

Tel :07528 493181

Info@strettonclimatecare.org.uk

www.strettonclimatecare.org.uk

Charity No. 1159816

Energy Advice Drop In
The Wellbeing Centre
Church Stretton
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Simple guide to retro fitting our homes to make them zero carbon.

The majority of British homes were built before much thought was given to energy efficiency, heating costs or carbon emissions. Many of them will still be standing in 2050 when the Government's target for Net Zero Carbon is reached. There is therefore a need for our homes to be made more energy efficient, warmer, cheaper to heat and responsible for fewer carbon emissions in less than 30 years:

“Our homes use 25% of all the energy in the UK and emit 20% of the carbon dioxide emissions. If the UK Government is to deliver its targets of a 68% emissions reduction by 2030, and net zero by 2050, household emissions need to be addressed urgently. The UK has some 28 million homes, the vast majority of which need improving by having retrofit work carried out. A national retrofit strategy will also improve the UK's energy security. Retrofit should be carried out alongside all other improvements.” (Construction Leadership Council Scotland.)

An uninsulated property can lose a great deal of heat up to the following %s: roof 25%, walls 35%, Floor 15%, external doors and drafts 15%, windows 10%.

Retro fit can be carried out during routine maintenance and repairs but rather than undertaking tasks piecemeal, consider if it is possible to use them as steps in an integrated and long-term plan to improve insulation and energy efficiency.

A full retrofit can be expensive and disruptive but is necessary if carbon emissions reduction targets are to be met. The best time to consider this work is before an existing property is moved into but this is not always possible and retro fit may need to be done room by room. The starting point is for an EPC survey (Energy Performance Certificate) to be undertaken. This will superficially look at construction, existing levels of insulation, lighting and heating efficiency and give an efficiency rating A = very good, G = very poor. This survey will also provide some basic recommendations as to the improvements that can be made but in many cases a specialist survey is advised. The average EPC is currently D. The Government Future Fit Building Standards is likely to see existing homes subject to higher standards and new homes expected to produce 75—80% lower carbon emissions by 2025. From April 2020 all rented property requires a minimum EPC of E, though there are some exceptions.

At this point some notes of caution are added. A plan of the programme of work is needed and although some of the above measures can be relatively straightforward to install, done incorrectly without specialist knowledge they can become the cause of future problems.

- The fabric of older properties needs to breathe to prevent the build-up of moist air (condensation) inside. Making them airtight and warmer without proper ventilation could be a recipe for disaster.
- The sloping ceilings of rooms in roof spaces will need special attention to ensure there is an air flow between the upper side of the ceiling and the underside of the roof so it is usually necessary to add insulation on the inside of the ceiling.
- Suspended timber and uninsulated concrete floors are a source of considerable heat loss and need specialist attention.
- Older properties may have solid walls. Though it is less disruptive to insulate these externally, the materials used must be breathable and done in such a way that cold spots are not created and rainwater discharge from the roof is still effective. “Whenever you fit solid wall insulation to a building you need to take account of water vapour to make sure that you don’t create new damp problems in the future. This may involve using “breathable” insulation materials that will allow the vapour to carry on permeating the walls, or it could involve creating a continuous vapour barrier to make sure no vapour can get into the walls from the inside. You will need an experienced specialist installer to develop a moisture control strategy that is specific to your building.” *Energy Saving Trust*
- If considering external insulation, planning permission may be required so the advice is check with your local planning authority.

To be efficient, heat pump heating systems run at a lower temperature than traditional oil or gas boilers so should not be installed until the property is well insulated to an EPC rating of ideally C or above. *NB ‘High Heat’ heat pumps are increasingly available where improving poor insulation is not possible.* Heat pump systems work best with underfloor heating though oversizing radiators may be a solution. See SCC Information sheet No. 27. From 2022 – 2028, the Boiler Upgrade Scheme is offering grants of £7,500 to replace carbon based heating systems with a Heat Pump. See Information sheet No 35.

Unfilled cavity walls should have the cavity professionally inspected to ensure the cavity is not too narrow (less than 50mm) and is clear of debris which can cause a moisture bridge. The outer wall should not be prone to rain penetration and any loose render repaired first.

When modern energy efficient and draft free glazing is installed, unless you are installing a mechanical heat recovery system, sufficient trickle vents should be added to encourage some air flow. Care taken to ensure as new windows they are fitted there are no gaps in cavity wall insulation around the revealed openings. Any gaps will cause cold spots and a cause of possible condensation.

