



Section One

HOMES IN WEST SOMERSET

The West Somerset Context

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HOMES IN WEST SOMERSET GETTING STARTED

The housing context

- There are 17,000 dwellings in West Somerset, 4,000 of which are in the Exmoor National Park.
- Government has deemed that 2,500 new homes should be built in West Somerset between 2006-2026, most of which will have to be in and around Minehead, Williton and Watchet.
- The average cost of a house in the district is £218,000 (national average is £164,000)
- Average earnings are 15% below national average and 25% of households are in fuel poverty.
- 70% of homes in the district have solid walls and are therefore difficult to insulate
- 60% have no mains gas. Containerised gas (bottle or tank) is more expensive
- There are a high number of listed buildings, and many in conservation areas

We also produce 30% more carbon dioxide than the average for the south west - 11.41 tonnes per annum. These conditions mean that making West Somerset homes more energy efficient can be more complicated than in other parts of the country. This section provides an introduction and overview of ways of upgrading the energy efficiency of your home.

Upgrading your home will help reduce carbon emissions and use of the world's resources, and will save on energy bills in the future. There are two different ways to get to your goal.

1. Researching and doing or overseeing it yourself. It can be cheaper to buy the materials and do the work yourself or employ a local builder.
2. Hand the whole job over to an installer. This will cost more than option 1 but will involve you in less work.

Whichever you decide, you may need planning permission, or building regulations requirements (see section 2).

Before you start any insulation or heating project it's a good idea to talk to as many people as you can to find out what materials and prices are available. At the end of this section is a list of the main sources of advice, national and local - a good place to start.

Many homes in West Somerset are let to tenants by private landlords. Landlords may be able to get grant money for repairs, insulation and renewables. In West Somerset the Landlord Accreditation Scheme administered by Sedgemoor council offers a grant up to £3000 plus a 3% loan up to £15,000 to bring homes up to the decent homes standard. There is also an empty property grant of £10,000. For information about this contact Esther Carter and Nick Jobson (on 0845 2417 243 sedgemoor.gov.uk). Landlords can offset repairs against tax due if they improve properties.

Grants and discounts for heating and insulation are available to home owners and private tenants (not housing association tenants). There are certain income and other requirements (see section 6).

Effective ways to make your home energy efficient

1. Insulation The easiest, cheapest, quickest place to start, which makes the biggest difference to your bills and comfort, is to insulate so that the heat you generate inside the building stays inside! There's a lot more about this in section 3.

Before starting to insulate you need to find out whether the building has any problems that need to be addressed, such as damp. If it is an old building which needs to breathe it may be better to use natural products.

2. Heating. After you have thought about insulation you should think about how you create heat for heating and hot water in your home or business. We assume that you want to change, add to or reduce the heat inputs (heat producers) that you currently have in an existing building. And much of this information is relevant if you are building new too. Reviewing the systems you have is a good starting point and is worth doing well before your current system breaks down. The process of upgrading can be time consuming and is best not attempted after your boiler terminally breaks down in the middle of winter.

Heating water and heating rooms are things we will always need to do in our homes. We can use various fossil fuels to do this, or we can use the sun to provide the heat. Solar thermal systems can provide hot water and photovoltaics can produce electricity. The new Feed in Tariff (FIT) pays for every unit of electricity produced, and a similar scheme is proposed for solar hot water. The return may be greater than putting money into a bank. (see section 4).

3. Creating a system that works for you.

It's satisfying to create a system that works for you, but deciding which systems, products and tradesmen to use is the difficult bit, and it helps to get as much advice as possible. There is lots of information and advice out there, and most is good but not all of it. The more investigation you do, the more you will get out of it. There are a lot of websites and advice lines. You can talk to manufacturers, suppliers, builders and other people who have renovated their houses (see section 5).

Talk to the authorities. Planning departments will advise you on what you can and cannot do in relation to planning permission. The District Council building regulations officers know a lot about building work. If you plan to make changes that will affect the character or appearance of your home, or if you live in a listed house or conservation area you need to find out what the authorities will allow.

Understanding the language used will help when deciding which products to buy and which businesses will fit and service them. If you do not want to get to grips with the language used you will have to trust your chosen supplier. If you go for a system that is provided and fitted by more than one organisation you should have a basic understanding of what they are talking about to be able to keep on top of the overall project, because individual suppliers may not.

Almost every building will be different which means that almost every solution will be different. Whether you chose to use very ecologically sound products or products that are expensive in energy and resources is your choice.

