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Information Paper

Energy efficient refurbishment of community centres

Findings from the U Choose 2 Retrofit scheme in Cornwall

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One of the biggest challenges currently facing the UK is improving the energy efficiency of existing buildings, which includes the community centres covered in this Information Paper. For many of the community groups who run their own community centres, keeping the operating costs affordable (including fuel bills) is likely to be one of the most significant and ongoing concerns they encounter.

Driven by such concerns, with an awareness of rising energy prices and aided by financial incentives for refurbishment measures and renewable energy sources, some community groups are considering what potential energy-saving adjustments they can make to their community buildings.

This Information Paper presents guidance and lessons learned from the refurbishment of several community centres in Cornwall. It will be of interest to community groups looking to embark on refurbishment of their community centres as well as to designers and consultants that may be called upon to assist with the management and delivery of such projects.

1 Background

Schemes such as the Green Deal (which provides loans for energy efficient refurbishment measures)[1], the Feed-in Tariff (FiT)[2] and Renewable Heat Incentive (RHI)[3] (which provide payments for generating renewable energy) incentivise many building owners to consider energy saving building works. In addition, rising energy prices and consequential increases in running costs will inevitably place a strain on the ability of community groups to manage and run shared community centres. These drivers may well push community groups to embark on construction projects, becoming 'clients' for builders and exposing them to an industry to which they may be unfamiliar.

Roof refurbishment is a common measure for community centres, and provides opportunities to reduce energy bills

In cases involving 'simple' works, such as basic loft insulation or heating system repairs/upgrades, little intervention may be required and works may be completed without a hitch (although considerations around maintaining appropriate ventilation are often overlooked). However, as the potential complexity of works increases, unforeseen consequences may include:

- solutions being installed that do not work well with the patterns of building usage
- measures not delivering the savings that may have initially been expected
- poor quality delivery as a result of different trades not fully understanding each other's requirements (ie a lack of overall leadership and management)
- further enabling works being required that have not been budgeted for
- delays due to unexpected additional works or miscommunication.