

Rise of the ECO-HOME

We're increasingly being told that we need to make our lifestyles more sustainable, so what better starting point than our homes?

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Think 'eco-home' and images of log cabins in the middle of nowhere, or of hyper-modern houses made of glass, might spring to mind; however, an eco-home certainly doesn't need to be as complicated – or indeed as costly – as it might initially seem.

In the most basic sense, it is simply a property that has been designed and adapted to minimise its negative impact on the environment as much as possible through reduced energy consumption, which in turn reduces the use of fossil fuels and cuts CO2 emissions.

"It's not an exact science, but it usually comes down to building materials, insulation, energy systems and central heating," says James Alcock from TheGreenAge,

one of the UK's leading energy saving advice portals. Eco-homes are becoming increasingly popular, with developers, builders and architects taking steps to ensure their designs are that bit greener. This is bolstered by government schemes and initiatives such as the Minimum Energy Efficiency Standard that came into force last year.

If you are considering building an eco-home from scratch, the material you will be using is a key starting point: it is crucial that it is sustainably sourced and if you are using wood that it is FSC certified. It is also a good idea to source building materials from the local area in order to reduce the amount of fossil fuels that are used in their transportation.

Locally sourced materials will

also have the add-on benefit of blending in better with their surroundings and acting as less of an eyesore on the landscape.

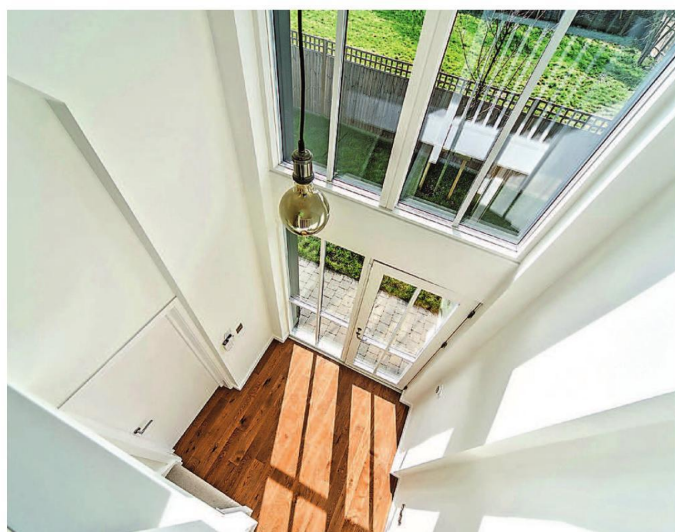
You'll also need to consider insulation and double glazing to minimise energy used for heating, as well as an efficient water system and a means of disposing waste products in a way that isn't harmful to the natural area.

"Building an eco-home is not necessarily the easiest thing to do, as you're often forced to choose between the most eco-friendly options and the most budget-friendly ones," warns James. Although it may well be an expensive process to start with, an eco-home will benefit from much lower energy bills and running costs in the long term.

However, there are plenty of easy ways to make your current property more environmentally friendly; it can even be as simple as changing your light bulbs to an LED variety.

"The old style of light bulbs gave off 90 per cent heat and 10 per cent light. LEDs flip this on its head, giving off 90 per cent light and only 10 per cent heat," James explains. As a result, although they cost more to buy initially, they use significantly less energy and will last much longer too.

Other changes include swapping your regular cleaning products for environmentally friendly ones that don't release harmful chemicals into waterways (look out for brands such as Ecover) or swapping your showerhead for a low-flow model to reduce water consumption.



Scocles Court by Vilsana Homes makes the most of natural light throughout



A pioneering estate of executive eco-homes is being built in Minster, where Kentish barn-style houses stand in the former grounds of Grade II-listed Scocles Court manor house. This home overlooks the gym and picnic spot

Utilise your garden to its full potential by planting more wildflowers and creating a mixed grassland to attract bees and encourage biodiversity, and set up a compost heap to reduce kitchen waste. “Adding a guttering system and water butt will provide you with useable rainwater for your garden,” James suggests.

A bigger change you can make is to switch to a renewable energy provider that uses sustainable sources such as wind power and solar power as opposed to harmful fossil fuels; leading companies include the likes of Good Energy, Ecotricity and Bulb. You can also choose to install solar panels that offer a completely renewable, sustainable energy source, although these have recently dropped in popularity following the end of the Feed-in Tariff.

Adding more insulation to your home is also a great way to reduce energy

consumption, “the easiest and cheapest insulation to do yourself is loft insulation, which can make a huge difference in the winter months,” says James.

The UK property market looks set to get greener; as we become more and more aware of the need to reduce our carbon footprints, homes with features such as solar panels, good insulation and rainwater harvesting systems are increasingly in demand.

Thanks to ever-improving technology these eco-friendly changes are much more affordable now too, so there’s no excuse for not doing our bit, even if it is just by changing a light bulb. Perhaps being green can be easy after all. ♦

Find out more about eco-friendly living with TheGreenAge’s podcast, The Green Room and visit: thegreenage.co.uk/the-green-room-by-the-greenage

PROPERTY IN FOCUS

Farrington Mews, High Street, Bridge CT4, £735,000

For sale as of June 2019 with Winkworth, this property (below) forms one of a pair of new four-bedroom village homes in Bridge, built by award-winning developer Rogate. It has been built with a low carbon ethos and finished to a high-specification, with an emphasis on modern, light and open spaces.

