

Why my contribution to Energy Saving Week is a set of simple and cheap plastic panels

Eco-double glaze your entire home for £700

It was Mrs O'Kelly's determination to double glaze the sash window of the bathroom that turned me into an enthusiast for cutting carbon emissions... and our £1,200-a-year fuel bill. The estimated cost was £700, and she was saying we 'might as well' do the 18-odd other windows in our 1885 South London Victorian terrace house for about £12,000 – an outlay that would take decades to pay for itself. Furthermore, it would look vile.

Like so many others who own period properties – 20 per cent of the 22million homes in England and Wales are pre-1918 – we have only slowly got to grips with our profligate energy consumption.

We have followed the fashion of recent years, making our house less insulated than when we moved in 12 years ago: carpets have been taken up in favour of draughty floorboards and old curtains replaced with blinds.

Last year, I made a start by buying three sets of heavy, interlined curtains, which instantly warmed up the house on winter nights.

Gordon Brown's visit to the nearby Sheehan family in Balham last month to unveil his £910million energy aid package goaded me to further efforts.

Sue Sheehan saved 42 per cent on her heating bills – £300 to £400 – by

By **Sebastian O'Kelly**

rigorously draught-proofing a house little different to ours.

Most interestingly, she had double glazed her pleasant old sash windows with clear plastic secondary glazing attached to the window frame with magnetic tape.

'I did get a quote for glass but it was £7,500, while the plastic panels cost £700 for the entire house,' said Sue, 43, an avowed eco-evangelist who is, ironically, a motoring journalist.

'They made more difference than anything else in keeping the house warm and after two winters they will pay for themselves.'

They are also unobtrusive, being clearer than the original 1880s glass.

I ordered my 19 panels of clear acrylic from the industrial supplier www.365plastics.com (01535 656983) for less than the price of one double-glazed unit in glass. I paid £600, they came ready-cut and wrapped in blue film to protect against scratches and I put them up myself using magnetic tape.

For older properties, particularly Grade I Listed houses where you cannot change the windows at all, this is the closest to double-glazing you can



CUTTING BILLS: Sue Sheehan with Gordon Brown last month



LYNN HILTON

BLUE-SKY THINKING: Sebastian and Rob with the covered glazing sheet

get. A consensus estimate has housing responsible for 20 to 25 per cent of the UK's carbon emissions, but while new-builds have strict energy efficiency regulations, huge efforts are being made to cut waste in existing housing stock. Gordon Brown's energy aid package has suppliers offering half-price cavity wall and loft insulation, which is free to pensioners over 70 and to those on benefits.

The quango Energy Saving Trust launches Energy Saving Week tomorrow, during which suppliers such as B&Q will offer cut-price insulation products and energy-efficient electrical appliances.

Rob Bell, an Energy Saving Trust inspector, came round for a room-by-room home-visit service.

He approved of the draught-proofing, the thick curtains and the loft insulation. But I scored badly on heavy use of incandescent traditional light bulbs, with five in one chandelier. Replacing these with low-energy bulbs would save £3 a year each.

None of our radiators has thermostat controls, but as I ban my wife and two daughters from having central heating until mid-December, and then limit it to one hour a night,

my meanness is probably more effective than any thermostat the Energy Saving Trust could recommend.

As for the acrylic glazing, Rob was quite impressed. 'It is obviously not as good as proper double glazing, but it will save you a lot of heat at a fraction of the cost,' he said.

Improving energy efficiency for older housing is such a priority that the Building Research Establishment (BRE) at Watford is testing several products that will be available in DIY shops within two years. The solid brick walls of a Victorian building on site are being coated with 'aerogel' insulation,

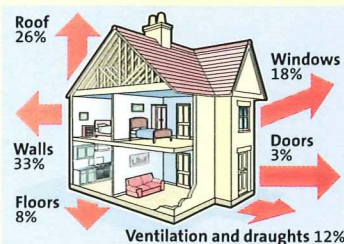
only 10cm thick. Derived from panels on the Space Shuttle, it can provide the same insulation as a metre of conventional insulating material.

Another product BRE is testing is Energain, a 'phase change' gel that can be coated on walls, floors and ceilings to provide heat, or to cool a room in summer.

'To combat climate change it is important to make our traditional housing stock more energy efficient,' says Dr Peter Bonfield, BRE chief executive.

My plastic panels are obviously just a first step.

Keep heat in and bills down



Source: Energy Saving Trust

● Insulating lofts could save up to £205 on heating a year.

● Double or secondary glazed windows save £150.

● Draught-proofing doors saves up to £30, with more for windows and floors.

● Solid walls lose most heat. Bulky, expensive insulation makes a difference, but new products will soon be available.