

A Community Green Deal?

With increasing recognition of the need to retrofit our towns and cities to meet the challenge of climate change Nick Dodd explores the challenges and opportunities for regeneration, communities and local economies..

When the 'New Deal' was ushered in by US President Roosevelt in 1933 as a response to great depression it was nothing short of a 'call to arms', an invitation to the American citizens to take part in rebuilding the economy from the bottom-up – creating new homes, farms, factories and even power grids.

In 2008, as we appeared to be entering a new great depression the New Economics Foundation saw sufficient resonance to call for a 'Green New Deal'. This New Deal would seek to match the ambition of Roosevelt, challenging UK plc to rebalance, reshape and rebuild its economy along sustainable lines – embracing the potential of so called 'green collar' employment.

The spirit of the 'Green New Deal' is now being taken forward in post-downturn 2011. The Coalition Government is bringing forward legislation for a 'Green Deal'. A revolution in energy efficiency is promised. But what kind of deal will it be? The answer from the Coalition Government is whatever we want it to be. The 'Green Deal' is proposed as forming just one strand of an enterprise-led, low carbon economic sector which will help bring us out of recession.

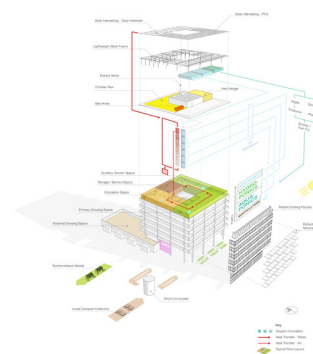
But is there any evidence that this could work? Well, yes. Germany has been Europe's low carbon economic powerhouse for nearly two decades now. Driven by successive coalitions of mainstream political parties along with the Greens, they grasped early on the need to ready their economy to exploit the potential of new sectors such as solar photovoltaics and building retrofitting – with a focus on nurturing home-grown demand, hand in hand with R&D, manufacturing and development of skilled trades.

But their approach has gone further than that. Germany has realised that in order to really drive low carbon economic growth you need to engage local government, businesses and citizens at all levels. The Government took the lead by using economic and planning levers to create certainty and make it attractive and beneficial to invest. Then everyone else has done the rest. And it really has been everyone – local councils, landlords, homeowners, manufacturers, skilled trades, farmers.

The result is a dynamic green collar sector which has played a part in filling the gap left by the hollowing out of old industry in areas such as the Ruhr Valley as

Sign Up to the Mailing List

Here are a few retrofit projects we have been working on recently.....



Vertical Farm

We have been working with our friends Creative Concern to develop a vertical farm here in sunny Manchester as part of this years Manchester International Festival.



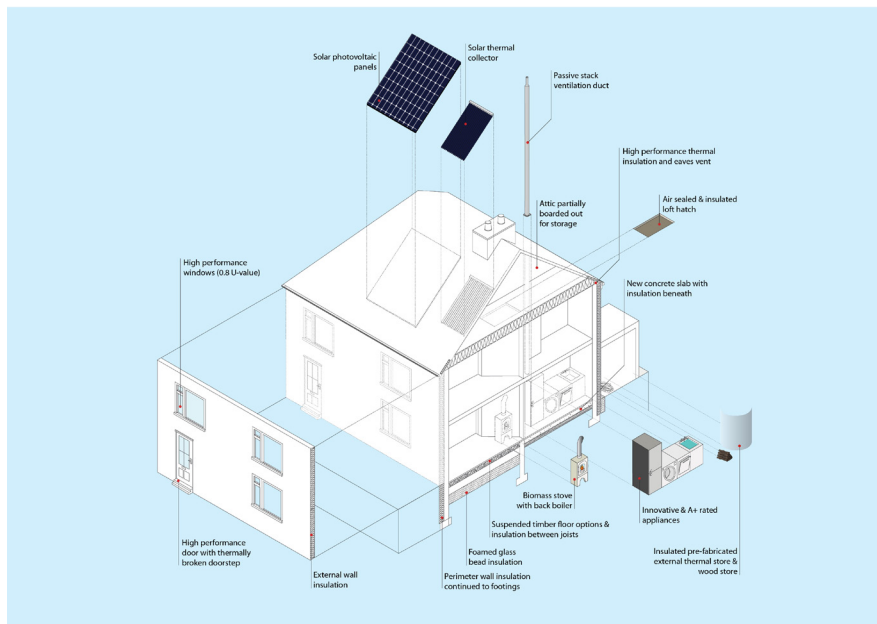
Retrofit for the Future Award

URBED's retrofit for the future project in Rotherham has been named winner of the 'Property and the Built Environment' category in the 2011 Sustain Awards.

well as building a substantial export market. And it is not just in Germany that this model has worked. Countries as different as Denmark and Spain have also led the way. In Spain green collar sectors are one of the few areas of their economy that has continued to grow despite the withering impact of the downturn.

