

Sustainability Forum Notes 24th October 2023

The evening was divided into two parts, 2 presentations with time for questions, followed by a roundtable and feedback session.

The presentations were:

- Retrofitting existing homes;
- Solar together;

The next Sustainability Forum will be on the evening of **Wednesday 7th February 2024 (6:15pm for a 6:30pm start).**

Additional events to be aware of: Great Big Green Week – 8th June – 16th June 2024. W3R Friends of the Earth are the organisers of this, and encourage local groups to run an event, either for their group, or an open event, during the week. Further information will be available on <https://greenwatford.uk/>, in the meantime please contact sustainableswherts@greenwatford.uk.

Retrofitting existing homes

Watford's housing stock consists of housing with an energy rating between G and B, with the majority (59%) a D rating. Improving the energy performance of a home will usually reduce your energy bills, for instance moving from a G rating to an A rating could reduce energy bills from £6000 pa to £1000pa. Improving the energy rating of homes will also improve the comfort for those living there, both in winter and summer.

According to government definitions, 12.7% of homes within WBC were considered to be fuel poor in 2021.

For Watford Community Housing (WCH) homes, of which there are approximately 5000 in the borough, the majority achieve a C rating with just over 600 being in the D band and just over 400 being in the B band. WCH is working to improve the D band homes with government grants, and are supported by the council.

WBC have worked with a number of partners to support the improvement of both social and privately owned homes, which has brought in over £6.5m. The currently active grant schemes are:



Measure	Home Owners (and tenants having repairing responsibility as part of a lease agreement)		Private Landlords and Tenants	
	Grant for able to pay resident	Grant for low income resident*	Grant for able to pay renting resident	Grant for low income renting resident*
a) Cavity Wall Insulation £2,250	£1,000.00	£2,500.00	£750.00	£1,000.00
b) First time heating £5,000	x	£1,500.00	x	x
c) Heating Controls £350	£100.00	£250.00	£100.00	£250.00
d) Loft Insulation <175mm £1,100	£750.00	£1,250.00	£750.00	£1,000.00
e) Air Source Heat Pump (Other renewables) £13,000	£1,500.00	£2,500.00	£1,000.00 Subject to EPC C	£1,500.00 Subject to EPC C
f) Replacement Boiler £3,000	x	£1,500.00	x	x
g) Room in Roof £3,500	x	£2,500.00	£1,000.00	£1,000.00
h) Solar PV (project area based) £5,500	x	£3,000.00	x	£3,000.00
i) Solid Wall Insulation (brick finish or project area based) £17,000	£2,750.00 + add if brick slip up to £3,000.00 (£3k full elevation, £1.5k half elevation) = £5,750.00 max total	£3,750.00 + add if brick slip up to £3,000.00 (£3k full elevation, £1.5k half elevation) = £6,750.00 max total	if brick slip up to + £2,000.00 (£2k full elevation, £1k half elevation)	£2,500.00 + add if brick slip up to £3,000.00 (£3k full elevation, £1.5k half elevation) = £5,500.00 max total
j) Storage Heater £2,000	x	£1,000.00	x	x
k) Underfloor Insulation £1,500	£1,500.00	£2,000.00	£1,500.00	£2,000.00
l) Party Wall Insulation £2,000	x	£1,000.00	x	£150.00

To find out if you or someone you know is eligible for help contact Better Homes Better Health: www.bhbh.org.uk/make-a-referral

During the presentation there was a lively debate, and some of the key points which came out of this debate include:

- There was discussion on cost of measures, the differential between a C and D rating, and the cost and payback of solar.
- How do we make it easier for people to know what measures would work in their home? Is there a way of producing manuals and / or cost measures for different house types?

