

By Robert Kyriakides, CEO Genersys Plc

The people of the North West are ardent about the environment and equally passionate about ending fuel poverty. It's official! During 2003 Rochdale Borough Council undertook a comprehensive consultation exercise to find out what the current and future issues the residents of Rochdale felt were the most important. Highest on the list of the people's priorities were improving the environment, ending fuel poverty and making a positive contribution towards tackling climate change.

As a result Rochdale Borough Council together with Rochdale Housing Initiative formed the Rochdale Borough Energy Forum, a network of housing, regeneration and sustainability agencies in the Borough. The Forum has been successful in hosting a number of events, seminars and raising awareness of sustainable construction. Furthermore, it has been the catalyst for large scale solar thermal installations in Rochdale and Heywood so that people can see what can actually be achieved.

Solar thermal technology was chosen as the next logical step in a chain of energy efficiency measures that the North West Housing Associations started some years ago with insulation double glazing and efficient heating systems.

Northern Counties Housing Association identified Cherwell Court in Heywood as suitable for a retrofit solar thermal installation. This sheltered accommodation building was built in 1985 and is home to 40 elderly residents in 34 flats, plus communal areas, laundry facilities and kitchens. Khubsuret House run by St. Vincent's Housing Association in Deeplish was also nominated as a suitable building. Meaning 'beautiful house' in Urdu, Khubsuret was built in 1994 and contains 34 flats and communal areas for elderly Asian and English residents.

Fuel poverty is a big issue for both buildings as their residents come from the most deprived communities in Rochdale and pay their fuel bills separately.

Working in partnership with Genersys plc, who undertook the installations as a partnership exercise, these two housing associations now have their residents' fuel bill substantially reduced as a result of using the free benign energy from natural daylight.

Douglas Dalziel, director of Genersys in charge of this operation says "Our technology works using daylight - it does not have to be direct sunlight. We have fitted a display in the entrance hall of Khubsuret which shows exactly how much energy we are getting at any given time. At a seminar held there in early March the buildings were demonstrably getting free energy in very cloudy conditions."

The systems act as valuable pre-heat to existing fossil fuel installations. Each building has twelve Genersys 1000-10 panels on a south facing roof. David Read, of Future Heating Limited, engineer in charge of the installation said "We would have preferred to put double the number panels on the roof; there was enough space on the roof but there was not enough space to store the water heated and as a result we had to do design the systems as pre-heat systems."

Even so, the installations are providing free green clean energy and are saving around twenty tonnes of carbon dioxide each year.

There are other initiatives afoot in the North West. The North Manchester Energy Efficiency Advice Centre has run a number of workshops with the residents to explain how the installations work and the other practical measures people can save energy and money. The local awareness of the need to tackle climate change and the determination end fuel poverty is apparent to all concerned.

Rochdale applied for Clear Skies funding for the scheme, twice and was unfortunately unsuccessful each time. With tremendous resolve they set about raising match funding and arm twisting so that they could get their projects off the ground. These are believed to be the largest solar thermal projects in the North West but if the good people of Rochdale have their way, Cherwell Court and Khubsuret House will not remain the largest solar thermal installations in the North West for much longer.

