building homes to code level 4:
- Rob Annable, Axis Design working with BMHT and interest in passivhaus approach, what are barriers & opportunities to building zero carbon homes;
- David Mason, Skanska construction company working with BMHT. Building to Level 6 – what are barriers & is it expensive;
- John Christophers, Zero Carbon House extreme zero carbon home & ideas how people can achieve this?

The presentations are available to view at:

http://www.birmingham.gov.uk/sustainability/forum

Following presentations and a question and answer session there was a 45 minute workshop for attendees to discuss the barriers and opportunities facing retrofit and new developments to be more sustainable and energy efficient. The notes from these workshops are below. The views expressed are the independent contributions of attendees to the Forum and not specifically those of Birmingham City Council.

BARRIERS

Retrofit

Practical and Technical Problems

- Loss of internal space, internal upheaval & redecoration
- Difficulty when neighbours do not want external wall insulation
- Risk of damage to property e.g. poor ventilation leading to mould/damp
- Danger of too much insulation & water tanks
- Roof wrong aspect for PV or solar thermal
- Planning permission conservation areas
- Ongoing maintenance, confidence
- Possibility of overheating properties with too much insulation

Attitudes

- Hassle more than apathy, more to do with being scared/understanding
- Perception of hassle internal upheaval & redecoration, clearing lofts to install insulation
- Poor information about financing/cashback perceptions on the market
- Education how do people access funding?

Ownership/Landlords

- Landlord's attitude towards retrofit private sector landlords don't want to spend capital and social landlords don't have the money
- Leaseholders are restricted as to what they can do to their property
- Live-in tenants
- Owner attitudes consideration of long-term risk

Green Deal

- Low take up of Green Deal
- Expectation of a "free scheme" need clarity of terms
- Availability of financial help to people on low incomes
- For some people the rate of interest on Green Deal is too high an element or risk on bad debt. Failing credit rating is barrier for some
- Too complicated poor information about financing/cashback need to educate people about how to access funding and understand the schemes
- Payback too long for older people
- Lack of Sharia compliant finance in Green Deal
- Uncertainty over what happens if owners move house before measures paid off

BE<u>S</u>

- BES not with right skills and advice go early finance left BES unprepared
- BES staff not trained customer service inadequate
- Depends on expertise of assessor
- Quality of assessment re. solar PV roof orientation

Builders/tradesmen

- Lack of access & knowledge for the building industry
- Training of existing tradesmen poor standards in places.
- Lack of understanding of inter-relationship of products

New Development

Financial

- Capital costs for developers
- Government grants for housing development decreasing by 25%
- Capital cost versus lifetime cost equation
- Difficult for individuals to fund
- Business model upfront investments & contracting and sub-contracting
- Government grants/funding/finance

- Longbridge E.ON will invest only if Code Level 4
- Political issue maximise uptake for eco funding

Building

- Land availability not impinging on green field development
- Feasibility of Code 6 need to be reasonable
- How do we incentivise the private sector to build in eco measures they have no long-term stake in performance
- Conflict with demand for housing
- Wider impact of having to build new roads and infrastructure
- Lack of adequate understanding by owners/renters of the way the property works and should be used to maximise the potential of features
- Maintenance of the technology involved.
- Review of building standards
- Skills on new build
- Need to make eco work on its own
- Terminology deters take up
- No viability: in/out culture, greedy landowners
- How do we incentivise the private sector to build in eco measures up front and charge more for the house – and ensure the buyer understands their property will be more efficient so have more disposable income to pay off mortgage rather than bills?

OPPORTUNITIES & SOLUTIONS

Retrofit

Positive Social Impacts

- Positive behavioural change with more efficient properties
- Publicise loft clearance help new jobs
- Vacant housing should be retrofitted and improved then sold on or let to rejuvenate local areas
- Neighbourhood plans people having a say
- Independence & autonomy local decision making

Economic Opportunities – jobs, save money etc.

- Economy of scale across properties
- Job creation with a higher installation rate
- Education of the population in energy efficiency and how to save money
- Avoid increasing energy costs by retrofitting now

Legislation

- 2016 reasonable retrofit measures
- 2018 letting limitations on inefficient properties for landlords to take action

 BES – existing brand/reassurance needed – should build on any success and sell the benefits

Ideas for solutions

- Calthorpe & Bournville estates to become involved
- Continual assessment & monitoring/audit & inspection
- Improvement of tradesmen's skills, existing workforce and new entrants
- Dispelling the myths
- Construction supplier awareness
- Education leaflets on damp proofing and dispel scare stories
- Homeowners need to understand real benefits catered towards Victorian properties or relevant property
- Skills re. quality of assessment. Continual assessment and monitoring. Action taken to rectify. Audit inspection
- Training by manufacturers
- Standards of specification and monitoring
- Whole street approach to retrofitting linked with planning permission. What are the priorities? Early engagement with planners
- ECO available to Carillion. Green Deal assessment eco package
- Coventry model link to private tenancy unit to take enforcement for disrepair

Financial solutions

- Energy saving co-op
- More transparency on opportunities for other/all funding mechanisms
- Free? No loans, rewards for good behaviour
- Attractive rewards
- Eco funding? Tax rebate
- Grants
- Supply model: community engagement strategy ownership
- Carbon savings at cheapest rate possible
- Energy suppliers be taxed

New Development

Legislation

- SPD for legislation on build quality
- District CHP Local policy required
- Quicker planning approval for higher standards. Lower 106 requirement if possible.
- Council take percentage of lets on high standard developments reducing development risk?)
- Coherent policies from government
- Social policy issues around housing
- Planning condition 10% renewables

Education

- Education of the population in energy efficiency
- Improvement of tradesmen's skills, existing workforce and new entrants

Ideas for Solutions

- Community Land Trusts
- Different ownership models
- Facilitating long-term thinking
- Pride in area
- Co-housing/self-build Redditch Co-op Homes
- Maintenance responsibility fee (modest)
- Knowledge management in council's and developments
- Soft infrastructures first
- Whole life costs considering energy bills, health etc.
- Local authorities to designate land to self-build communities
- Redevelopment land although a cost. LA to designate derelict land for selfbuild
- Consideration of lifetime costs for customers
- Clean, added value (quality hallmark)
- Mobility older people moving to smaller houses
- How does eco sit with different family sizes?
- Top priorities mixed use
- Access to information e.g. radio and billboards for people who do not read/advertising campaigns
- Changing the curriculum in the colleges
- Constantly changing legislation and regulation

<u>Transformational Regeneration</u>

- Make better use of space by having 3 or 4 storey houses enable more space for families
- Building on existing heating schemes
- Minimum housing standards code
- City council unlocking land bank