

# open

INSPIRATION AND IDEAS FROM  
THE HOUSING CORPORATION  
WINTER 06 ISSUE TWO

## COMMUNITY SPIRIT

WHERE PLANTS ARE CHANGING  
THE NEIGHBOURHOOD

## PARK LIFE

GREEN SPACE IN BRAZIL

# after the floods

HOW CARLISLE CAME BACK STRONGER





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Members of the Clapton Park Estate Resident Group have a lot to smile about. They are seeing their green spaces transformed

# open

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Welcome to the second issue of Open, brought to you by the Housing Corporation, the government agency that funds new affordable housing and regulates the work of housing associations in England.

In this issue, we focus on the latest green developments in housing. We show how housing associations are upping environmental standards of both new homes and existing buildings, and how greening the spaces in between homes is helping to improve the quality of residents' lives. And at the back you'll find a directory of research and guidance published by the Housing Corporation and others, which will help you find the expertise you're looking for on this subject.

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## energy from the ground

Harrogate tenants tap into natural heat

As fuel bills soar, a group of Harrogate Council tenants are enjoying a cut of more than half in their heating costs.

It's all thanks to installation pumps that tap into natural underground heat, fuelling central heating and hot water systems. The pumps have replaced inefficient solid fuel and electric storage heaters in eight bungalows for older people.

The results have been spectacular, with bills of up to £600 a year cut to just £215. There are other benefits too. Bigger radiators keep the same output but run at a lower temperature and tap water is not scalding hot, cutting the risk of accidents.

The council plans to install another 100 systems in its general housing stock. As the work progresses, other measures such as energy generation and mini wind turbines will be added.

Find out more [www.harrogate.gov.uk](http://www.harrogate.gov.uk)



Tenants with their new heat pump



Residents and volunteers spruce up Severn Walk

## a budding start

Greener living for Sutton Hill tenant group

Plenty of bright flowers and a new 'green gym' have brightened up the neighbourhood for Severn Walk sheltered housing scheme in Sutton Hill.

Volunteers grabbed paintbrushes, scrapers and spades, rolled up their sleeves and set to work on the paving, gardens and fences to give the area a thorough spruce-up. Landlord Wrekin Housing Trust set up the scheme with the British Trust for Conservation Volunteers and the local tenants' group.

Resident Jenny Smith says, "The small changes made will make it much more pleasant for the tenants living at Severn Walk, and everyone here feels a lot better after all the exercise!"

Find out more [www.wrekinhousingtrust.org.uk](http://www.wrekinhousingtrust.org.uk)



A Sutton Hill tenant gets to work on the garden

## on the roof

South west London's grass roofs and car-free schemes

A secure cycle shed for residents is just one feature of a car-free scheme in south west London by Servite Houses.

The scheme at Carlton Drive in Putney aims to show how high-quality eco features can be incorporated into new housing at little extra cost.

The eye-catching green roof on the 22 flats is perhaps the most unusual idea. It is planted with a mixture of low-maintenance grasses and herbs. Servite estimates that the extra cost per home of more than a dozen innovative features is under £1,500 – well worth the investment for the future.

Find out more [www.servitehouses.org.uk](http://www.servitehouses.org.uk)

## gold and green

Housing associations can showcase their environmental work in the coming year with the Housing Corporation's Gold Awards.

Now in its second year, the scheme continues to champion innovation. Apply now if your project links to the 2007 themes of environmental sustainability and empowering communities.

Up to three winners in each theme will receive £50,000 for a year-long campaign to promote their work.

Find out more [www.housingcorp.gov.uk](http://www.housingcorp.gov.uk)



Resident Kirsty Young and her son enjoy their EcoHome in Manor Farm Close, Normandy, Guildford

## paving the way

Guildford's pavements soak away flood risk

Investing in an energy consultant has paid dividends for Greenoak Housing Association, with a series of successful EcoHomes developments.

A rural scheme in Normandy, Guildford, incorporates 'future-proofing' features such as porous block paving to help soak away surface water and reduce the risk of flooding. Carbon dioxide emissions are minimised and non-toxic materials were used in the construction.

The association overcame difficulties in sourcing unusual and sustainable materials, and a limited market in timber frame contractors, to produce the 12 semi-detached homes. The development is the first rural scheme in the South East to achieve an EcoHomes 'excellent' rating.

Find out more [www.greenoakha.org](http://www.greenoakha.org)



As a single parent bringing up two kids, Nigel Ratcliffe knows all about budgeting. He's finding that eco features in his new Westlea Housing Association house are saving him about a third on fuel bills.

The house in the village of Bushton, Wiltshire, is one of six that have replaced obsolete former council housing. Although the road layout and front gardens have been retained, the houses are sited to make the most of natural light and passive solar gain. They are heated by ground source heat pumps, which are proving much cheaper to run than conventional gas systems.

Nigel certainly notices the difference. "The underground heat that is captured is constant all year round so you gain even in winter," he says.

He moved to Bushton to be near his sister who lives in the next village. But there was a delay when bats were found roosting in the old houses. Eventually the housing association found a solution: build a little 'garage' for them behind the new homes.

The family has lived in the house for two years now after spending time in a privately rented house. Their new home

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### Energy efficiency

The Energy Saving Trust sets energy efficiency standards that go beyond building regulations for use in the design, construction and refurbishment of homes.

Housing associations can use its range of best practice guides, online tools, technical advice and training seminars to improve the energy efficiency of their homes.

Find out more  
[www.est.org.uk](http://www.est.org.uk)

is deceptively spacious, feeling bigger on the inside than it looks from outside, Nigel says. Best of all, the residents have found themselves 'going green' as they become more aware of eco living.

