

Workshop Summary

INSULATING 'HARDER TO TREAT' PROPERTIES

May 2015

A workshop facilitated by Nottingham Energy Partnership as part of the Nottingham City Homes Green Deal for Communities Programme

Introduction

This report provides a summary of responses from key stakeholders in the solid wall industry from the workshop held on insulating Harder to Treat properties. It summarises the views of Planners, the Local Authority, private landlords, solid wall manufacturers and contractors, and non- Governmental Organisations regarding:

- 1. The definition of Harder to Treat properties that are characteristic of the housing stock in Nottingham**
- 2. The production of solid wall insulation guidance templates to inform future projects and to ensure compliance with Planning.**

Background to the Harder to Treat programme

The “Harder to Treat” programme is commissioned by Department of Energy and Climate Change (DECC) and undertaken by Nottingham Energy Partnership in collaboration with Nottingham City Homes. The workshop is the first stage of the programme to develop robust, comprehensive and straight forward guidance for key stakeholders in the solid wall industry.

Harder to Treat Programme Outline

The programme is designed to address the more difficult issues to surrounding the solid wall insulation market by:

- **Identifying common Nottingham property types that prove more difficult to insulate than standard solid brick properties.**
- **Determining the feasibility of insulating these particularly difficult archetypes, including the creation of property templates for individual property types.**
- **Overcoming the cost barriers faced by small and medium sized enterprises to invest in training for the Green Deal Installer Certification.**
- **Encouraging local installers to develop methodologies for these difficult property styles.**

Improving the energy efficiency of the UK’s housing stock is a key priority to the success of the Government’s current strategies including climate change, fuel poverty and the Decent Homes Standard.

In the context of improving domestic thermal efficiency, one sector of the UK housing stock has proved to be particularly challenging. Described as “Harder to Treat” and defined as those homes that are currently not being considered for solid wall insulation and therefore benefiting from the Government’s Energy Company Obligation on energy suppliers to install energy efficiency measures in domestic properties.

Harder to Treat properties as defined by the Energy Saving Trust typically describe four categories of dwellings;

1. With solid walls,
2. Off the gas grid network,
3. No loft
4. High-rise flats

For the Harder to Treat workshop only the solid wall category was considered.

Workshop Purpose

The purpose of the workshop led by NEP, was to organise a learning opportunity for future solid wall insulation installs. To select the property archetypes that are characteristic in Nottinghamshire that would be defined as harder to treat and would require solid wall insulation, and to produce a series of templates to be used by homeowners, builders, and professionals in the industry to ensure quality.

The key objectives of the workshop was to bring a broad focus and align the fuel poverty agenda, local regeneration and energy policy as well as technical challenges of improving domestic thermal efficiency with national and local planning policy, while working to analyse the barriers to the installation of harder to treat properties.

Workshop Aims

- 1. Decide if Harder to Treat property templates will be a useful tool for householders, builders and Planning.**
- 2. Decide which properties to select as Harder to Treat.**
- 3. Explore barriers and concerns: technical, Planning, tenure, cost.**
- 4. Decide if we need to elaborate on the general Planning Guidance.**

Workshop Approach

A selected group of key stakeholders in the solid wall insulation industry were invited to the workshop to obtain a comprehensive account of their experience and perspective of the barriers preventing the uptake of grants and install of solid wall insulation. The group included Planners, Private and Social Landlords, Councillors, Environmental Health Officers, solid wall insulation manufacturers and installers, as well as non-Governmental Organisations.

A presentation provided the background to the project outline, and explained the context for the project both from a local and national perspective. The presentation covered the following topics:

- National and local energy and regeneration strategy
- The success of Nottingham City’s area based solid wall insulation schemes and level of investment for the City
- Typical Hard and Harder to Treat Property archetypes in Nottingham and quantities.
- Typical architectural features
- Technical Challenges
- The scope for solid wall insulation in Nottingham
- The relevance of tenure
- Planning considerations
- Issues and existing solutions

A brainstorming session followed the presentation to provide a relaxed, informal approach to looking at the issues, encourage creative thinking and bring the diverse experience of all attendees. The workshop groups were divided into two and facilitated by NEP. The groups were required to answer the following four questions:

1. Is the Guidance Template worth pursuing?
2. What format should the template be?
3. Who is it aimed at?
4. Content per property archetype?

Workshop Question Responses

1. Is the Guidance Template worth pursuing?

All the stakeholders agreed that the guidance template for the installation of solid wall insulation for Harder to Treat properties is necessary. The Planning Officers stressed the need for the templates to include guidance on quality checking the workmanship to achieve a consistent approach to the technical challenges.

2. What format should the template be?

There was a general consensus amongst stakeholders that the format should be diagrammatic and annotated to produce a clear and easy to understand series of documents. The templates need to describe each stage of the install, post install care for the insulation system, together with home energy advice that considers the subsequent change in heating and ventilation requirements following the increased levels of insulation.

Specific planning requirements need to be emphasised e.g., the planning application must be submitted prior to applying for Government Grants.

