

## **Briefing – HeatSeekers Proposal 20<sup>th</sup> July 2011**

Following a presentation to Councillors prior to the Community Services Scrutiny Committee, there were a number of concerns raised concerning the proposed HeatSeekers project. At the presentation it was felt further clarification was needed before the project could be given the approval to be carried out this year. The following briefing hopes to address any concerns and inform all Councillors how local residents will be protected as part of the proposed scheme. For this briefing I have contacted other local authorities and conducted research to offer a full response to these issues.

### **Executive Summary**

We believe there are significant benefits to this project that meets the Council's objectives regarding climate change, but more importantly it will also help residents to save money and to reduce fuel poverty within the city. With the introduction of the Green Deal next year there is an important time issue to this project, where to maximise the use of current funding, the HeatSeekers scheme needs to be introduced this year.

This project offers a new approach to promoting energy efficiency and making contact with residents, but also an opportunity to collect data to effectively target future work. The team of trained surveyors means direct contact can be made with residents and is a resource that we would not be able to match by ourselves. There are risks with any partnership working, including the potential to raise data protection concerns, but we believe we can manage these risks and this project could play a significant role in delivering improvements and helping to shape further work within Cambridge.

### **Overview**

Energy Saving Partnership (ESP) is a company who has worked with around 60 Local Authorities to use thermal imaging technology to identify homes that may benefit from improved insulation under their Heatseekers project. ESP have specially equipped vehicles that take thermal images of homes during evenings in the winter months to identify those homes showing heat loss through poorly insulated walls and lofts.

A team of surveyors then follow up these properties equipped with the personalised thermal images of each home requiring insulation. The resident is provided with insulation advice, and if requested a survey can be carried out on the properties with a quotation issued. An installation is booked there and then and managed through to completion. Work is carried out by their insulation contractor, the Mark Group.

Energy Saving Partnership would like to work with Cambridge City Council (CCC) to deliver the HeatSeekers project in Cambridge. This agreement would require the endorsement of CCC through joint promotion and the use of its logo to increase the potential success of the scheme. There is no financial agreements with the company, it is only partnership work for an agreed period of time. In return we not only hope to assist residents to save money and have a warmer home, but to collect data to allow CCC to provide further assistance in the future by targeting the Governments Green Deal.

It is proposed that a Memorandum of Understanding be agreed and signed by both organisations before the project is started.

### **Benefits**

Agreeing to work with Energy Saving Partnership brings a number of key long and short term benefits to Cambridge City Council and local residents.

- This scheme will increase the uptake of grant assisted energy efficiency measures in Cambridge, and as a result:
  - Enable residents to save money on their fuel bills.
  - Reduce the number of residents living in fuel poverty.
  - Reduce Cambridge City's carbon dioxide emissions
- Local residents can take advantage of Carbon Emissions Reduction Target (CERT) funding while it is still available. CERT may offer a more cost effective solution than the proposed Greed Deal solutions, and with the Green Deal being introduced Autumn 2012 it is important residents make the most of CERT funding now.
- The thermal images give residents a new opportunity to understand how heat loss occurs in their property and how to do something about it.
- The surveys allow Cambridge City Council to access housing data which it has not had in the past. This data can be used for targeting current schemes but also for the future when we are expecting to take a strategic role to target the Green Deal.
- A partnership with an installer means we know exactly where insulation measures have been installed and we can give residents greater confidence in the organisation that will carry out this work, especially if they know the City Council will be continually monitoring.
- The project offers residential contact on a scale we could not provide alone at a time where we need to prepare ourselves for the Green Deal. This is provided at no cost to the local authority.

### **Qualifications**

Mark Group (MG) is a national company, with over 1,400 employees that can provide 'whole house' solutions to energy-efficiency. Founded in 1974, Mark Group has already helped to make more than two million homes more energy-efficient, currently installing around 6,000 insulation measures every week

The Mark Group is the insulation contractor for this project and they hold membership and accreditations for a number of bodies. Those relevant to this project are:

- British Board of Agrément (BBA)
- National Insulation Association (NIA)
- Association for the Conservation of Energy
- Cavity Insulation Guarantee Agency (CIGA)
- BS EN ISO 9001 Quality Assurance

Mark group has other memberships that are available on request.