"We religiously put out our recycling bins," he laughs. "I am all for more ideas. If Westlea want to stick a solar panel on my roof, they are very welcome!" **open**

Find out more  
[www.westlea.co.uk](http://www.westlea.co.uk)

# living with nature

Residents in the village of Bushton in Wiltshire are saving money by going green



Nigel Ratcliffe and his children outside their new home

A Brazilian city built on efficient construction methods, green parks and a successful public transport system – welcome to Curitiba

## park life



Greening a rapidly expanding city of 1.6 million people is no overnight task. Fortunately, Curitiba in southern Brazil got a head start of 40 years on most of the world's conurbations.

Its city government came up with a pioneering development plan for sustainable growth back in 1966 when global warming was unheard of. Special bus lanes give commuters fast access to business districts and three quarters of the city's workers use public transport.

A striking feature of the city is its public parks. Each Curitiba resident has four times the World Health Organisation recommended amount of public green space.

The city-owned Curitiba Popular

Housing Company (COHAB) funds low-cost, high-quality housing. COHAB helps low-income construction workers buy their own plot of land, and arranges advice from city architects to draw up building plans.

More recent innovations include support for more efficient construction methods. In a move later adopted by the UK government, the city held a competition for innovative low-cost housing designs. Six houses were built to showcase the designs, and are still being monitored for their performance. **open**

Find out more  
[www.curitiba.pr.gov.br](http://www.curitiba.pr.gov.br)

"Each Curitiba resident has four times the World Health Organisation recommended amount of public green space"

Making the most of the parks and open areas that surround social housing estates can change residents' quality of life overnight

# community spirit

Little pockets of greenery and landscaped planting are springing up from one side of London to the other.

Those neglected parts of North Kensington, where street drinkers and dogs were the only inhabitants, have suddenly disappeared. They have become play areas for kids, tree-lined spaces where people sit and socialise, a green lung for a densely populated area.

Over on the Victorian Stamford Street estate near Waterloo, a rainbow of annual and perennial plants greets residents and visitors. They are another example of how residents have transformed the estate's open areas with training and tools.

It's a similar story on the Clapton Park estate in Hackney, which has its own residents' board. Here, a 'green day' gave locals the chance to have their say on green spaces, and the work is underway with help from a landscape contractor. It costs very little compared to major building works but the change to the feel – and appeal – of an area can be profoundly uplifting.

Landlords Peabody Trust and

Notting Hill Housing, who promoted the landscaping schemes, want to ensure that taking into account the space in between buildings becomes a part of everyday thinking. They have set up Neighbourhoods Green, a research and good practice project aimed at ensuring liveability is not just a bolted-on feature.

They point out that well-managed open spaces can help to improve housing management. Revitalising no-go areas where people are afraid to venture, and cutting out graffiti and vandalism, helps to tackle the anti-social behaviour that can make residents' lives a misery. Estates with instant kerb appeal are more attractive to potential tenants and buyers, speeding up lettings and avoiding empty homes.

There are difficulties though, as Peabody Trust landscape regeneration manager Mathew Frith explains. "These semi-public spaces are often physically fragmented, and there are complex tenure issues to consider, presenting significant complexities compared to those of parks management. There are also problems with lack of the right

skills, and few apprenticeships in this type of work available."

He says housing organisations must develop strategies for how they will improve and manage their green assets. Peabody, for example, must be one of the few housing associations in England with a tree strategy. "There are plenty of examples of good projects, but do these bring about organisational change so that social housing providers take the issue more seriously?" he asks. "We need to get to a point where this is a well-resourced, mainstream service, not something you do extra."

To that end, Neighbourhoods Green plans to test out the national standard for green space management, the Green Flag Award, with social landlords. Promoting the standard should encourage landlords to take the idea firmly on board. So by next year, green fingers crossed, the first flags may be pinned on social housing estates.

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### Find out more

[www.neighbourhoodsgreen.org.uk/ng](http://www.neighbourhoodsgreen.org.uk/ng)  
[www.greenflagaward.org.uk](http://www.greenflagaward.org.uk)

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### People power

WHEN THE RESIDENTS' GROUP AT CLAPTON PARK ESTATE TENDERED OUT ITS LANDSCAPE DESIGN IT DECIDED TO BREAK THE MOULD.

A small independent company won out, and is now one of the first in London to run such a large contract, with stunning results.

John Little is the owner of the Grass Roof Company. "They were taking a chance on us, we knew that, so we're even more passionate about giving back as much as we can," he says. "Because we care about the area, we know what the residents want, and what will work. Being out and around, we can also report other problems, and add value that way."

By building close personal relationships with many of the residents they are inspiring the estate to go green.

John Little on the Clapton Park Estate

# broad horizons

Out in the flat lands and big skies of East Anglia's Fenlands, a project is taking shape that could lead European thinking on sustainable development

## EcoHomes standards

DEVELOPED BY THE BUILDING RESEARCH ESTABLISHMENT, ECOHOMES COVERS A RANGE OF ELEMENTS INCLUDING ENERGY, TRANSPORT, POLLUTION, MATERIALS, WATER, LAND USE, ECOLOGY, HEALTH AND WELL BEING.

Each element carries a score. When totalled, the scores form a rating on four levels from 'pass' to 'excellent'. Housing Corporation-funded schemes must achieve at least 'very good', the second-highest level.

The standard is flexible and designed to reward positive steps taken to improve the environmental performance of UK housing.

Find out more [www.sustainablehomes.co.uk](http://www.sustainablehomes.co.uk)

In one of eco housing's biggest tests yet, more than 100 new homes will be built to high environmental specifications, and then evaluated for their construction, liveability and marketability.

Home Group won a competition set by Fenland District Council to build the homes on three sites, with a mix of outright sale, shared ownership and social renting.

