



1.0 Introduction

This note outlines discussions had at the first West Midlands Greener Together Forum on the 28th of June 2022, where the topic discussed was regional retrofit projects. The Forum brought together speakers involved in tackling retrofit from different perspectives, but all with the goal of improving energy efficiency in the region's homes. The WM2041 Five Year Plan has outlined the scale of this challenge: 292,000 homes need to be retrofitted by 2026 to stay on course for achieving net zero by 2041. The speakers were:

George Simms, SMART Hub Lead, Energy Capital – leads on establishing a cross directorate Hub to support the development of a Sustainable Market for Affordable Retrofit Technologies (SMART) across the West Midlands and delivering domestic retrofit solutions.

Phil Beardmore, Environmental Leader, Energy Confidence – Phil supports organisations and householders with energy advice and support to decarbonise businesses. Phil offers whole-house energy advise packages and supports Faith centres to decarbonise their places of worship.

Rachel Jones, Chief Executive, Act on Energy – encourage energy conservation by providing free and impartial advice for householders and small businesses across the West Midlands. They have been addressing Fuel Poverty and Climate Change for over 20 years supporting households through their energy journey.

Immy Kaur, Co-founder and Director, Civic Square - work closely with neighborhoods to experiment and test building resilient, regenerative neighbourhoods. They co-design and co-build spaces at the heart of communities for them to meet, connect and work together to address issues, such as retrofitting their homes.

The following notes reflect the discussions had within the plenary session and questions which followed each speakers' presentations. The presentations can be found on the [website here](#).

Regional retrofit projects

2.0 WMCA Energy Capital retrofit update

- The SMART Hub (Sustainable Market for Affordable Retrofit Technologies) has been set up by the WMCA in 2021, as part of its investment to deliver its net zero targets. The team has already led the region in attracting more than £10m of funding for retrofit projects and has supported partners in additional bids of more than £14m.
- The WMCA's Energy Capital team, as part of a consortium including Sandwell Council, Solihull Community Housing, City of Wolverhampton Council, Community Housing Group, Midland Heart, Orbit Housing Group, and Wrekin Housing Group, had successfully secured £7.5m from the government's Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund. This will be used to retrofit 600 social homes across the region, including the installation of low carbon heating systems and solar panels.
- The Sustainable Warmth Competition programme has also now launched in Elmdon, Solihull, and Foleshill in Coventry, following the award of £2.86m from funding secured by WMCA from central government. The WMCA, local authorities, Act on Energy and other partners have been engaging with residents in the two areas to take up the offer of support to retrofit their homes with a range of environmental solutions – from installing insulation to solar PV to low carbon heat pumps.

2.1 What support and schemes are available to target the very lowest households for retrofitting?

- [Act on Energy](#) support vulnerable households with energy advice and guide them through the retrofit process. Energy assessors at the charity, visit householders to talk through what they need to do to their home. Also support councils to deliver Local Authority Delivery Scheme (LADS2), Green Homes Grant and the Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund.
- [Civic Square](#) are working with residents on Link Road, Ladywood to work through the practicalities and benefits of retrofitting their homes and how to apply for grants and funding.
- Phil Beardmore from Energy Confidence is currently working with Footsteps to help develop energy saving strategies for faith groups in Birmingham. There are places still available and with just a £50 returnable commitment fee, you can apply to take part in the project here: <https://footstepsbcf.org.uk/project4f/>

2.2 How can we encourage a more collective approach to retrofit by a street-by-street approach rather than single homes

- The WMCA's Net Zero Neighbourhood Demonstrator is a region-wide programme where homes are retrofitted with insulation and green heating on a street-by-street basis, alongside other low carbon infrastructure such as on-street electric vehicle charging points. The aim is to secure more funding to build a series on these demonstrators across the region.
- The WMCA are currently developing a Trailblazer Devolution ask to negotiate with government, which will redefine the powers of the WMCA across the region. Net Zero is a key part of the ask, and funding for retrofit work will be part of the devolution deal to fund whole neighbourhood projects rather than through single measures. There are also asks to work towards creating an organisation that can support end-to-end customer journey support through retrofitting.

2.3 Need a zero-carbon mandate for all new builds to be introduced

- The WMCA do have a [Zero Carbon Homes Charter](#) which is aimed at developers, housebuilders and other stakeholders involved in delivering housing within the region. [The Routemap](#) is an action plan setting out how we will achieve the principles set within the Charter. However more work is needed to create a mandate.

2.4 How do we address the skills gap within retrofit technology and installation?

- University College Union (UCU) retired members group raised the important point that there needs to be more education courses within further and higher education to upskill the workforce. Points were raised on if there is already demand for these services, how to encourage suppliers to undertake the training could be difficult. WMCA devolution ask is for a long-term funding structure to not rush people through training which can lead to poor outcomes. University College Birmingham have a retrofit and low carbon modules being built into their construction courses. Other examples include Futureproof Essentials in Bristol and CarbonLite Retrofit course in Scotland.
- Issues were raised on the ability to find impartial advice on supporting householders through the retrofit journey. Also, problems with finding a supplier/installer due to issues with the supply chain and long wait times, plus soaring costs for materials. Civic Square shared their experiences of engaging people with retrofit through being present in everyday conversations and activities. They attended Jubilee celebration street parties to speak with community members and found that whilst some became involved due to climate change, saving money and because it's a good thing to do, many joined because it seemed like a fun project to be involved in as they can shape their neighbourhood.

3.0 Community updates from Forum members

- Civic Square are hosting an event on July 13th – 15th called 'Retrofit Reimagined'. It is a three day neighbourhood festival taking place in Birmingham. More details here: <https://www.best.build/all-events/retrofit-reimagined/>

- Low Carbon Homes are planning a Birmingham Retrofit Summit with the City Council in December over three mornings (6, 7, 8 Dec). It will all be online and free to attend. WM-based, so looking forward to a strong event to help get retrofit scaled-up locally. Short video here on the type of event we create: <https://vimeo.com/680469858> More info on our work at <https://lowcarbonhomes.uk/>
- Harriet and Chris Martin shared their full home retrofit experience with the Forum. They retrofitted their 1930s semidetached home in Bournville 12 years ago. See the measures they put in place and the benefits they experience at <https://superhomes.org.uk/homes/harriet-martin/>

4.0 Next steps

- We have created a monthly Energy and Environment newsletters to share our work. You can register to receive these newsletters [via this link](#).
- Briefing notes will be presented at the Environment and Energy Board meetings. The next board meeting is taking place on Tuesday 26th July 2022.
- Please email wmgreenertogether@wmca.org.uk if you would like to be connected to anyone who attended the Forum. We will send your contact details onto the person for them to contact you.
- Next Forum meeting will be held in Coventry in September. This will be a hybrid meeting with details shared soon.

Please see current Forum Terms of Reference and past briefing notes [here](#).