

- 2 Energy Efficiency** - Looking at how regulatory compliance has driven the market towards ever higher levels of insulation in building fabric whilst also requiring the use of more efficient appliances in a move to save energy. Looking at the areas where purchasers should seek to clarify the likely levels of insulant in older properties and to better appreciate the comparatively higher costs of maintaining comfort levels in such older properties.

The Property Doctor

...how energy efficient is your home?

Written by Colin Bruce, Director, Bruce Shaw Property Consultants Limited

Winter is definitely upon us, for those of you fortunate enough to live in a modern property; this will not necessarily be a major concern. This is because newer properties benefit from far higher standards of insulation. The amount of heat loss permissible through the external walls and roofs for instance has reduced almost four times in the last 20 years alone. Many older properties (pre-war) have absolutely no originally applied insulating materials of worth in their construction. As a result these older properties cost significantly more to heat. Indeed, many cannot afford to properly heat these homes due to the cost involved.

Most properties will have glass wool insulant in the roof space but are you aware that compliance with the newest Building Regulations can require upwards of 300mm thick of glass wool in the roof, some 3 times that generally provided 20 years ago. Next to roofs, the walls are the second largest contributor to heat loss in the home. Older properties can be upgraded by the application of a range of remedial insulants including, externally applied insulant finished with roughcast, internally applied insulant finished with plasterboard or even cavity insulation. All of these options are worthy of consideration although the original form of construction and its condition will often dictate the most appropriate solution.

The highest levels of expenditure by house owners in the 'after - sales' housing market is the purchase of new windows. This is a subject dealt with in one of our future articles, however, as far as energy loss is concerned, this area too has seen massive changes as a result of the Building Regulations. Not only are we now having to provide double glazing but there are numerous forms of high - tech glazing systems that further reduce the potential energy losses through the glazed element by filling the gap between the two glass panes with inert gasses and using specially 'treated' glass sheets or even by introducing triple glazing. There are very few if any situations remaining where a traditional 'low tech' double glazed window will prove to be compliant with Building Regulations.

In addition, most ground floors in new properties are now insulated by the insertion of slabs beneath the concrete floor or alternately by suspending glass wool insulant beneath timber floors, whereas very few properties were provided for in this way until relatively recently.

Assuming your external fabric is properly insulated, there are as many issues surrounding the available choices of heating system. The Building Regulations dictate the efficiency levels required. Not surprisingly, modern boilers perform significantly better than previous equivalents (32% reductions in energy usage are commonly quoted by industry sources during the last 15 years alone). Similarly electrically we have seen the advent of a complete industry manufacturing energy saving light fittings and bulbs. Even our 'white goods' are being graded in terms of their consumption of water and electricity. In truth I believe that many of us are simply offsetting the significant energy use consumption required by increased equipment levels in the home and office by adopting these energy saving facilities.

In general, whilst we would commend to you compliance with modern Building Regulations, these choices must be considered in the context of the entire property. After all there may be little point in installing high tech triple glazing, for instance, in a property 100 years old, particularly if the remainder of the building is unlikely to be upgraded for many years. It is also important to realise that older properties are often reliant upon their inherent ability to 'breathe'. Replacing windows can appear to cause dampness problems because of their combination alongside inadequate heating and ventilation provisions. Accordingly it is essential that home improvements are fully and carefully considered, taking professional advice where necessary. Unfortunately many contractors and suppliers of double glazing and other available home improvements are insufficiently well qualified in general building technology to be able to comment upon the effect that their proposed changes might have on your property, as well as the obvious fact they have a vested interest in your purchasing their product.

We can all make improvements to our property that will enhance energy efficiency; some of these can be relatively expensive processes. Please be sure that by your actions you do not detract from your most valuable asset. Take your time, money well spent will add value, money ill spent could possibly see a reduction in value or make the property more difficult to sell. You may wish to consider having your property fabric reviewed in its entirety and to consider what options are available to you, if so the Property Doctor can help. You may also, depending upon your personal circumstances, be able to benefit from Government grants to improve insulation levels throughout your home, be sure to check all available avenues.

If you have any queries, or need to consult the Property Doctor please contact either Colin Bruce or Brian Shaw on 01383 824450 or by mobile (24 hours) on 07900 913975, Bruce Shaw Property Consultants Limited, 6 Forth Reach, Dalgety Bay, Fife KY11 9FF or visit us on-line at www.bruce-shaw.co.uk