The £13 million project is the brainchild of Smartlife, a team drawn from the Building Research Establishment, Cambridgeshire County Council and other partners in England, plus organisations in Malmö, Sweden, and Hamburg, Germany. Key funding to acquire land has also come from English Partnerships, Housing Corporation and Fenland DC grants, which have enabled 41 affordable homes to be built.

The team came together to tackle shared problems of sustainable growth. The housing markets of Chatteris and March where the homes will be built has the second highest rate of immigration to the area. The area shares the problems of unbalanced markets and demographic change that also feature elsewhere in Europe.

Sue Belk, development director for Home Group in the south, is excited at the prospect of getting started on site, after Fenland DC gave the planning go ahead in June.

Home Group will build a quarter of the homes using conventional 'brick and block' methods, and the rest using three different modern methods of construction: concrete, steel and timber frames. The BRE will monitor the construction and how the homes perform once occupied.

"We are seriously committed to modern methods of construction," Sue said. "We were keen to deliver this housing as it gives us a chance to bring together our architects and ensure a high quality of design."

**"The homes must not all look the same, and they must fit well with the environment and locality. We want to break the mould of traditional affordable housing"**

Unusually, Home Group asked three firms of architects to work together on the project, Avebury, Churchill-Hui and Proctor and Matthews. They have produced a set of standard house types that will aid efficient construction but look very different from each other externally.

"That is very important," Sue said. "The homes must not all look the same, and they must fit well with the environment and locality. We want to break the mould of traditional affordable housing."

Home Group is taking the full risk on the 79 homes that will be sold on the open market – 14 of which are for shared ownership – and Sue admits the scheme will have to be marketed carefully to ensure full take-up. All the proceeds will be recycled into the project, to fund the affordable housing.

She hopes the lessons from Smartlife will not stop with the first project. Home Group hopes to use the designs produced by the three architects on a London site, as they are especially suited to high-density developments.

For Sue, the project offers great potential that could help raise design standards across the board. "We do need to improve design. These homes are a bit larger and certainly better quality than you would see generally in the private market," she says. **open**

Find out more [www.smartlife-project.net](http://www.smartlife-project.net)  
[www.homegroup.org.uk](http://www.homegroup.org.uk)  
[www.fenland.gov.uk](http://www.fenland.gov.uk)



The Smartlife steering group

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### Modern methods

THE HOUSING CORPORATION IS PROMOTING FASTER AND MORE EFFICIENT BUILDING THROUGH MODERN METHODS OF CONSTRUCTION (MMC).

MMC involves using a range of off-site manufacturing techniques to speed up construction, with less time spent on site. Research by the Corporation with the National Audit Office estimated that using methods such as modular and panel construction should:

- make it possible to build up to four times as many homes with the same on-site labour;

- cut on-site construction time by over a half; and
- mean that building performance is at least as good.

Exploring new, eco-friendly and quicker construction methods will contribute to the £140 million in efficiency savings that the Housing Corporation expects to make on its grant funding this year, allowing more homes to be built.

To read the report Using modern methods of construction to build homes more quickly and efficiently, visit [www.nao.org.uk](http://www.nao.org.uk)

When Mother Nature struck Carlisle, the human costs were incalculable and the financial costs vast. But the city's unique response is now helping others to be better prepared

# after the floods

“Flat? It’s more like a palace. You couldn’t get me out of here with a bazooka”

The floods have brought the residents of Milbourne Street closer together



In the aftermath of torrential rain and gales in January last year, an unusual find was made on the pitch of Carlisle United FC. It was two goldfish, swimming in the floodwaters that had engulfed the city overnight.

The moment of levity relieved what was otherwise a catastrophic event. Around 6,000 people were affected by the contaminated floodwaters that surged over the banks of the city's three rivers that night. Hundreds became homeless. Their 1,600 homes had to be cleared of sewage, silt and debris. Some families are still in temporary accommodation now.

The rescue effort was hampered by the fact that the control centre, the city council office, was under water to a depth of five metres. With electricity and telephones out, and trees fallen across roads, calling for help became difficult.

Like many others, Joe McGuire and his neighbours found themselves

marooned in their building with raging floods all around. With no help coming, they eventually rescued themselves, stepping out into the waist-deep water and helping each other wade to safety.

The water was contaminated and did severe damage to the building, so they have not been able to return. “You think of water as benign, but it is very destructive,” he says. Landlord Impact Housing Association had to move Joe into a flat elsewhere in Carlisle, in a house converted with Housing Corporation funding. “Flat? It’s more like a palace,” Joe says. “You couldn’t get me out of here with a bazooka.”

After the flood, and in a new town, Joe has had to work on getting to know some new friends. As he points out, much socialising is centred on pubs, so as a non-drinker he is at a disadvantage. “I have to try a little bit harder to make sure I am in places where I can be among people,” he says. ▶

Joe McGuire enjoying his new flat – the floods left him without a home



## Building in resistance

THE GOVERNMENT OFFERS INFORMATION ON A WIDE RANGE OF PERMANENT MEASURES THAT CAN BE UNDERTAKEN TO IMPROVE THE FLOOD RESISTANCE OF NEW AND EXISTING BUILDINGS. THE ENVIRONMENT AGENCY GUIDE, PREPARING FOR FLOODS, OFFERS ADVICE UNDER FOUR SUB-SECTIONS: EXTERNAL WALLS, INTERNAL WALLS, FLOORS, BUILDING SERVICES AND FITTINGS.

External walls – A variety of water-resistant paints and coatings (or tanking) are available that can help prevent floodwater soaking into the external face of the wall.

Internal walls – Flood resistance can be improved by replacing gypsum plaster

with more flood-resistant materials, such as lime-based plaster products, ceramic tiles, or hydraulic lime coatings.

