Adapting suburbia to face up to climate change

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How can we change and adapt our homes to cope with climate change? What actions can neighbourhoods take to mitigate problems caused by increased heat stress and reduced comfort during hot spells, restrictions on water use, reduced air quality, and stress and costs associated with flooding and storm damage? What are the best adaptations we can make to our homes? Should we all install solar panels and grow our own vegetables? What wider infrastructures need to be introduced to prevent flooding prevalent in many areas of the UK? And how do we communicate what changes are best suited to different styles of home

and different region in the UK?

These are just a few of the questions addressed in a research report led by a team at UWE Bristol, 'Suburban neighbourhood adaptation for a changing climate (SNACC)' that will be launched at the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors in London on Tuesday 23 October 2012. Don Foster, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State at the Department for Communities and Local Government will speak at the event.

The SNACC project is collaboration between the UWE Bristol, Oxford Brookes University, Heriot Watt University, Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council, Bristol City Council, Oxford City Council and White Design in Bristol. The work was funded by the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council (EPSRC).

Over 80% of people in England live in suburbs and they will experience warmer, drier summers and wetter winters in the future. By working with local authorities and residents the SNACC project recommends effective and practical adaptation measures for different types of English suburbs.

Professor Katie Williams from UWE Bristol led the research team, she explains, "Adapting suburbs for future climate change is important. The vast majority of people live in suburban areas and they spend most of their time in their homes. In the future neighbourhoods will be hotter and drier in summer, and warmer and wetter in winter. There will be more heat waves, storms and floods. Our report shows how best to adapt homes, gardens, streets and public spaces. The research has shown, for example, the many benefits of shading on homes and in streets, and the effects of planting more greenery. It has highlighted the best ways of protecting against flooding and storms. However, the project also found that currently very few suburbs are being adapted, and that householders are very unlikely to make changes to their homes and gardens in

response to climate change. We looked at ways to enable suburban adaptation, and suggest simple things like ensuring householders get the right information when they do DIY and build extensions, and far more complex solutions about changes to planning policies and partnership working.

"This research is significant because many suburbs are not even coping with today's climate, let alone the changes that are now inevitable in the next 50 years and beyond. We have highlighted problems with overheating in homes, flood damage, deterioration of green spaces and so on. The Government is undertaking a lot of work on climate adaptation right now, and we are working with several government departments, including the Department for Communities and Local Government, to ensure that our findings feed into national programmes to help householders and local organisations cope with climate change."

The full project report will be available on the SNACC web pages from 23 October. www.snacc-research.org/

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