### **Guarantees of work**

- All Mark Group installing technicians are trained and certificated by the British Board of Agreement.
- Cavity wall insulation is covered by the 'CIGA' guarantee, which guarantees workmanship and materials for 25 years. (Mark Group with apply for it on the

resident's behalf and it will be sent to the resident direct from CIGA. It can take up to 8 weeks for this to be delivered after installation.)

- Loft insulation carries a statutory manufacturer's guarantee.

### **Funding Available**

The funding available through ESP and MG is based on grants provided by the Government through the energy companies under the CERT funding scheme. These are available to all homeowners, private landlords and tenants and are the standard grants available through all installers. As installers costs vary there can be slight differences in the prices charged by each installer. We make residents aware of this and encourage them to seek alternative quotes. For Mark Group,

- Priority Group residents (those over 70 or on certain benefits) can receive cavity wall insulation and loft insulation (where existing is under 60mm) at no cost (subject to survey).
- In all other cases cavity wall insulation is £149. Loft insulation (where existing insulation is under 60mm) is £169, and other loft insulation top ups are £199. (All subject to survey).

All these prices are subject to survey as other factors such as property size and existing insulation can vary the cost.

'Warmfront' eligible customers in need of insulation measures are processed directly through Mark Group using existing Mark Group CERT funding. Any requirement for other measures is referred to Warmfront. This has the effect of maximising the full £3500 that is available through the Warmfront scheme for more expensive measures, such as heating systems etc.

### **References**

I have contacted three Local Authorities for feedback and advice on the scheme. These local authorities were Colchester Borough Council (CBC), East Herts District Council (EHDC) and Hart District Council (HDC).

All work was carried out last year with the Colchester and Hart projects still on going.

The feedback was generally positive from all three local authorities. All reported that the project delivered what was expected with large numbers of properties being insulated.

Current installation figures are:

Colchester Borough Council	192 lofts and 274 cavity walls
East Herts District Council	Over 1200 properties insulated
Hart District Council	806 properties insulated to date

There were a couple of issues raised about the project itself. EHDC felt the images did not truly reflect the heat loss of a property. We agreed this was an inherent issue with thermal imagery but this did not stop the image from being used as a useful promotion tool. HDC felt that there was not enough clear information from the HeatSeekers team about the areas they were working on and they were hesitant to supply address details of where measures had not been taken up. This is something we would need to clearly request in the Memorandum of Understanding.

Regarding the quality of insulation work and any complaints, CBC had no complaints about the quality of work and HDC said there was a very low level of complaints.

EHDC reported that work was carried out to a good standard. There was one case where there was a serious complaint where the work was not done as expected and the same resident made complaints about damage to a conservatory. Mark Group acted quickly and the resident was compensated, although the resident was seeking greater compensation. 4 further minor issues were sorted satisfactorily.

All local authorities reported that issues were dealt with effectively.

Finally, I asked for any recommendations if CCC were to proceed with this project. CBC and EHD both suggested that we need to be very clear from the outset what we want out of the project in terms of feedback, data and additional services.

I have copies of the agreed Memorandum of Understanding's for both CBC and HDC and we can use these as a starting point for ours.

### **Residents Associations**

I contacted the same local authorities to obtain a contact for local residents associations (RA) and to see if the RA's were ever consulted about the project and if any issues have been raised.

EHDC never spoke directly with a RA and never received any feedback from them. They did however notify all councillors of the scheme but again have never received any complaints from Councillors.

I have spoken to a number of contacts at CBC. The Community Welfare Co-ordinator who ran the HeatSeekers scheme was not aware of any complaints from residents. I also spoke to the Co-ordinator of the Community Development Team who co-ordinates the Neighbourhood Action Panel's (NAP's). The NAP's include representatives from local community, residents associations and statutory groups but there were again no reported issues for HeatSeekers. Finally I have also spoken to the Chair of the Colchester Federation of Residents Associations, she was aware of the scheme but no issues surrounding HeatSeekers has ever been reported to her.

