

Joint Oireachtas Committee on Planning Housing and Local Government.

“Energy Efficient Housing”.

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The Tipperary Energy Agency has been retrofitting homes for 15 years to high energy standards and has developed a keen insight into both the development of the technical Solutions and also the policy levers necessary to develop a significantly stronger retrofit market. In the Context of the deepening climate crisis, we must only define a 2050 retrofit as one that is energy efficient and is heated by renewable heat. In 2018 somewhere between 500 and 1000 homes renovated to this standard, and 40%-45% of new build homes reached this standard. We need to hit 45,000 homes a year between now and 2050 to achieve both our national and global policy objectives, notwithstanding our moral and ethical requirements to ensure a safe future for our children. There is a myriad of things that are needed to achieve a rapid increase, I will focus on a few key actions that require political intervention.

1. The State needs to rapidly implement robust phasing out of fossil fuel boilers, starting now with new build as part of the new NZEB regulations, but then commence phasing out as appliances retire. Clearly the state will need to support lower income homes in this regard, and the opportunity for solid fuels first is clear. We are currently installing fossil fuel systems in homes so developers can save a few hundred euro or less and the state will need to incentivise these homeowners to remove them. We are currently going backwards in the number of homes we need to retrofit, as we are locking in more fossil fuels in new build homes as we are removing in renovated homes.
2. We have renovated, with funding from SEAI, a number of homes for people with severe respiratory illnesses burning solid fuel in very inefficient homes. The impacts in terms of cost (c. €2000 per annum savings), CO₂ of 20 Tons per annum, and health would suggest a specific heavily subsidised deep retrofit for fuel poor, solid fuel heated homes, particularly in peat burning areas. This clearly would have an added benefit of reduced health care costs due to lower respiratory illnesses and a stimulus of job creation in the Thousands.

When it comes to the non-state or non-low income homes, In order to entice people to retrofit their home, we need to ensure that people want to renovate their home, and when someone wants to renovate their home, then they need sound impartial advice, good installers and they need to be able to afford the retrofit.

3. The state needs to get more involved in development of the retrofit market. Upper Austria, a region the size of Munster has achieved a 45% cut in Building CO₂ in a decade by having

grants and carbon taxes but also having a significant market development presence. What would this look like: Robust standards for all relevant technology that are practical, and installer focused and enforced. In addition, Upper Austria has a mandatory energy training requirement for relevant professions and trades. In Ireland, there is no heat pump installation standard, no required training course, and little enforcement outside of grant programs. Limerick institute of Technology developed the “build up skills road map” for renovation which is un-implemented. Waterford Wexford ETB have a number of courses that need to be available to every tradesperson in Ireland as soon as possible.

4. Affordability of deep energy renovation remains a key issue, for both state and citizen. The current deep retrofit pilot program, which is welcome, needs to be turned into a long-term renovation program that costs the state significantly less as it would, at current levels finance only 6-7% of homes using the 4Bn national development plan. The key to this, which has been exhaustively discussed at sustainable energy finance conferences is a blended low-cost loan program similar to the German KfW bank program that offers householders cheap long-term finance and grants. The European investment bank currently offers de-risking mechanisms to facilitate this cost reduction, which the state utilises for SME lending via the pillar banks already. In addition to the finance, a carbon tax to encourage investment balanced with a subsidy is the only affordable way the state will achieve wide-spread shift to efficient renewably heated homes.
5. Finally, the Tipperary Energy Agency act as a one stop shop for renovation, providing advice, retrofit design, procurement of contractors, certification of the works and access to grant finance, and ideally in the future access to low cost loan finance. This facilitates homeowners navigating the pitfalls of a significant challenge of deep renovation. Similar to local Civil Engineers/ architects designing extensions, securing planning permission and certifying bank payments. Whether a local authority linked Social Enterprise model like the TEA or another model of service delivery, I am absolutely sure that we will not have high quality deep renovation without some form of professional intermediary that can design a deep retrofit for people, either in one go, or a step by step renovation.