



Addressing Agenda 21

By Robert Kyriakides, CEO Genersys Plc

Our ideas about what a decent home should be have changed over the years. In 1953 Poplar Borough Council built council homes on its Lansbury Estate without central heating, but with coal fires and with water pipes visible as they passed through rooms. They were expensive to heat, water was heated by a small immersion heater in an un-lagged cylinder and heat dispersed rapidly through the Crittal steel windows and up the chimneys. The lofts were not insulated.

These days housing provision is largely undertaken by Housing Associations. They provide decent accommodation at an affordable cost. It is worth looking at one of the leading Housing Associations - Westlea - to see how things have changed over the past fifty years.

Westlea owns over 6000 homes; under the energetic management of its Building Services Manager, Stephen Parker and the caring eyes of its board of directors, Westlea has been a real leader in the field of environmentally conscious housing management.

Westlea knows that a thermal solar system has two important advantages over a fossil fuel system. First, a good system can make a family's energy more affordable because it will produce the vast bulk of a family's hot water without significant cost. Secondly, thermal solar systems can save nearly a tonne of carbon dioxide emissions each year.

It can be hard to envisage a tonne of carbon dioxide; the best way is to picture the soot that coal burning fires produce - the kind of fires that were built on the Lansbury estate in Poplar fifty years ago. Soot is virtually pure carbon and a large coal sack of soot contains about as much carbon as a tonne of carbon dioxide.

Fifty years ago we were discharging carbon in the form of soot and carbon dioxide into the atmosphere and paid for it with the pea-soupers and smogs of those years. The Clean Air Acts put an end to the fogs but not the carbon dioxide. Today the matter with which we pollute the atmosphere is invisible and odourless but just as dangerous.

Westlea recognise that there is an important balance between preserving energy and using energy. Their homes have very high SAP

ratings - a good 15 points higher than their peer group. Having created conditions where they may preserve more of the energy they need (and therefore use less energy) Westlea have now turning to generating energy for their homes.



They have carried out a variety of projects using a variety of sustainable and renewable products. Westlea, working with Jephson Homes and using funding from Swindon Council, built seven Integer homes near Abbeymeads. The homes were fitting with Genersys solar thermal systems as part of an overall environmentally sustainable approach. Westlea have also committed to installing over one hundred thermal solar systems in houses in the next six months and we are busy training their installers, Ultra-Warm in the requisite skills.

Recently Westlea was awarded government 'Clear-Skies' funding for the installation of solar systems for four blocks of flats in Wiltshire. The Clear Skies Scheme will fund 50% of the overall costs. The project involves the installation of Genersys solar water heating systems for 98 flats. The solar systems will, using the power of light, produce up to 70% of hot water free, rather than using costly energy made by burning fossil fuels.

The Government, by making Clear-Skies funding available, demonstrates that thermal solar systems are an important way of tackling climate change and fuel poverty as we moves towards a low carbon economy. Housing Associations, like Westlea with a clear environmental vision, are leading the way.