### **Internet Search**

I have conducted an internet search for Energy Saving Partnership Ltd, HeatSeekers and the Mark Group to identify any recorded issues and complaints.

There are no recorded issues with Energy Saving Partnership Ltd from my search.

There is a news article from the Herts and Essex Observer that reports of 'hard sell tactics' on the part of HeatSeekers. In this case, an insulated property was visited to offer insulation and it is reported the surveyor admitted he was calling on every house in the neighbourhood. This newspaper raises questions regarding the relationship

between the local authority and the private company delivering the scheme, which had to be clarified.<sup>1</sup>

There are a number of websites relating to the Mark Group.

- The reviewcentre.com has 194 reviews of the company with mixed responses. Overall the rating given by these reviews is 3.5 stars out of 5.<sup>2</sup>
- Canyoutrustthem.com has 8 reviews, 1 review recommending the company and 7 complaints. The complaints range from missed appointments, not following customer requests, not bringing the right equipment, damage to the property and data protection.<sup>3</sup>
- Snagging.org has a short forum thread about one particular case where a loft installation was not completed.<sup>4</sup>
- Express.co.uk has an article which explains the case of a Mark Group Insulation where an appointment was missed and Mark Group failed to organise a parking permit. It was later reported that in all cases, it is the responsibility of the resident to obtain any permits.<sup>5</sup>

### **Data Protection**

Data protection would be a significant concern for a project such as this and there are a number of items that would need to be clarified to help protect residents in the case of the images that are taken and the potential sharing of data.

The proposed Memorandum of Understanding states the following:

- All images and associated information must remain confidential between both parties.
- Both parties agree not to use confidential information for any purpose other than the HeatSeekers programme.
- Neither party will disclose confidential information to third parties without prior written agreement.

With respect to the image taken of the property, the HeatSeekers website states "The only purpose of the system is to assist householders in improving the energy efficiency of their homes. The system cannot see through walls or windows. The image is not a photograph it is only a thermal image of the property, therefore your privacy will not be invaded. No details of the homeowner or tenant are captured during the scanning process."<sup>6</sup>

Waverly Borough Council has a very competent FAQ on their HeatSeekers scheme, published on their website, with many items we may want to adopt to safeguard the public and offer confidence.

"Is my privacy being invaded?"

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.hertsandessexobserver.co.uk/Dunmow-Stansted/Uttlesford-Heatseekers-project-slammed-for-hard-sell-tactics.htm>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.reviewcentre.com/reviews238177.html>

<sup>3</sup> [http://www.canyoutrustthem.com/index.php?go=quick\\_search&keyword=mark+group](http://www.canyoutrustthem.com/index.php?go=quick_search&keyword=mark+group)

<sup>4</sup> <http://forum.snagging.org/snagging-general/679-mark-group-mark-insulations.html>

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.express.co.uk/posts/view/76829>

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.homeheatseekers.co.uk/faq/>

The thermal image is purely of the outside of the building. In no way can the cameras see into your home. Your data is looked after according to the Data Protection Act and is not shared outside of Waverley Borough Council or Heatseekers.

What about safety and security?

- Visits from Heatseekers' surveyors will only be made after an introductory letter from Waverley and Heatseekers has been sent out.
- All Heatseekers staff will carry photographic identification.
- Waverley will have a list of the surveyors visiting homes. If you receive a visit from a surveyor and would like to verify their authenticity, please contact Waverley's Communications Team on 01483 523344 or 01483 523044.
- Please do not allow anyone into your home claiming to be from Heatseekers unless you feel comfortable doing so, they show their identity card and you have received a letter from Heatseekers saying that they will be visiting you.

Is the work carried out by authorised staff?

Yes, all work carried out will be guaranteed and completed by qualified trades people.”<sup>7</sup>

In addition to the website we should also include a sentence on any letters sent to residents to clarify these issues.