3. Who should the template be aimed at?

The conclusion was that the templates need to be aimed at home owners, social housing providers, private tenants and to developers and contractors. To ensure planning principles are maintained there should not be any distinction made between tenures. The need for the template to be criteria based was emphasised in order to minimise issues with Planning.

4. Content per Property Archetype?

The first exercise involved **defining the “Harder to Treat” Solid Wall Property Archetypes** from the hard to treat ones. Using local Nottingham knowledge and Nottingham City Council’s GIS mapping programme a list of non-traditional property archetypes were included in the presentation for the attendees to review, they included the traditional 9” masonry wall construction as well as a combination of wall types.

The following properties were categorised as Harder to Treat:

Victorian properties

Overall the majority of the attendees supported the principle that the historical and architectural merit of the Victorian design needs to be respected in order to reinforce local distinctiveness and character. Streetscapes like Wilford Crescent West need to be preserved.

Stakeholders agreed the following:

- Original features should be preserved through the installation of internal wall insulation on the front elevation.
- Front elevation needs to be preserved. As a general rule, internal wall insulation will be permissible on the front elevation.
- External wall insulation can be installed on the rear and side elevations if it is not facing the street or overlooking an open public space. For example, an end terrace with two street facing elevations would need planning permission.
- Each property should be taken on merit, however with a template it is plausible that an install can be considered without planning.
- Any property that is oversailing a public highway requires Planning Permission. If it encroaches onto the public highway that is not particularly narrow or has a low foot fall it should not be an issue with the Highways Agency.

- Planning would be willing to consider an insulation system that could suitably replicate the original features. However recent examples of insulation systems designed to replicate the original construction have not met with Planning’s approval.

Non Traditional Built Properties

In Nottingham non traditional built properties include British Iron and Steel Frame (BISF) properties and Cross wall properties - Cross wall timber frame (including tile hung and boarded), Cross wall concrete (including tile hung and boarded) and William Moss with an undercroft.

- Due to the lack of architectural detail, there is greater flexibility from a Planning perspective.
- Planning permission may not be required providing the local Planning Authority are part of the initial design process prior to works starting and agree to the finished look.
- The design needs to show verticality.
- The render finish must be agreed in order to maintain consistency and uniformity, as well as individuality per property.
- The ultimate decision rests with the Planning department and will be decided on a case by case basis.

Additional Factors

Quality – Most of the stakeholders raised their concerns about maintaining quality workmanship across different contractors including whether the system would be able to preserve the original features of the property.

Planning Protocol – The Planning Officers explained some of the current procedures and standards that need to be adhered to when installing solid wall insulation and would therefore need to be included in the templates:

- The front elevation of all Victorian properties needs to remain the same and can only be insulated with internal solid wall insulation.
- Planning approval would not be required for a like for like finish.

Full Planning Permission

Planning permission will always be required where:

- The aesthetics of the property is changed, and the proposed materials are not of a similar appearance to those used in the original construction of the house.
- Listed buildings (Listed Building Consent will also be required).
- Blocks of flats
- Houses in Conservation Areas, Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty

Conclusions

Template Format

Evidence from the two workshops supported the proposal to produce guidance templates for the installation of solid wall insulation for Harder to Treat properties. Stakeholders agreed that the format of the template needed to be straightforward through the use of images to explain the technical aspects and Planning Regulations with an emphasis on maintaining a high quality standard.

The templates would be made available electronically and could include an interactive element. There is a need to examine how the templates can be promoted to become a reference resource for technical guidance for all stakeholders involved in solid wall insulation projects whether it is a single installation managed by a home owner or a large government funded scheme.

The templates need to be relevant to householders, planning officers, building control officers, conservation officers, manufacturers and installers as well as those working within the regeneration sector (Local Authority Housing, Housing Associations, non-governmental organisations).

It was concluded from the workshop discussion that In Nottinghamshire, when installing solid wall insulation the Harder to Treat properties consist of two main categories:

1. Victorian dwelling - (9” brick solid wall construction)
2. Non traditional builds

The non-traditional built dwellings consist of several different sub categories and a range of templates for the different non-traditional build archetypes will be produced.

Workmanship

DECC’s rationale for the provision of Green Deal Installer certified training for SMEs was validated by the Planning Department and confirmation that new planning standards stipulate the architectural character of the Victorian property needs to be preserved. The shift in focus onto Harder to Treat properties that cannot be installed externally with solid wall insulation currently highlights the limited choice in experienced contractors to carry out this work and the potential importance of addressing the training requirements to be able to specialise in solid wall insulation for Harder to Treat properties.

The templates will assist in educating the contractor and providing them with a methodology and perspective that considers a more in-depth analysis of the construction of the property in relation to the application of the insulation. The templates will provide adequate information to ensure the character of the surrounding area is maintained and the heritage, location, and the impact of the final finish are all duly considered by all stakeholders prior to the start of the installation.

The application of internal wall insulation is more disruptive process than external wall insulation because the contractor requires access to work inside of the property. The templates will provide a standard code of conduct to be followed by the contractor to ensure that they are considerate to the resident whilst working in their property.

Finally it was agreed that the group should reconvene within two months of the workshop to assess the first draft of a guidance template.