Decide on your budget. What fuels are available to you; whether you can make use of renewable technologies. There are many ways to help you make your house more energy efficient, and these are discussed in this pack.

4. Sources of advice. We have listed advice and grant giving agencies, commonly used websites, manufacturers, and building suppliers (see section 5). It's useful to get several quotes if you are going to employ a contractor. You may find that different contractors suggest different systems, which the advice centres can explain to you. Not all builders, or suppliers, will stock or work with the same materials. Section 4 is a good place to start, with a list of the main websites and builders and suppliers; but be aware that an energy advice centre, for instance, may well suggest higher prices than a local builder or fitter, because it will be giving you figures from national companies.

Everything changes constantly. New products are developed, criteria for grants and loans are altered. It also helps to know what might happen in the future. The schemes offering free insulation, draught proofing and heating will visit to tell you what can be done for free, or whether they can arrange for you to have work done at a subsidised rate. As we've said earlier, start by talking to as many people as you can.

Heat loss from the home



SOURCES OF ADVICE AND INFORMATION

Care and Repair

01278 442407

Practical help for vulnerable people (old/disabled) who find it hard to deal with the process of grant applications etc. They also help with repairs and improvements eg disabled adaptations.

Centre for alternative technology (CAT)

0845 330 4572

www.cat.org.uk

Their centre in Wales demonstrates sustainable building and their website has a lot of information.

Centre for Sustainable Energy (CSE)

01179 341400

info@cse.org.uk

Runs energy advice centre (see EST). Manages Somerset's Warm Streets scheme.

ECOS Trust

01458 259 400

www.ecostrust.org.uk

Promotes design and build techniques with reduced impact on the environment.

Energy Action Devon (DARE)

01837 892 000

www.devondare.org

Gives phone advice on what can be done and what it might cost. They will visit a site to assess the most appropriate kinds of insulation and renewable energy sources, but charge for this.

Energy Efficiency officer

01278 436 426

Somerset West Partnership: West Somerset, Sedgemoor and Taunton Deane

The Energy Saving Trust (EST)

0800 512 012

www.energysavingtrust.org.uk

They have an extensive database on all aspects of energy efficiency and renewable sources of energy. Their energy advice centres run advice lines and they refer people to schemes providing free or subsidised insulation and improved heating systems. They work with communities and have set up a Green Communities network (see below).

Exmoor National Park (ENPA)

01398 323 665

www.exmoornationalpark.gov.uk

Their sustainability officers give advice and information on schemes to bring energy efficiency to rural communities; and sources of funding. Planning and heritage officers give information on what can be done in the Park.

Green Communities network

0844 848 0077

www.energysavingtrust.org.uk/cafe

Set up by EST with a helpline for members giving more detailed information provided by people who have specialist knowledge of aspects of this work. Green Communities – 0844 848 0077

Landlord Accreditation Scheme

0845 2417 243

www.sedgemoor.gov.uk

Administered by Sedgemoor council. Offers a grant up to £3000 plus a 3% loan up to £15,000 to bring homes up to the decent homes standard. There is also an empty property grant of £10,000. Contact Esther Carter and Nick Jobson for information.

National Energy Action (NEA)

0191 261 5677

www.nea.org.uk

A charity that provides information and training on all aspects of energy efficiency

REGEN SW

01392 494 399

www.regensw.co.uk

Supports renewables in the SW. Communities for Renewables: new scheme (2010). This initiative aims to support and bring together communities in the south west interested in developing local renewable energy projects.

Warm Front

0800 316 2814

This is a national scheme providing home owners and private tenants with insulation, draught-proofing and new or improved heating systems. They have been conducting trials of renewable energy systems and hope to extend the scheme to cover these. Warm Front is managed by **EAGA** for the government (Lawrence Connelly 0191 247 3844 for developments in Warm Front www.eagarenewables.co.uk).

Warm Streets

0800 512 012

The Somerset grant scheme that offers cavity wall and loft insulation to residents, This is free to people who meet certain income or age criteria.

West Somerset Council (WSC)

01643 703 704

For planning and building regulations

Website for trusted suppliers

01395 579 879

Cathy Debenham

www.yougen.co.uk

Yougen is building up details of companies people have used across the UK. It wants feedback and other names to add to the list. There is discussion on their blog.

WISH

0800 512 012

Helps people over 50 in Somerset to stay warm and well in their home. Offers help with energy, adaptations and financial support.