Floors – Modern solid concrete floors with damp-proof membranes are generally regarded as the most flood-resistant floor type. With suspended timber or concrete floors, floodwater is likely to collect in the void beneath the floor.

Building services and fittings – To prevent damage, kitchen units, hobs and ovens, electricity meters, fuse boxes and gas/oil-fired boilers should preferably be installed above the maximum expected flood level.

Find out more  
[www.environment-agency.gov.uk](http://www.environment-agency.gov.uk)



David Sowden was one of the first residents to install flood guards on his house in Crosby on Eden

“You have to be patient, I have only been here a short time.”

He finds that every local has an experience to recount, and many were involved in the rescue operations somehow.

John Little, supported housing manager at Carlisle Housing Association, led the work of setting up emergency reception centres – but not before becoming stranded himself on a flooded road.

He and colleagues cared for about 300 people for the next six days, as well as sending out food and supplies to people camping in the upstairs of their own homes. People with learning difficulties, disabilities, homeless people and those needing medication all turned up at the centre needing specialist help. Many had no clothing or personal belongings, having been evacuated by boat in their nightclothes.

The housing association provided temporary office space for council staff whose building was flooded, and dealt with 30 of its own properties that also suffered water damage.

Carlisle HA is unusual in holding the contract from the council for coordinating emergency housing. When it was set up in 2002 to take a transfer of the council’s housing stock, John and his team also transferred. Rather than lose their expertise, the council struck a deal to continue receiving the service.

The council’s Homeless Section had the nightmare task of dealing with those people who were made homeless. They worked with Carlisle HA to free up as many of the association’s empty properties as possible, arranging to have the properties repaired, decorated and basically furnished, to ensure that the families were warm and safe. Adding to the problems, the city council’s own hostel for homeless people was

“People don’t realise the stress. You have been so busy fighting with the different organisations, it is only later that it hits you. This has eased the pressure”

under 120 cm of water, and all of the residents were displaced.

Dealing with the longer-term aftermath is the task of the city council’s principal housing officer, Allan Dickson. With support from the Government Office for the North West, the council successfully bid for £1.5 million in special government funding to tackle the remaining housing problems.

With thousands of homes already built on the low-lying flood plains in and around the city, plus three schools and hundreds of businesses, the council cannot afford to take a chance that flooding will not happen again.

“With climate change this will certainly happen more regularly in the years ahead,” he says. “We need to alleviate the problems already there and give peace of mind to people about the future.”

High banks or bunds are being constructed along the riverbanks to contain the waters in the city. Further out, however, the need for help is acute.

So the council used some of its special funding on an innovative scheme of protection for individual houses that could be replicated elsewhere. As some 5 million people and 2 million homes in England and Wales live with the risk of flooding, the potential is huge.

The system involves fitting a simple-looking set of guards for doors and airbricks to each house at risk. In an emergency, an automated telephone call from the Environment Agency alerts householders, giving them about two hours’ warning. They then fit the guards, which are stored in a shed or attic.

David Sowden from the village of Crosby on Eden is one of the householders trying out the new guards. He and his wife had to get upstairs quickly in the flood as 40 cm



From flood guards to solar panels: residents are opening up to eco features

of sewage-contaminated water poured in. The guards are designed to keep all water out for 20 hours, and the greater the pressure, the better the seals work.

David says the protection measures are especially welcome at this time. He had to live in a caravan for almost a year, and had severe stress in dealing with builders and insurance companies – and knowing all the time that another potentially devastating flood could be on the way. “People don’t realise the stress,” he says. “You have been so busy fighting with the different organisations, it is only later that it hits you. This has eased the pressure.”

As Carlisle recovers, a legacy of serious stress-related illness has begun to emerge. That is another reason why all the agencies are keen to avoid another flood resulting from what everyone believes will be an inevitable repeat of extreme weather conditions. The cost of damage to buildings has run into millions of pounds, and the human cost incalculable. The guards for 72 homes cost a mere £285,000.

And as for the goldfish, they were returned safely to their owner. **open**

**Find out more**  
[www.carlisleha.org.uk](http://www.carlisleha.org.uk)  
[www.carlisle.gov.uk](http://www.carlisle.gov.uk)

# a green future

New environmental standards are helping to improve the quality of tenants' lives in Walsall, and setting a benchmark for the rest of the country

**M**ark Bird apologises for being a 'green anorak' but can't stop himself asking everyone to do just a little to help save the planet.

He is a major works project manager at Walsall Housing Group, which, along with Ocean Housing Group, has thoroughly road tested a new housing standard that will help achieve more than a little in the drive for a green future.

The EcoHomes XB standard is designed to improve the environmental performance of England's existing housing stock. Housing associations are the first to use the standard, which is endorsed by the Housing Corporation. The Corporation also spent over £90,000 in funding its development.

Mark and the Walsall team applied XB to 127 of their rented homes in Aldridge and Brownhills. Built in the 1970s, the mix of terraced and semi-detached houses, plus flats, had very low environmental ratings.

Extensive works to bring the homes up to the decent standard were already planned, including double glazing, condensing boilers and insulation.

**“The standard is important because it gives us an opportunity to show how green the business is – all the way from the top with our policies. You can look at yourselves and change what isn't working”**



Mark Bird: self-confessed green anorak

JULIAN HAWKINS

An XB tool developed by the Building Research Establishment allowed the group to plan further works to raise the environmental rating again. These included water meters, rainwater butts, photovoltaic tiles to power communal lighting to flats, telephone points for home working and recycling.

