How much of your organisation’s housing stock could achieve a net zero carbon standard, while generating a healthy financial return, with a new kitchen and bathroom thrown in for free? Evidence from the Netherlands suggests it could be a higher proportion than you think.

At the end of January, I was lucky enough to be part of a study tour to Holland to meet the organisations responsible for developing the first wave of retrofit projects under the Dutch Energiesprong initiative. Energiesprong (or 'energy leap') is a novel concept for delivering net zero carbon home retrofits, reducing household fuel bills to zero and replacing them with a monthly service charge paid to the housing provider. What differentiates Energiesprong from the Green Deal is the innovative combination of long term, low interest finance, off-site manufacturing techniques and a performance guarantee from the construction company to ensure projected savings are achieved. The white paper can be found here.

For some reason, the trip brought to mind the children's book, “Ug: Boy genius of the Stone Age”. For those that haven’t yet read it (and it is well worth the trouble), it’s the story of a youngster with a dream, set in a (very slightly) historical rendering of the Stone Age. Ug’s dream is to design a new pair of trousers, softer, warmer and more comfortable, in order to make his cold uncomfortable sandstone trousers a thing of the past. He faces many obstacles, some technological, but mostly from others who can’t see the point of it or think it’s impossible (I won’t tell you how the book ends).

I’m sure you can see the parallel with retrofit. When I first heard of Energiesprong, my thoughts were consumed with questions: how would it work technically? Wouldn’t there be differences between the Dutch and UK retrofit market? Could it really deliver the kind of return promised? All valid questions, and only the tip of the iceberg.

But it struck me on this trip that we’re actually in a much more fortunate position than Ug. Rather than having to imagine what this vision of utopia might look like, it was actually here in front of us. It has been tried and tested; the concept works. The technology is not ground-breaking.

The problems our group anticipated have already been faced and dealt with. This is not to say that there won’t be obstacles in importing the concept and that it can be applied to all or even the majority of housing, but it can be done and the potential is tremendously exciting. To talk about how we can help this happen in London, please get in touch.

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