



THE SUNDAY TIMES

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HOME MARKET

Feeling the chill? **Emma Wells** finds eco-friendly pads where you can turn up the heat without worrying about bills

Be honest. You must have done it by now. And even if you've resisted the temptation, you know you're going to do it soon. Turned on the heating, that is. This is the weekend when we traditionally flick the switch, having realised that summer really is over, and putting on another cardie and pair of socks just isn't going to do it. So we are preparing for the shock of energy bills, as well as fights over who controls our home's temperature.

Depressingly, Uswitch.com has found that more than half of British couples battle over the thermostat. Women prefer a more tropical ambience – which often leads to a frostier atmosphere.

We're all confused, too, about whether we'll really get better long-term deals if we change energy provider, or any government discount schemes we might be eligible for. And don't even mention the smart-meter scandal, with many users reporting their energy bills actually rocketed after the new gadgets arrived.

We admit that retrofitted solar panels aren't the greatest look, but there are plenty of stylish eco-homes that could more than halve your energy use. Here's our pick of the best low-bill boltholes.

Oxfordshire £2.5m

Here's an inspiring example of how a country home can be stylish as well as energy efficient. Five-bedroom Wittenham House, in Boars Hill, just outside Oxford, has high ceilings, and wall-to-wall glass panels. Each room in the newly built property is fitted with a mechanical ventilation and heat-recovery system; the underfloor heating is powered by air-source heat pumps and a rainwater harvesting tank supplies water to the five bathrooms.

01865 790077, knightfrank.co.uk

Super savers



Hertfordshire from £217,950

Set to put Hertford on the front line of progressive eco-living, the 17-storey Beacon will comprise 272 studios, one-, two- and three-bedroom balconied flats and penthouses, due to be completed in 2018. Its green technologies – triple glazing and what is thought to be the highest-density solar farm in the world – should generate sufficient heat and power to ensure residents don't need to pay any energy bills for at least the first five years.

020 3283 8583, thebeacondevelopment.co.uk



Lincolnshire £349,950

Architect-designed and within walking distance of Horncastle, Valdis is kitted out with enough well-designed green tech to make sure the owners receive more income from feed-in tariffs than they pay out in running costs. It has four bedrooms, one with an ensuite.

01507 522222, robert-bell.org



Warcestershire £540,000

Designed using the Passivhaus energy-modelling system, the Autonomous House, in Cropthorne, near the market town of Pershore, has open-plan living spaces with vaulted ceilings upstairs, and four double bedrooms below. There's a two-storey conservatory and an impressive-looking plant room in the basement, for weekend tinkering.

01926 455950, fineandcountry.com



Devon £875,000

The clean lines, LED-studded ceilings and pale wood floors of Willow Lodge, seven miles from Honiton, are enough to turn you off draughty period homes for life. The four-bedroom house is blissfully well insulated, so heating (and cooling) costs are minimal.

01392 423111, knightfrank.co.uk



Kent £1.495m

Completed two years ago, and clad in sustainably sourced larch wood, this five-bedroom home in chic Chislefield Park, Orpington, has triple glazing and a highly efficient heat-recovery system – the gas and electricity bill is about £900 a year. There's also a blossoming sedum green-roof system. Water is recycled via a grey rainwater harvesting system.

01689 220182, alandemaid.co.uk



Derbyshire £1.75m

The previous owners of this farmhouse on the edge of the Peak District village of Altonfield installed three sets of solar panels and a biomass boiler, both of which generate tax-free income. As well as the five-bedroom main house, there are six circular holiday cottages.

01932 860537, sothebysrealty.co.uk



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