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Northwards Housing

Northwards Housing is a not-for-profit company set up by Manchester City Council to manage approximately 12,500 social housing units across north and east Manchester. Northwards has completed a number of projects to date to go beyond the obligations imposed upon it by the Government's Decent Housing Standard, whereby 95 per cent of social housing is supposed to be 'wind and weather-tight, warm and with modern facilities' by 2010.

Tower blocks

In 2008 solar photovoltaic panels were fitted to the roofs of Northwards' ten multi-storey blocks, at a total cost of £500,000. Saving an estimated 42 tonnes of carbon dioxide emissions annually, the project received funding from Manchester City Council and the Government's Low Carbon Buildings Programme.

Residents were consulted about the scheme but not asked to contribute financially. Through the installation of import/export meters, Northwards will be able to export any excess electricity generated over and above the demands of the blocks, back to the national grid. The scheme generates electricity for lighting the communal areas so doesn't impact

directly on residents' fuel bills. However, any money saved on the landlord's electricity supply and the revenue generated from the exported electricity will be re-invested in further improvements and sustainability projects.

Award-winning Ranby Avenue

The scheme consisted of external improvement works to 12 properties within a 1950s maisonette block situated at Ranby Avenue in the Charlestown area of Manchester. The block was in need of major modernisation to both the external and internal areas.

The objective of the scheme was to improve the overall appearance of the properties, helping to improve the energy-efficiency performance, reduce carbon dioxide emissions, and benefit the residents by reducing their fuel bills and providing a warmer home. The photovoltaic solar panels provide power to a communal lighting system. Excess electricity generated will be sold back to the National Grid. It is hoped that any money saved through the use of the PV panels would reduce the cost of the landlord's electricity supply and, as with the tower blocks, be reinvested in other schemes for residents' benefit.



The main energy-efficiency related work was the installation of new condensing central heating boilers and controls, insulation/render system, new windows and the photovoltaic solar panels. The total cost for the work was £221,000 with £15,000 coming from the Low Carbon Buildings Programme for the solar panels.

The render system has had a major visual impact on the block, providing a much-needed facelift with the additional benefit of insulating the entire block.

The heating and hot water systems are now much more efficient and coupled with the new double-glazed windows and insulation, the properties are more desirable to live in. The project was developed to improve the thermal efficiency/comfort of the block, thus helping to reduce residents' fuel bills and helping to tackle fuel poverty; resident satisfaction with the project was 100 per cent of those who returned surveys.

Northwards has shown that the installation of photovoltaic technology needn't be a costly or complicated process, and that there are real benefits for organisations that pursue this

technology. Northwards has committed to sharing its experiences of the project with other interested parties. And with a runners-up award in Inside Housing's first Sustainable Housing awards in 2008, Northwards hopes that the above are the first of many exciting low carbon schemes.

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