

Retrofitting and Sustainability Q&A – 22nd Sept 2021

Q.1.	Why can a homeowner not get a grant for wall insulation, without upgrading their heating system? This can remove a lot of people from the market and slow retrofitting down.
A.1.	Stand alone grants for wall insulation are available from SEAI. IGBC (Irish Green Building Council) is working closely with SEAI to develop “Building Renovation Passports”, which will allow a “stepped” approach to retrofit over time.
Q.2.	Is the real sell for a residential client on retrofit "build comfort" and not necessarily savings?
A.2.	This is certainly one of the drivers for clients. In my experience, clients are interested in comfort, savings and sustainability, with some clients more interested in one rather than another
Q.3.	Is there guidance available in Ireland on how to achieve Net Zero Carbon for new buildings ahead of 2030?
A.3	Not currently. There is a pilot research project in progress. However, my view is that we need lots of new thinking and to move away from “adjustment” of existing building design to entirely new methods of thinking about how we “do” housing, taking into account everything from 3d printing to modular home construction.
Q.4.	Do the presenters think the spiralling or at least uncertain cost of electricity from the grid is a major impediment to convincing home owners to move from fossil fuel to heat pumps?
A.4.	We have to move away from fossil fuels. This is not an “option”. There are grid challenges, but these are being addressed. We have come a long way in terms of making our electricity generation “renewable” but still have a way to go. Oil will be gone very shortly, and gas will follow. We have seen the challenges of gas supplies/costs in UK in the last week
Q.5.	Due to the age of the house did any works take place to the foundations?
A.5.	We assessed the stability of the existing footings which was acceptable, some cracking to walls had to be stabilised using helicoil inserts.
Q.6.	Did the client for the first house example avail of any grants please Fergus?
A.6.	Grants were initially assessed, however, the client decided that the loss of sovereignty on decision making and the cost differential of approved’ contractors was not worthwhile so no grant assistance was sought. Also, the timeframe between application and completion requirements did not suit the project program as this was a comprehensive refurbishment. On other projects for example under the superhomes scheme the grant constraints towards ‘approved’ contractors have consistently negated potential economies.
Q.7.	Is there an estimation of man-hours to complete a residential retrofit - eg. How many hours are required to get an average E-rated detached building to a B rating? This might better answer how short Ireland is on labour. Also how long does it take to design a retrofit?
A.7.	I don’t have an estimate of man-hours, but it is undoubtedly a very labour intensive process. The “EnergieSprong” model reduces significantly the labour component of the work.

Q.8.	Krystyna, is the 90 years payback is purely financial? Are the non-financial health benefits of retrofits included? And also with a 90 years payback, what is the lifetime of a retrofit?
A.8.	Yes, these are simple cost-based payback estimates. I am not aware of any full cost/benefit analysis carried out to assess retrofit on broader terms.