XB allows organisations to measure the housing's environmental 'footprint' before and after major works, and plan for the future. The effect on the homes in the pilot was dramatic: the score after the first set of works rocketed by almost 150%, and a further 64% increase can be achieved to reach the maximum feasible.

Mark is now planning to roll out XB throughout the group's 20,000 stock.

“The standard is important because it gives us an opportunity to show how green the business is – all the way from the top with our policies. You can look at yourselves and change what isn't working,” he says.

WHG tenant Nicky Marshall has found the new condensing boiler, double glazing and other features in her home have cut fuel bills dramatically. She is especially pleased with the

shower, which saves water.

Nicky says the WHG improvements have made her more conscious of green issues, such as switching off lights to avoid waste. Now she and her neighbours are asking WHG to work with the council on providing more recycling facilities.

Mark accepts that cost is often seen as a reason not to adopt ideas like XB. But the urgency of climate change means we cannot afford excuses, he argues. “You have to grasp the nettle,” he says. “What we do now will have a dramatic impact on our children's and grandchildren's generations.”

In the south west, Ocean Housing Group has piloted XB on two estates, one rural and one urban. Since the improvements were made, their scores have jumped by over 50%. The work also helped identify where money would be best spent. Importantly, chief executive David Renwick says, it also showed which homes simply wouldn't be worth investing in. **open**

**Find out more**  
[www.whg.uk.com](http://www.whg.uk.com)  
[www.bre.co.uk](http://www.bre.co.uk)

JULIAN HAWKINS



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### XB explained

ECOHOMES XB WAS LAUNCHED IN JUNE THIS YEAR AFTER TWO YEARS IN DEVELOPMENT. IT IS A USER-FRIENDLY TOOL DESIGNED TO HELP HOUSING ASSOCIATIONS AND LOCAL AUTHORITIES PLAN AND MEASURE THE BENEFIT OF IMPROVEMENT WORKS TO THEIR HOUSING STOCK AND AID THE OVERALL ENVIRONMENTAL PERFORMANCE.

The scheme is simple to use, and flexible enough to allow for the wide

variety of housing types and measures that can be adopted.

Users assess their existing homes on seven criteria: management policies, energy, access to public transport, pollution, water, health and waste. Each area gets a score out of 100.

The package developed by the Building Research Establishment then allows users to develop short and long-term targets for improvement. It offers a target score that the landlord should be able to reach for each

development or neighbourhood, using recommended measures.

The system recognises that some housing types and areas will have poor scores initially and that some measures will not be feasible or cost effective. It seeks to guide associations to maximise environmental performance of their stock according to what is most achievable in each location, and to measure improvement.

Find out more  
[www.breeam.org/ecohomes.html](http://www.breeam.org/ecohomes.html)

Ellie and her grandparents in their XB rated home

# can we fix it?

If children's TV programmes are anything to go by then 'Yes we can'. Some of the world's best-known builders are making the switch to eco thinking

When Bob the Builder starts construction on an eco village, complete with solar panels and straw houses, you know something is up. Bob's foray into Sunflower Valley – a project he won by competitive tender, incidentally – is the latest sign that consumer demand for green products and lifestyles is reaching the top of the list.

Andy von Bradsky, a director of architecture practice PRP which specialises in sustainable housing projects, detects a change in the air. The UK's traditionally conservative approach to building is finally under challenge, he believes.

The shift is led by the social housing sector, where innovation is supported and landlords have a long-term interest in housing. Tenants who experience the benefits of low bills and excellent thermal comfort in new homes often become evangelists for a green future. And recent rises in fuel costs have also helped push the issue of green technology to the fore.

"We are only a couple of years from a point where green design is demanded," Andy says. New building regulations, the Code for Sustainable Homes, which is due in force from next year and will promote the energy labelling of homes, and EU directives will help to keep the issue in the news. "People will demand to know the energy performance in the same way as they do for fridges," he says.

When all developers must meet higher standards, cities will compete to raise their game, he predicts. And as early as 2010, we may reach the 'tipping point' where green design is fully embraced by the private market and there is no turning back. "This is the future," Andy says. "Policy is moving only in one direction." **open**

Find out more  
[www.bobthebuilder.com](http://www.bobthebuilder.com)  
[www.prparchitects.co.uk](http://www.prparchitects.co.uk)

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### Labelling homes

THE GOVERNMENT'S CODE FOR SUSTAINABLE HOMES WILL BE INTRODUCED FROM 2007, AND IS DESIGNED TO DOVETAIL WITH THE ECOHOMES STANDARD.

The five levels, from basic to an aspirational carbon-neutral 'five star', will combine mandatory performance standards with tradable, optional elements.

Also coming into force from 2008 is UK adoption of the EU energy performance of buildings directive. This will require information for buyers and renters of accommodation to be made available, to enable them to make informed choices.

Though still in development, Energy Performance Certificates are likely to be similar to those used on white electrical goods which show the efficiency level achieved within a range. Using EcoHomes XB may help associations produce certificates.

Find out more  
**Sustainable Homes consultation paper**  
[www.communities.gov.uk/index.asp?id=1162094](http://www.communities.gov.uk/index.asp?id=1162094)

**EU energy performance of buildings directive**  
[www.defra.gov.uk/ENVIRONMENT/energy/internat/ecbuildings.htm](http://www.defra.gov.uk/ENVIRONMENT/energy/internat/ecbuildings.htm)

Buying clubs like One Planet Products are playing a big part in helping to make sustainable products available at the lowest possible prices

# natural homes

It is probably the dream of every householder to live in a home so energy efficient that you can sell electricity back to the national grid.

That is a distinct possibility for tenants of Vale Housing Association after photovoltaic cells were installed in four homes as a demonstration project. The scheme, which is backed by the Department for Trade and Industry and the Housing Corporation, will monitor tenants' fuel bills over a two-year period.

