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THE REDUCTION of carbon emissions is neither optional nor a luxury. The UK has set itself the ambitious target of ending the country's contribution to global warming by 2050 – and the biggest challenge it faces in achieving that begins at home.

The very idea of making all UK homes low-carbon – or, better, zero-carbon – can seem like an unclimbable mountain. So much of our housing stock was built to service an industrial revolution that was literally run on fossil fuel or, in the case of much post-war social housing, at a time when energy was relatively cheap.

Pulling it all down and starting again is unthinkable; and when we've upgraded all the doors, windows, cavity walls and lofts, what more can be done to improve the energy rating of the property?

I want to argue strongly for the unmatched expertise and innovation that social housing managers are already bringing to this crucial part of the country's efforts to green its infrastructure and economy.

Councils, their housing companies and housing associations are, like us here at Your Homes Newcastle, already well-versed in retrofitting the fabric of perfectly good homes to cut the amount of energy needed to make them comfortable and affordable to live in.

We know our stock; and because the customer is at the front of everything we do, the quality of that stock is really important to us. And although we've already delivered huge improvements through the Decent Homes programme, we're always looking at ways that innovative technologies can bring just a little more.

That's how we came across Q-Bot, the best and least intrusive solution we've found for the significant loss of heat from the huge number of UK homes built with suspended floors.

It's remarkable technology. No-one needs to move out of their home. The robot, which sprays liquid foam onto the underside of a suspended floor to seal it, drops into the void below the floorboards through a hole no bigger than a dinner mat. Inside the house is the robot, an expert with a remote-control console, and a cable and hose that run outside to the electrics and foam tanks in the Q-Bot van.

Since we partnered with Q-Bot nearly three years ago, we've done this in 372 homes, insulating about 9700sqm of flooring. On average it only takes a day, and we were able to carry on with this work in void properties even through the pandemic. We are now back safely installing in customer properties with new measures in place and they tell us that the difference in the feel of their home, and the sudden absence of draughts, is instant.

The figures speak for themselves. In a typical home with a suspended floor, 20% of all heat escapes through the timbers. We're finding that Q-Bot reduces 79% of this lost heat and decreases cold

draughts by 30% across the whole home. The average saving on energy bills is between £150 and £240 a year and carbon emissions drop by around 16% per home.

These are the headlines, but there are also hidden good news stories when social housing managers do this kind of work.

For instance, where we can, we leverage this kind of innovation to create new, sustainable and skilled jobs in our local economy. So, while Q-Bot is a London-based company, we were one of the first organisations in the country to have a partnership agreement with them where we deliver the end to end solution; they train and supply robots to our directly employed in-house team.

We're building on our own long experience of retrofitting. We can guarantee and deliver retrofits of the highest quality, even when the technology is very new.

Our resident-focused health and safety protocols and ethical best practice are already in place and come as part of the deal.

Last year, the UK became the first major economy to pass laws to bring its greenhouse gas emissions to net zero by 2050. It's one of the most ambitious targets in the world, and social housing management companies are already leading on the solutions that will get our homes on track to meet it – and at the best possible value for money.

More than that, of course, and particularly important in these troubled times, is that a warm home with affordable energy bills fosters wellbeing, with all the hidden benefits that wellbeing brings to health service savings, and in sustaining individuals who are well enough – both physically and mentally - to play a full role in their communities and local economy.

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