And the opportunities don't just lie in traditional low carbon sectors such as renewable energy and building retrofit. In the US - the source of the sub prime mortgages that sunk the EU property market but ironically were originally intended to help regenerate communities - the continued decline of cities such as Detroit has bred a new wave of eco-entrepreneurs who have had to create their own green new deal from scratch. Urban food production is the new retrofit vanguard. Aquaculture and vertical farming are amongst the many new opportunities.

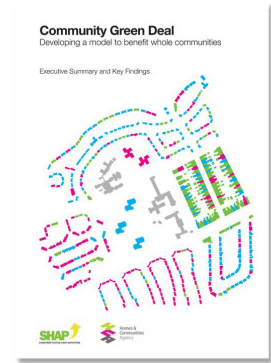
So what does this mean for UK plc's ambitions? The early signs are that the 'Green Deal' could be a low carbon economic boon for the likes of the utilities, big DIY companies and the growing herd of marketing agents for overseas products. The retrofit kit of parts that will be required to adapt solutions to over twenty million homes is a billion pound opportunity for UK plc. Overseas suppliers are poised to reap the value added but is this what we want?



Retrofit for the future diagram

Decent Homes contracts delivered by social housing providers set a useful precedent by making builders develop local supply chains. Could the new [Local Enterprise Partnerships](#) (LEPs) working with Higher education, Chambers of Commerce, Trade Associations, Contractors and Builders Merchants help provide the foresight and support that local industry may need to move into this sector? We are already seeing some positive signs of this in areas such as the Black Country, where the last vestiges of our engineering base are finding new relevance.

But it is not just about technologies and specifications. The lesson from pioneering low carbon economies is that the scale and pace of change needed is difficult without the engagement of communities, neighbourhoods, streets and individual households. Retrofit entails huge amounts of disruption whilst homes are improved and it could change the appearance of whole areas. The level of distrust of the utilities and builders who might co-ordinate or deliver these works



Community Green Deal

URBED's Community Green Deal report was launched at a major conference at the Public in West Bromwich on the 1st December 2010



Carbon Coop

We have been working with the Kindling Trust and Co-operative and Mutual Solutions to establish a membership-based business and savings society that can support households to make 80% carbon reductions.



Eco-Neighbourhood Plan

We recently ran a two-day workshop with the people of South Workington to develop an 'eco' plan for their neighbourhood.

is borne out by recent opinion polls. So what happens if we don't like the deal on offer?

The proposed new [Neighbourhood Plans](#) could create a more positive way forward. They could be used to help shape how the Green Deal is delivered. People are more inclined to put up with disruption if investment reflects their concerns, needs and aspirations, and if they can better understand and enjoy the benefits that will come. They are also more inclined to believe word of mouth recommendations or if they can see their friends and neighbours benefiting. They might even want to get involved, tackle other issues such as food, recycling and transport, or even form new social enterprises or businesses to create new jobs and skills.

The low carbon economy has taken too long to get started in the UK. Now is surely the time for us all to get involved. And what about the 'Green Deal'? Certainly we should embrace it – we have a natural tendency in the UK towards cynicism as a self-defence mechanism against change – but it is for us to define what we want from it and how we could use it to shape the future of our communities and to find a new impetus for our economy.



Victoria Baths

Opened by Manchester Corporation in 1906 Victoria Baths is an iconic and very special building. The challenge of re-commissioning the baths led the Trust to commission us to develop a low carbon heating strategy.



Dearne Valley Eco-Vision

An ambitious long-term vision to transform the post-industrial landscape, infrastructure and know-how of the Dearne in a way that within ten years it will have the lowest carbon footprint in Europe.

URBED

(Urbanism, Environment and Design)

10 Little Lever Street

Manchester

M1 1HR

t. 0161 200 5500

f. 0161 237 3994

e. info@urbed.com

w. www.urbed.coop



Subscribe to our Mailing List

urban
scrawl