The Oxfordshire-based housing association is among a growing number of associations that wants to ensure as much as possible of the billions of pounds' worth of maintenance and construction components going into their homes are obtained from sustainable sources. Vale is also recycling during building works, cutting down on skip waste.

With the Housing Corporation insisting that all of the 70,000 new homes built using its £3.3 billion investment over the next two years must reach EcoHomes 'very good' standards, the pressure is on to 'go green'.

Other associations in the region are members of buying clubs. These help associations, councils and private developers to get the best prices and most efficient delivery of components.

Recently a new bulk-buying club, One Planet Products, launched in the South East. The brainchild of the BioRegional Development Group and WWF, it aims to make sustainable products available at the lowest possible cost. **open**

Find out more  
[www.oneplanetproducts.com](http://www.oneplanetproducts.com)



Residents inspect new solar panels at a sustainable products fair

Our pick of reports relevant to this issue's green theme, plus some of the latest publications supported by the Housing Corporation. All are available online at [www.housingcorp.gov.uk/open](http://www.housingcorp.gov.uk/open)

## What's new?



### EcoHomes XB: The environmental rating for existing housing

EcoHomes XB has been developed to allow existing stock to be assessed and monitored. It balances environmental performance with the need for a high quality of life and a safe and healthy internal environment.

This assessment guide highlights how the standard facilitates the tracking of improvements made during routine maintenance and minor refurbishment.

It groups the issues assessed into seven categories: energy, water, pollution, materials, transport, ecology and land use, health and well being. Many of the issues are optional, ensuring EcoHomes is flexible enough to be tailored to a particular development or market.



### Domestic energy primer: An introduction to energy efficiency in existing homes

Home energy use is responsible for 27% of the UK's carbon dioxide emissions, which contribute to climate change. By following the Energy Saving Trust's best practice standards, new build and refurbished housing will be more energy efficient – reducing these emissions and saving energy, money and the environment.

This guide provides housing associations and others with information on how home owners and tenants can identify opportunities for improving energy efficiency. It includes recommendations for common energy efficiency improvements, typical costs and savings, and advice on issues associated with improvements and how to avoid problems.

## Climate change



### Carbon assessment and reduction in regeneration areas: Best practice manual

Translating national emission reduction targets into local action requires strategies that relate to all communities, including those in regeneration areas.

This best practice manual focuses on CARRA (Carbon Assessment and Reduction in Regeneration Areas), a local action project on climate change in the EC1 New Deal area of Islington, which concluded in December 2004.

Headed up by the London Borough of Islington, it looks to improve understanding by making the connection between energy use and climate change.



### Warm words: How are we telling the climate story and can we tell it better?

Climate change is the subject of more media debate and governmental communications than ever before. But the effect it may be having is not always clear.

This report, published by the Institute of Public Policy Research, sets out the results of research into how debates on climate change in the UK might be connecting or failing to connect with mass audiences, and how it could be made more effective.

## EcoHomes



### EcoHomes: Achieving very good

This guide supports housing associations, developers and their design partners in meeting the EcoHomes 'very good' standard, which is a requirement from April 2006 for homes funded by the Housing Corporation's National Affordable Housing Programme 2006-08.

The guide is based on the EcoHomes Support Programme of 2005 and includes

recommendations on the EcoHomes process, indicative costings and housing association case studies.

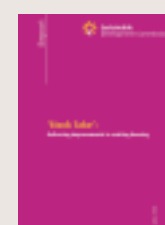


### A guide to EcoHomes: An environmental assessment method for homes

This guide contains information on the value of EcoHomes and how housing associations can achieve it.

It introduces the concept of EcoHomes, the issues it covers, the costs involved and how the assessment method works. It also explains why EcoHomes is important, what the Housing Corporation requirements are and how this may affect your scheme.

Useful sections include topics such as getting started with EcoHomes, a green guide to specification, and further help on finding an assessor.



### Stock take: Delivering improvements in existing housing

Homes already built account for 99% of our total housing stock. This report assesses the level of savings in resources, energy, water and waste that can be achieved by improving and making more efficient use of the existing stock of 21 million homes.

Funded by the Sustainable Development Commission, it will be of interest to central government policy makers involved in sustainable development, resource efficiency, housing and sustainable communities; local authorities; housing associations and housing owners that prepare maintenance strategies; and NGOs concerned with neighbourhood renewal, communities and the environment.

## Energy



### Renewable energy factsheets

These easy-to-read factsheets, produced by Energy for Sustainable Development in collaboration with the Housing Corporation,

summarise the current prices and benefits of using renewable energy.

Topics in the series include factsheets on affordable warmth, biomass, community energy, condensing boilers, new build environmental quality, refurbishment, solar water heating, wind energy and more.

Each contains a handy 'what is?' explanation and cases studies to highlight examples and best practice.

The Community energy factsheet includes examples from north London housing associations that are using community heating to provide heat from a central source through a network of pipes.

## Finance



### Green value: Green buildings, growing assets

A report that aims to stimulate discussion on what our future sustainable communities should look like, and

how we can get there.

The report includes an insight into the profound impact buildings have on the quality of our lives and the world around us. It highlights the work of British Columbia Province in hosting the world's first sustainable Winter Olympics in 2010, and how it plans to encourage sustainable green building practices based on strong business principles.

Green value looks at the financial value of green buildings and how they contribute to a sustainable community, balancing economics with the environment.



### Financial analysis of Gallions Ecopark

Ecopark shows how the UK social housing sector can contribute to environmental sustainability.

