



GREEN BELTERS

One of the timber-clad eco-homes in Ardgeal

Four-bedroom house in the Highlands: £157,000 for 60 per cent shared ownership

For the latest in eco-living you don't have to be rich... housing associations are leading the way on green homes to rent or part-buy

By JENNY MCBAIN

FORGET draughty old council houses - these days if you want the latest eco features, a housing association home should be top of your list.

The new generation of eco-friendly social housing is cheap to heat and packed with green features that often surpass current government targets. And they put plenty of much more expensive new-builds to shame.

Many have cutting-edge heating systems, solar panels and large windows that let as much sun in to warm them as possible.

And some are so well insulated that just the warmth of human bodies

and electrical appliances such as fridges can heat them.

About 20 per cent of new housing is provided by housing associations and many go way beyond building regulations covering homes' carbon footprints and energy efficiency.

Which is great news for the UK's thousands of housing association tenants. Richard Mann, of United Welsh Housing Association, said: "Fuel bills can be a big financial drain for families on limited incomes so efficiency becomes especially important."

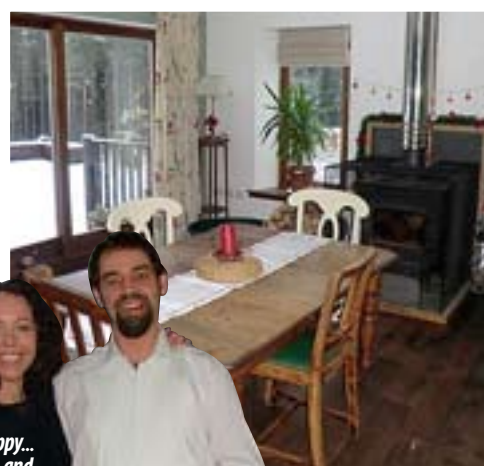
Here we look at three associations embracing eco-building...

ECO FEATURES: timber cladding, super-insulation, solar panels, wood-burning stove and veg garden. Annual running costs: £57 for wood and £360 for electricity.

AT first glance the six timber-clad forest houses at Ardgeal near Aviemore look just like the high-end wooden lodges found in this Highland ski region.

They're modern and stylish... but on closer inspection they have enviable green credentials.

"We have really put a lot of thought into making these homes work for the residents, the community



Happy... Lee and family

and the environment," says Ronnie MacRae of the Highland Small Communities Housing Trust, the association which built the properties.

"We source materials and labour locally wherever possible. They are very cheap to heat and have outdoor space for residents to grow food and keep hens."

Lee Bisset, 35, moved into a four-bedroom house at Ardgeal two years ago with her partner David Hood, 42, and their two children. She says:

"This house is warm and cosy with lovely clean air. It is very much a lifestyle house - and requires our input to make the most of the green aspects."

Three-bed house, Shropshire, £97 a week rent

ECO features: shared biomass boiler, meters to monitor energy use, rainwater harvesting. Running cost: £30 a month for heating and hot water

ONE way of making heating more efficient and cheaper to run is to have a district heating system where a central boiler powers a number of homes.

That's what Shropshire Housing Association put in place when they built Rocksgreen in Ludlow.

The association invested in the heating plant and sells energy to the tenants.

Spokesman Paul Sulston says: "We invested in two biomass boilers which heat 91



homes. The wood comes from waste from local sawmills and is processed into wood chips for burning at a plant just eight miles from the houses."

Other eco features of the homes include



Enjoying the quiet... Jody

in-house meters so residents can monitor their fuel consumption and water butts to harvest rainwater.

Resident Jody Goode says: "We like it here as the house is spacious and warm, and the area is nice and quiet with beautiful views."

Three-bed house, in Gwent: win free rent

ECO features: Insulation and solar power. Running costs: close to £0.

UNITED Welsh Housing Association's eco house is so well insulated that residual heat from electrical appliances is enough to keep it warm.

Photovoltaic cells turn sunlight into electricity, which can be used to provide extra heat and for general household needs.

Unused power is sold back to the National Grid so over the course of a year energy costs are likely to be zero - and the house's carbon footprint is zero.

A competition will be launched to find occupants for Larch House for a period of time so the performance



can be monitored. Applications will be invited from residents of Blaenau Gwent in South Wales or those who have a connection to the area.

Research has shown that eco gadgets alone will not reduce energy bills.

Richard Mann of the housing

association says: "Basic things like not opening windows when the heating is on make all the difference."

"If you don't use an eco house properly it can end up costing more."

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