New properties should be built to high insulation standards but to date will generally not be of zero carbon or Passive House standard.* Such properties need to be very well insulated, air tight and with professionally installed mechanical heat recovery and ventilation systems. Such homes need minimal heating in winter but may become over heated by thermal gain in summer without some form of shading.

When retro fitting an older property to PAS 2035 and Passive House standards* it is strongly recommended that specialist advice is sought in order that each stage of the work done compliments each other. Not all architects are retro fit knowledgeable, not all builders have the necessary training, not all heating installers understand the challenges of older properties and not all building material suppliers carry the appropriate stock.

In older properties materials were sometimes used which today are considered hazardous (eg asbestos, lead and lead paint etc). Architects are unlikely to take responsibility should such materials be present and the property owner should exercise caution. An example of this is when removing certain makes of clay floor tiles which may be found to contain asbestos.

** The 5 Passive House principles: thermal bridge free design, superior windows, ventilation with heat recovery, quality insulation and airtight construction. (Passive House Institute).*

When retro fitting an existing property, the following areas should be considered:

Loft insulation, wall insulation (if solid either internal or external) cavity wall insulation, existing ground floors insulation (solid / suspended), windows, ventilation and internal air quality, lighting, heating and hot water generation, renewable and low carbon technology ie photovoltaic panels and solar hot water, water usage and rainwater water storage.

It is important to plan work in a logical order to avoid potential problems and reduce overall costs.

- If you are changing your electricity supplier switch to a 100% renewable supplier*
- If replacing a boiler, improve the home insulation first so the new heating system is not over specified*
- Is this the time to consider an air or ground source heat pump?*
- If initially unable to install a heat pump ensure any new radiators are suitably sized and cupboard space for a hot tank, control gear etc anticipated*
- When improving insulation consider the new ventilation and breathability characteristics of the materials used*
- Anticipate the requirements for air-tightness, shading and possible mechanical ventilation and heat recovery*
- New windows should be installed before any external insulation*
- If adding insulation to solid floors this would be the time to consider underfloor*

heating pipe work

- *If external insulation is considered, guttering will need to be repositioned, possibly replacing with deeper sectioned to cope with expected heavier rainfall and effective rainwater discharge off the roof into the guttering must be planned. Down pipes will need to be moved. This may also be the time to consider underground filtered rainwater storage.*
- *If the property needs re-roofing, this is the time to consider solar hot water and PV and any strengthening required.*
- *Maximise use of any scaffolding to combine measures.*
- *In possible flood zones take advantage of major internal work to consider one way toilet and waste water valves, raised electrical sockets and floor tiles instead of carpets etc.*

Recommended further reading:

The Carbon Co-op

<https://carbon.coop/>

Energy Saving Trust

<https://energysavingtrust.org.uk/>

Centre for Alternative Technology

<https://cat.org.uk/>

Herefordshire Green Network

<https://hgnetwork.org/>

Passive House Institute

<https://passivehouse.com/index.html>

PAS 2035 standards

<https://www.trustmark.org.uk/ourservices/pas-2035/>

Greening our Existing Homes
<https://www.fmb.org.uk/resource/greening-our-existing-homes.html>

<https://www.fmb.org.uk/resource/greening-our-existing-homes.html>

Centre for Sustainable Energy Bristol

<https://www.cse.org.uk/resources>

South Shropshire Climate Action's Retro-fit toolkit

<https://www.southshropshireclimateaction.org/energy-efficiency>

Hazardous building materials

<https://www.Hazardous materials and period houses - Country Life>

<https://www.idealresponse.co.uk/blog/8-dangers-of-old-buildings-you-need-to-know-about/>

Caution - Please Read this:

Our Advice Note has been carefully prepared and is, as far as we know, accurate at the date of publication. However, things change very fast in the world of technology and in government schemes. Sometimes parts of Advice Notes become outdated and may not offer best advice very soon after publication. We do our best to keep them up to date with the limited resources we have. Furthermore, our advice may not be appropriate for your particular circumstances. We advise that you get advice from a relevant expert before making changes. We may be able to offer further advice or make suggestions on who to contact if you get in touch with us. We are not technical experts but have many years of offering common sense advice and we recommend you should not rely on our Advice Note alone for making decisions. The national advice centre Energy Savings Trust is a good source of information.

See <https://energysavingtrust.org.uk/>