Through Ecopark the developer, Gallions Housing Association, wants to demonstrate that sustainable living is not something new and cutting-edge that needs a huge effort and an immense budget. The homes contain a combination of cost-effective and applied energy saving and sustainable principles. The project has

focused on demonstrating an environmentally friendly form of housing construction that can be replicable in social housing on a wider scale.

Four different house types incorporate different combinations of technologies to reduce the consumption of energy, including sun rooms, solar collectors and under-floor heating, amongst other things.

## Flooding



### High level target 5: Development and flood risk 2004-05

We cannot eliminate the risk of flooding, but we can seek to manage the risks that are ever present, and increasing.

This report and its appendices summarise the impact of the technical advice on flood risk provided by the Environment Agency, on planning decisions made by English local planning authorities.

With major revisions to the planning system in England, and changes due to the way the planning system deals with development and flood risks, it's hoped that current and future flood risk is taken into account at all stages of the revised planning process.



### Damage limitation guide

It's estimated that as many as 2 million homes are situated in flood plains in England and Wales and are at risk of flooding from rivers or the sea.

Finding out whether your home is in a flood risk area, understanding what you can do to reduce the risk and taking action to prepare in advance are the key steps in learning how to cope with flooding.

This useful guide gives practical advice on how to reduce the damage floodwater can cause to properties. Measures are often simple and do not need technical knowledge.

It contains information about understanding if a home is in a flood risk area, what preventive measures you can take to reduce the risk, and the key steps in learning how to cope with flooding.



### Development and flood risk - guidance for the construction industry

Flooding can be devastating in terms of the cost of repairs, replacement of damaged property, loss of business and considerable personal trauma.

This guidance will be of value to developers, builders, designers and planners. It contains useful background information for insurers, mortgage lenders, building owners and occupiers, and others involved in the development process.

It sets out practical guidance in assessing flood risk as part of the development process, recommending a tiered approach to flood risk assessment and a simple-to-use toolkit to help practitioners complete assessments.



### Standards for the repair of buildings following flooding

Flooding is a major problem for many people in the United Kingdom, posing a risk to health, safety and well being, and resulting in widespread damage to property.

In the autumn 2000 floods, 10,000 properties were flooded at more than 700 locations at a cost in the order of £1.0 billion. Flood damage to properties can range from minor effects on walls, floors, basements and services to more serious issues such as structural damage to buildings.

This guide contains illustrations of damage, surveys, drying and decontamination, and repair work to buildings. Appendices include guidance to homeowners, technical information, details of organisations that can advise on flooding and information on the provision of insurance.

## Green spaces



### Decent homes, decent spaces

Decent homes, decent spaces follows on from a conference, Neighbourhoods Green, held in London in December 2003 which demonstrated

that action was required to promote green spaces within the social housing sector, to ensure that their design, management and use meets the needs of residents.

This report provides the context for Neighbourhoods Green, highlights some case studies from the conference, and sets out the project's objectives. It provides an initial source for those in social housing with an interest in the design, management and safe use of spaces around residents' homes.

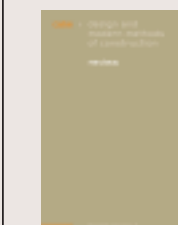


### Start with the park: Creating sustainable urban green spaces in areas of housing growth and renewal

Start with the park is a good practice guide for everyone involved in the processes of sustainable growth and renewal.

It is particularly relevant to the creation and care of green spaces in housing growth areas and housing market renewal areas. It will inform and inspire strategic decision makers working in local delivery and partnership bodies, local and regional authorities, government departments and other national agencies, private developers, housebuilders, registered social landlords and community and voluntary sector groups.

## Modern methods of construction



### Design and modern methods of construction

The term modern methods of construction (MMC) embraces a range of technologies involving various forms of

prefabrication and/or off-site assembly.

This report presents the findings of a programme of research funded by the Housing Corporation and commissioned by CABE (the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment), to investigate the qualitative implications of MMC on the design quality of social housing schemes.

It focuses exclusively on schemes that have received funding from the Housing Corporation under round one of the Challenge Fund.

MMC is increasingly regarded as a realistic means of improving quality, reducing time spent on site, improving on site safety and addressing skills shortages in the construction of UK housing.



### Using modern methods of construction to build homes more quickly and efficiently

This report explains how modern methods

of construction can be used to build good-quality homes quickly and efficiently.

An independent examination, it aims to identify how to get best value when using modern methods of construction. The end result is a report that provides practical help to social landlords and private developers.

The research is drawn from expert knowledge contributed by 50 leading sector practitioners in four workshops, together with further detailed information from over 20 organisations currently active in the home building industry.

It is an invaluable starting point for any organisation considering how to introduce modern methods of construction. It invites others to develop the results described in this report and in the supporting material.

### Sustainable development



### Securing the future: UK Government sustainable development strategy

This report outlines the Government's main strategy for sustainable development in the UK. It aims to enable all people to enjoy a better quality of life without compromising the quality of life of future generations.

It takes account of new policies since 1999, and it highlights the renewed international push for sustainable development from the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg in 2002.

The lead Department, Defra, chairs a programme board to oversee delivery of the strategy, but all UK Departments share responsibility for making sustainable development a reality.



### Sustainable development strategy

Sustainable development in the housing association sector will significantly contribute to the development of

sustainable communities across the country.

The Housing Corporation is committed to mainstreaming sustainability principles into both the housing association sector and its own operations and activities. This commitment is articulated through the development of the Housing Corporation's sustainable development strategy.

This publication provides an overview of some of the activities that the Housing Corporation and the housing association sector will need to do to deliver the outcomes sought in the strategy.



### Developing an environmental policy and action plan: A guide for housing associations

This guide is based on the experience of a series of

seminars held by Sustainable Homes during 2000 and 2001.

