



HIGH TECH: Mike Hughes Jnr in the service cupboard



NEW VIEW: John Hughes opens one of the new windows at the eco-friendly property in Turton Street, Golborne

IT'S A NEW TYPE OF GREEN HOUSE

Eco win to boost business

BY NATALIE GERAGHTY

A LONG-ESTABLISHED family building firm has gone green and turned an ordinary house into two award-winning eco-apartments.

Hughes Brothers, based in Leigh, employ ex-offenders, providing them with skills to work in the building industry.

As an experiment, employees have been able to develop their skills further and work with renewable sources to build the ultimate environmentally friendly home.

The company has just received a Building Excellence award for the best sustainable project awarded by Wigan Council.

A team of tradesmen and apprentices worked on a 130-year-old semi-detached Victorian house in Turton Street, Golborne, which was once home to brothers Mike and John Hughes, who run the firm with their father Mike Snr.

The house has been split into two, one-bedroomed apartments. They are the equivalent to code four for sustainable homes on the government's new standards, where code six is the most environmentally friendly possible.

Operations director Mike Jnr said: "John and I used to live in the house together and it was so drafty.



GREEN TEAM: Some of the team who worked on the house in Turton Street, Golborne: Mike Hughes Jnr, left, brother John and their father Mike Snr with workmen Jamie Foster, Ross Lloyd, Scott Marsden and John's son, Paul

"It had huge sash windows, just 75mm of insulation and we used to sit there with blankets around us.

"I started researching renewable energy about four years ago after I went to Scandinavia and had a look at projects over there. They have been eco-friendly for around 30 years.

"I wanted to bring their projects here and it has taken us about seven months to finish the house."

The house used to use six tons of carbon a year and cost £2,000 in energy bills. Now both apartments use just 0.9 tons a year each and cost £275 in combined energy bills.

John, managing director, said: "As a firm, we wanted to tackle social and climate issues so we spent £80,000 making the house eco-friendly. We planned for our experiment to succeed."

Evacuated solar tubes were placed in the roof to help heat up water, the ceil-

ings were lowered to allow 2ft of new insulation and there is now under-floor heating and not a single radiator in sight.

The one-bedroomed apartments are decorated throughout with eco-friendly paint and there are no carpets that could potentially harbour lice, just laminate flooring.

John said: "The house also uses heat recovery, it extracts hot air from the kitchen and the bathroom and sends it to the other rooms to warm up the house.

"When we had finished the house, we wanted it to lie dormant for a while without anybody in it, to see how warm it gets.

"Without any heating on, it was already 18 degrees.

"We had a team of ex-offenders working on the house. People from disadvantaged backgrounds carry a stigma and we wanted to remove that stigma and give them a skill they could use.

"If there is a need for renewable items



WATER POWER: The solar thermal evacuated tubes panels on the roof



KEEP COOL: The temperature in the eco-home is carefully controlled

in the future, then we need people with the skills.

"How important is their background then, if they have a skill?"

Mike added: "The whole thing was about working together as a team and getting the project delivered.

"We have been described as the 'carbon pioneers' which made the hairs stand up on the back of my neck.

"We're trying to do our bit."

The Hughes Brothers are now preparing to build two new code six homes in Platt Bridge.

John said: "We're quite confident with this new build, we know what renewables to put in now, we just need to build it.

"It's just two houses to begin with, so if it goes well, great, if not then at least it was only two."

The new homes should be ready by Easter.

Theft girl gets a let-off

By Bethany Taylor

A TEENAGER who stole hundreds of pounds from her mum to give to her drug addict boyfriend has turned her life around thanks to a previous supervision order.

The court heard how the remorseful 17-year-old girl had taken nearly £700 over two months in giro cheques made out to her mum, who phoned the police to teach her daughter a lesson.

After stealing the cheques the girl then cashed them while posing as her mum, which she was able to do after previously setting up a bank account in her mum's name using a credit card.

Prosecutor Jennifer Mansell told the court how the teen and her mum had become estranged for various reasons, including the mum's disapproval of her daughter's boyfriend, who took drugs.

The pair's relationship had become strained and the defendant was no longer living with her mum at the time of the crimes, although she had access to the house.

She told the court that she'd taken the first cheque in May because she needed to buy food but admitted that the second amount, stolen in June, was taken at the request of her boyfriend.

Cash

The money, which was intended to pay rent, had been posted to the Leigh home and as a result of the thefts Wigan Council is claiming compensation of nearly £790 from the defendant's mum.

After each theft the teen went to Cash Generator shops masquerading as her mum and was successful in getting the cash.

When the girl's mum did not receive the first housing benefit cheque on the day she was expecting it she got in touch with Wigan Council, but was told her that it had already been sent out.

There were then further investigations which showed that the money had been cashed at the pawnbrokers, but when the teen's mum confronted her she denied it.

The court heard that the girl finally admitted the theft after her mum visited the store and was shown a picture of her daughter cashing the cheque.

The 17-year-old is six months into a 12-month supervision order for previous offences of assault, robbery, theft and false imprisonment.

Melissa Fagan, defending, told how the court order has helped the girl to change her life around and she has now reconciled with her mum, who was with her in court, and is living back at home.

The teen was ordered to pay £400 in compensation and was given an absolute discharge for the crimes so as not to interrupt the supervision order.