- People need to be able to determine the best environmental option for the materials used. E.g. for insulation, mineral wool compared to sheep’s wool. Note: there is a resident in St Albans who did an eco-renovation on her Victorian end terrace house – you can find out more about it [here](#).
- Need to consider whole life assessment, e.g. so the embodied impacts are taken into account and their impact globally also taken into account.
- The cost of measures is going down as more people are doing them. WBC targets those unable to pay to see how can help, but don’t exclude people, and will look at a local area when projects are being done, such as tying in with WCH work.
- There was a discussion on standards, whether there are government standards, and how that relates to retrofit, where there are not set standards, when it is not covered by building regulations.
- There are a number of websites with useful information, such as the energy saving trust <https://energysavingtrust.org.uk/> and there is a Herts Energy Advice Tool, which can be downloaded from your favourite app store. This was developed by the Energy Saving Trust for the Hertfordshire Climate Change and Sustainability Partnership (HCCSP).

Solar Together

There was a short presentation on Solar Together, a joint Hertfordshire initiative to allow home owners and other building owners to join in a group buying scheme. Solar Together is run by iChoosr, who has run similar schemes for other local authorities. The first Hertfordshire scheme was run in 2022, and the second scheme was launched in August 2023, with the closing date for expression of interest on 27th October 2023. It is aimed at the ‘able to pay’ sector. In 2022 around 13,000 registered their interest with just over 2000 signed up for solar PV, with just over 100 in Watford. By mid-October almost 6,000 had registered their interest this year.

Roundtable discussion Feedback:

Question	Group 1	Group 2	Group 3	Group 4
Main things you /your landlord have done?		Solar panels. Insulation - loft and EWI. Boiler upgrade Double glazing Draft proofing / ventilation.	Change to gas cooker from an electric cooker where a gas supply exists.	St Mary’s has achieved the EcoChurch scheme silver award.
What has/would help(ed) you to make the changes?	Advice / assessment on current status. Fully sustainable solutions (but recognise this may be challenging).	Better / clearer communication to landlords so people understand who is entitled to grants. Information about partnerships to managing agents. Standards easily available and	Subsidise costs	

		easily understood.		
What would you like to see the council / Government do?	More information, especially on flats. Assessment service.	More transparency, clearer standards/ processes. New homes standards need to be improved. More publicity about support available from council and charity.	A kitemark for building / insulation / solar panel. Whole life product information. Their environmental impact.	Council: grant when people move home – get stuff done when it is less faff (as people find retrofitting hard work). Educate on factors influencing sustainability – now; end to end / lifetime; air miles / local production / removal. Example of perfect home using all sustainable ideas – BRE Focus on worst performing properties – communicate to those people, how are telling these people, e.g. a: to b: status OR – find out where the emissions come from – is it the poorest or is the higher value homes? Government: national standard.
What are you doing as a community group?		Better publicity about the Daisy – innovation in operation, e.g. grey water, solar panels. Better education through	RefillAbell CIC looking at workshops in the local community supporting the environmentally conscious.	Community ideas: Buy local / buy Watford. Enact from the top – council, businesses, people.

		community group meetings.	Support – raised in Nature scheme at Paddock road allotments, showing adults and children how to garden and grow food. Applying for grant for litter picking scheme.	Local ‘red tractor’ Farmers market. Educate / apprentices. Buy local business only with Kitemark or similar.
What action can you take?		Better awareness of self usage so able to monitor and reduce. Smart meters for water. People want best outcomes for money available. Clear indicators of how they can achieve their desired outcomes – e.g. save money, reduce CO ₂ .	Fix leaks. Mulch garden, water collection. All new builds should have rain water collection.	

Key ideas to consider and report back on at next meeting:

- Look to find information on ‘fully sustainable solutions’ and make available as appropriate
- How to better communicate about the grants available to homeowners, landlords, and tenants.
- Whole life assessment with regards to energy improvement measures
- Look at whether estate agents would promote grant options when people move house.
- Look at ways we can inform and educate people on energy improvement measures including signposting to best practice ‘show’ homes.
- Review how we prioritise properties.