

## **Social housing is getting greener**

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***([www.britishecoenergy.com](http://www.britishecoenergy.com)) comments on the increased uptake of renewables in the social housing market***

At a time when climate change and global warming are at the forefront of the political agenda; councils and local authorities across the UK are enforcing measures to ensure that their new builds and public housing are built to maximise energy efficiency and incorporate environmental issues.

One of the most commonly adopted policies is the Code for Sustainable Homes which looks at many areas of design and adopts a holistic view of the building process. Although the code is currently still voluntary, most social housing new builds must comply with Code level 3 which stipulates amongst other criteria, the property must meet the Energy Saving Trust's Best Practice Standard for energy efficiency.

Currently if new builds are going to meet Code level 3 it is most likely that they will be built slightly differently. Instead of the standard 300mm cavity wall, new builds are likely to have 340mm, which will allow room for more insulation and the walls themselves may be built with wider blocks. Any holes in the walls, created for pipe work for example, will have to be carefully sealed and an energy efficient boiler will also be a likely choice.

The Code for Sustainable Homes extends up to six levels, the highest being reserved for zero carbon homes. As builders and developers strive to gain accreditation for the higher tiers, many are realising that affirmative action is needed with regard to water usage, energy efficiency and the uptake of renewables. As a result rainwater recycling has become very popular and will probably become the most implemented renewable system in the social housing market. There are many reasons for this, largely because rainwater harvesting kits can be easily fitted to feed into toilet cisterns, washing

machines and outside taps, making up for around 49 per cent of a households total water usage. The right tank and system can also supply a number of homes in a multi-unit development, saving money on water bills and benefiting the environment. Rainwater harvesting systems also reduce the demand on the areas drainage systems which is of instant benefit to the local council and authorities.

Most councils are now more open to the idea of renewables and are much less likely to oppose plans for solar panels. Solar thermal will undoubtedly have a large presence in the future of social housing and public buildings. It is cost effective and can be successfully installed in existing buildings; however as with all renewable systems, they are quicker and easier to install during the building process. In the future it will be necessary to install Solar PV if buildings are to achieve the higher code levels, this will add a certain amount onto the building costs, but the cost savings in the long run will make it worthwhile.

**Grants for the installation of micro generation technologies are available to public sector buildings (including schools, hospitals, housing associations and local authorities) under Phase 2 of the Business Enterprise and Regulatory Reform's Low Carbon Buildings Programme. The available funding can reach up to £1million so it well worth applying if your area requires some financial support to go green.**

As long as the renewable energy source is correctly chosen for the job then there are no foreseeable drawbacks in its implementation in the social housing market. It is also important to ensure that good quality products are chosen, cutting costs in this area simply does not pay. This also applies to the quality of labour and fitting employed to install the renewable energy source. Poor quality can result in a renewable with a shorter life span or one that requires a lot of maintenance. It is always worth seeking expert advice from an independent renewable energy specialist as they will be able to give you unbiased information on a number of products and can help you to pick the best one for the job.

***BritishEcoEnergy.com ([www.britishecoenergy.com](http://www.britishecoenergy.com)) is dedicated to offering honest, independent and down to earth advice on renewable and energy saving technology for both domestic and commercial properties; with everything from solar panels to rainwater harvesting kits.***