The seminars provided guidance for 33 housing associations developing their own environmental policy and action plan. They varied in size (from 500 to 14,500 homes), location, stock types and provided a good mix of experience.



### Invest in sustainability

This report explores ways to move sustainability from the fringes to the mainstream of the UK housing sector.

To achieve this, a

partnership between Insight Investment (the asset manager of HBOS plc) and WWF-UK, aims to raise awareness of the environmental and social impacts of people's homes. It explores incentives, such as new financial products, that promote more sustainable lifestyle choices.

In January 2004, the first benchmark of UK listed house builders' performance and

reporting on sustainability was published. This report follows up that work, charting the progress that those companies have made in demonstrating their commitment to sustainable development.



### A regional sustainability checklist for developments

Our homes and communities have a wide range of impacts on sustainability, affecting

the economic, social and environmental well being of both the local and wider area.

A development not only has significant direct environmental impacts in terms of generating carbon emissions and waste and using natural resources such as water and aggregates, but the way homes and communities are developed also determines our lifestyle decisions and our overall impact on the local and global environment.

The national sustainability checklist for developments sets out a range of questions addressing key sustainability issues, and provides technically sound markers for 'good' and 'best' practice.



### Six steps to sustainable development for housing associations

A strategic approach is needed to mainstream sustainable development

across housing associations. Six steps tries to define key processes and issues that all housing associations will need to embrace at some point.

Sustainable development can be complex and daunting. This publication aims to provide a route map – a step-by-step guide for associations and their partners in achieving the many benefits sustainable development can bring.



### RuralZED: Affordable sustainable housing for Cornwall

With a Housing Corporation Innovation and Good Practice Grant, Cornwall Rural

Housing Association commissioned ZEDfactory Ltd to develop the blueprints for an affordable, sustainable, carbon-neutral house that could be replicated throughout Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly.

This report presents the design of the two model units. It takes the reader through ZED design principles and explains how they have been applied.

The project covers two designs that address the need for affordable housing, combat fuel poverty and reduce the environmental impacts of the homes and associated lifestyles to a truly sustainable level.

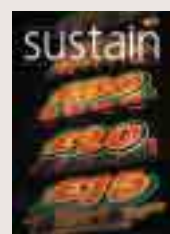


### Green futures

A magazine that aims to lead the debate on sustainable development, providing a lively snapshot of the latest news and opinion, along with cutting-edge

examples of good practice.

Regular contributors include leading environmentalists Jonathon Porritt and Sara Parkin, as well as journalists such as Polly Ghazi (The Observer), Oliver Tickell (Daily Telegraph), Roger Cowe (The Guardian) and Caspar Henderson (Financial Times).



### Sustain

The built environment represents the single most significant physical expression of human social development on this planet. Its sustainable development is

fundamental to our future.

Sustain magazine is a bi-monthly publication, dedicated to ensuring that public and private-sector decision makers are kept fully up to date in the field of sustainable development.

## open

INSPIRATION AND IDEAS FROM THE HOUSING CORPORATION

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London W1T 7BN

www.housingcorp.gov.uk/open

## openquotes

OUR LOOK AT WHAT RESIDENTS ARE SAYING ABOUT THIS ISSUE'S THEME – GREEN ISSUES

“The house is so warm. The way the house is designed means the gas bill is a fraction of what I used to pay. We also save on water bills, because water is recycled, and on electricity with energy-efficient light bulbs”

Candy Smiles, Oakeside Meadow, South Molton

“Living in my new home is as good as, if not better than, living in a traditionally built house. It's much warmer and much quieter than places I've lived before”

Mr Dover, Gipsy Close, Norwich

“Because the flats are so well insulated, you don't get any noise”

Angela Riley, Corbridge

“Since having had input into the design of my home, I am looking forward to the future. I can't wait to move into my warm new home with its double glazed windows”

Mary Cox, Christian Fields, Gravesend

“Since the floods the community has come together. I know people now that I had never spoken to before. The atmosphere is terrific”

Jim Rankine, Milbourne Road, Carlisle

“The residents' green day was fantastic. The small changes made will make it much more pleasant for the tenants, and everyone here feels a lot better after all the exercise!”

Jenny Smith, Severn Walk, Sutton Hill

sixty seconds with...

# sheila button



She's a self-confessed organic food ambassador, a board member on the Sustainable Buildings Task Group, a consumer regulator, a management coach and previously a housing manager. We caught up with a multi-talented Sheila Button at her Cambridge home.

### When did you first start thinking green?

I've been green for as long as I can remember. My parents were always recycling and growing vegetables, and I eat organic whenever I can, so I guess it all started from thinking about food.

### How did you get involved with the Housing Corporation?

I was chair of a housing association for ten years, so I first got involved with the Housing Corporation that way. I'm proud of the work we've done since, like requiring housing associations to be EcoHomes 'very good' and our work on XB.

### Reading anything good at the moment?

The architecture of happiness, by Alain DeBotton. It talks about what makes a house beautiful, and how architecture and the contents of our homes affect us more than we might think. It's great, I'd recommend it.

### How eco-friendly is your home?

We've had all the low-energy fittings like movement sensitive lights and zoned heating systems for years now. I live in a converted barn in beautiful South Cams, and the plan is to extend by a few rooms, including new solar panels. It would be great to see the old architecture of the place working in harmony with modern eco friendly ways. **open**

“I've been green for as long as I can remember. My parents were always recycling and growing vegetables, and I eat organic whenever I can, so I guess it all started from thinking about food”

## openfact

### Reducing CO2

If all new housing met Housing Corporation standards for affordable homes, 120,000 tonnes of carbon dioxide would be saved each year. That's equivalent to taking 12,000 cars off the roads.



After the floods: building new £12 million flood defences in Carlisle

**open**  
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