

## How your roof can rake in the readies

Landlords, tenants cash in on solar surplus

BY SAMRANA HUSSAIN

A Manchester landlord is taking advantage of a new scheme to encourage people to produce their own electricity. Beech Properties owner Stephen Beech has installed solar panels on the roofs of 50 of his properties in a bid to become carbon neutral. He has also improved insulation in many of his older houses and says his tenants will benefit financially.

Beech, who has 80 properties in Fallowfield, Longsight and Rusholme, is tapping into the feed-in tariff scheme, introduced in April, under which energy suppliers use government subsidies to buy any excess electricity generated by the panels.


Surplus power produced by the photovoltaic panels, which convert sunlight into electricity, is sold back to the national grid, with the profits being returned to the tenants through cheques or by the energy company reducing the tenant's bill.

Beech said it was a way of helping businesses to save the planet, get lower energy bills and get paid for generating solar power.

"The panels create the correct amount of energy to make the properties carbon neutral," he said. "For every extra unit of electricity you produce, the companies pay you 41p."

Beech plans to install panels on the roofs of 30 more

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A photograph of Stephen Beech, a man in a light blue shirt and dark trousers, standing on a roof covered with solar panels. The background shows a residential area with brick buildings and trees under a clear sky.

Stephen Beech demonstrates his energy-generating solar panels

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properties. "My target is to get all 400 bedrooms carbon neutral by the end of next year," he said. "Solar energy is the most abundant and efficient of all the potential power sources and solar also offers the best investment opportunities."

Beech said his property portfolio is worth £15m and Beech Properties' annual turnover is about £1m.

He has set up a new business, Beech Solar, to offer advice to individuals and companies about ways to save energy. "Not many people are aware of the grants and tariffs that are offered to businesses to go green.

"There are financial incentives out there but they are not clear and people are confused about what's available. Energy prices are set to triple by 2015 and this reduces reliance on utility companies. Money from solar energy is safer than money in the bank," he added.

Beech, who set up Beech Properties in 2001, has applied for a £500,000 grant from the government's Carbon Trust to get the remainder of his properties carbon neutral.

### **TOM ENTWISTLE**

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**'There are a lot of cowboys jumping on this bandwagon'**

This will include installing panels as well as air source heat pumps and water recycling along with insulation.

His initiative has resulted in him being named among the finalists in the consumer benefit section of the Energy Innovation Awards, run by the Energy Innovation Centre, based in Capenhurst, near Chester.

Tom Entwistle, owner of landlordzone.co.uk, a Lancashire-based website which provides advice for property owners, said he had not considered solar panels for his own properties.

He said: "This is not something that I am particularly aware of.

"Traditionally landlords do not invest more than they have to unless they can see a return.

"The main barrier is that the pay-back rate is quite long. To break even you probably have to put in several years of investment. There are a lot of cowboys jumping on this bandwagon, people making claims that you can save more than you actually can. You have to be aware how efficient the technology is."

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