One example from the Island Insulation Scheme states:

“Any information given remains confidential between the Council and Heatseekers under the Data Protection Act. All Heatseekers surveyors and Mark Group advisors will carry photographic ID and you will be provided with a Council Contact number if you wish to confirm their identity.”<sup>8</sup>

## **Recommendations**

We understand that partnering with any company can offer a risk, but with systems and agreements in place we can ensure the scheme is managed effectively with little risk to residents. The research conducted shows that there has been reported various problems in the past but the local authorities I have spoken to have still been positive about the scheme and they have seen measurable improvements from the work.

Therefore if we would to proceed with this project I would recommend the follow actions and agreements.

### Scheme Promotion

- Pre-scheme marketing to be carried out to raise residential awareness and confidence. This can include article in Cambridge News, Cambridge Matters, press releases including photo shots with councillors and vehicles, an 'open day' in the city centre where residents can see the vehicle up close and ask questions about the project.

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<sup>7</sup> [http://www.waverley.gov.uk/info/200105/climate\\_change/860/heatseekers](http://www.waverley.gov.uk/info/200105/climate_change/860/heatseekers)

<sup>8</sup> [http://www.bradingtoncouncil.org.uk/userfiles/insulation%20scheme%20letter\\_doc.pdf](http://www.bradingtoncouncil.org.uk/userfiles/insulation%20scheme%20letter_doc.pdf)

- Dedicated web page to be produced with an FAQ section to include contact telephone numbers in case of enquiry. This webpage can also include directions to the Energy Saving Trust for independent energy efficiency advice.
- All letters sent to residents to include CSC telephone number with CSC being equipped with FAQ's to field residents enquiries. This could also include a list of surveyors to enable CSC to confirm the identity of surveyors.
- All letters to also include the follow statement. "Please note, there are other providers of insulation available and the insulation offered here may not be the cheapest available. We would recommend obtaining at least 3 quotations to compare cost. See our website [www.cambridge.gov.uk/heatseekers](http://www.cambridge.gov.uk/heatseekers) for more information"

#### Memorandum of Understanding

A full memorandum of understanding should be agreed between ESP and CCC prior to the project commencing. This document will be referred to the City Councils procurement and legal team for agreement. Significant items to be included should be as follows: (Draft version of this document is available on request)

- The reputation of the Local Authority (CCC) could be damaged if the conversations between surveyors and residents was perceived by the resident to be "hard-selling". To avoid this, ESP will ensure all staff communicating with residents do not apply pressure.
- If CCC receive complaints from residents regarding hard selling, ESP and CCC will meet to address the issue. If agreement cannot be reached, CCC may ask ESP to remove reference to CCC support from literature and conversations with residents.
- All marketing and publicity of the project is to be agreed by both parties before the commencement of such marketing
- The Local Authority will not undertake any similar thermal imaging schemes throughout the duration of this project, although it is understood that CCC do operate their own handheld thermal imaging camera and will promote other insulation projects in their district.
- CCC takes no liability for any of the work or activity of the Contractor
- Regular meetings will take place to update CCC on progress of the scheme and to address any issues.
- CCC to have access to data to inform us of properties being thermal imaged, properties being surveyed, properties that have been insulated and properties where insulation has not taken place but is required.

- Additional CCC information may be included in the information packs distributed by surveyors. Surveyors may also be asked to complete a CCC survey form at each property visited.
- Following thermal imaging ESP's agent, The Mark Group will engage with Households to provide loft and cavity wall insulation. Other services of Mark group may be notified but not pushed.
- Both parties agree not to use confidential information for any purpose other than the HeatSeekers programme.
- Neither party will disclose confidential information to third parties without prior written agreement.

#### Further recommendations

- In certain circumstances surveyors may arrange to visit properties where the thermal image appears to show a well-insulated property. This may be due to other factors such as:
  - heating not being on,
  - residents being away,
  - resident is suffering from fuel poverty and is unable to adequately heat the property.
- We propose that all residents will receive a letter prior to a surveyors visit with the option to opt out of the visit if they so wish. If requested this can be change so residents have to request the visit, however we believe this would significantly reduce the schemes effectiveness.
- HeatSeekers will refer to other installers if requested, however an agreement would have to be put in place and other installers will have to be identified.

Justin Smith, Home Energy Officer