**'Everyone should feel this cosy’ – How an SEAI grant transformed this family home**

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When Antoin McDermott and his wife Eileen moved into their home in Slane in 2017, it was incredibly cold. It was a 1970s detached house that hadn’t been lived in for a long time. It was draughty “with a gale blowing through” it. The couple knew that it would be expensive to heat.

“We understood that we’d have to do some work on it,” said Antoin. “When we bought the house, we had put some money aside for renovations but we didn’t have the budget for the amount of work that would be required.”

The couple knew that they’d need a helping hand and decided to apply for a grant through the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI). Their application was approved and they got an SEAI home energy grant which enables homeowners to transform older, energy inefficient homes into more comfortable, low carbon homes that are cheaper to run.

“It was one of the best decisions we made,” said Antoin. “It’s been much better than we imagined.”

With the support of SEAI grants, the McDermotts got external insulation, roof insulation, a heat pump and solar panels. They also replaced their radiators with low heat radiators and put in a new ventilation system.

When they had moved into the house it had scored a drastically low F BER rating but thanks to the energy upgrades, they managed to bring the house up to an energy efficient A3 BER rating, reducing the cost of their energy bills significantly.

The couple said that they never experience draughts anymore, which is important as they have a three-year-old son Sé. “He’ll grow up never knowing what a draught is,” said Antoin. He said it in half-jest but it doesn’t seem like Sé will ever experience a draught in the family home.

“Honestly, you can leave the doors in the house open and you don’t feel a draught coming in at all,” Antoin added. “You don’t even need to find a warm spot in the house because it’s all warm. The funny thing is, we never really know what temperature it is outside because the house is consistently warm. You can even walk around the house in a t-shirt in winter. You get spoiled very quickly.”

It wasn’t a big decision for the couple to apply for the SEAI grant. In fact, it was a bit of a no-brainer. As well as improving the house’s insulation, ventilation and the overall look of the house, another important motivation for the McDermott family was the low carbon aspect of the energy upgrade.

“We have a young son, it’s good to know that we’re doing our bit to be kinder to the environment and combat climate change. We don’t use oil, gas or coal. We have a small wood fire that we use sometimes around Christmas but that’s it,” said Antoin.

Transitioning to a heat pump has been pretty seamless too. Heat pumps are powered by electricity and work by extracting heat from the air or ground outside the house and transferring it indoors at a warmer temperature. The McDermotts set the temperature on their heat pump to 21 degrees and whenever the temperature drops below that, the heat pump automatically kicks into gear. They can control the heat pump through an app on their smartphones. It didn’t take them long to get used to the convenience. According to the couple, the system is pretty fool-proof.

As well as heating the home through the heat pump, the McDermotts use solar panels, which they had installed on their roof. Solar panels use photovoltaic cells to capture energy from the sun, which they convert into electricity. They perform best on sunny days, but also draw energy when it is overcast.

“They work really well,” said Antoin. “People think that because it’s Ireland we wouldn’t get a lot of sunlight but the solar panels constantly have electricity running through them, even on overcast days. The panels work to power the heat pump too. When we operate the pump from the solar panels instead of the grid, we’re effectively getting free electricity.

SEAI provides a range of grants to homeowners for attic and wall insulation, heating controls, heat pump systems and solar panels. The McDermotts knew their budget wouldn’t cover the cost of upgrading their home and feel “thankful” to have availed of the grant.

“We never dreamed we’d have an A-rated house,” said Eileen. “We’re incredibly lucky.”

For other homeowners who are considering making their homes more energy efficient, the McDermotts advise to do your homework and make sure you’re getting the right people to carry out the job because “when it’s done well, it’s perfect”.

“It feels like we’ve moved to a brand new house - there are never arguments about putting the heating on or setting it to a timer, the house is always warm. The heat pump got us through Storm Emma in March. It was a godsend,” said Antoin. “Everyone should feel this cosy.”

*SEAI want to create a cleaner energy future for Ireland. They’re working with homeowners, businesses, communities and the government to transform how we think about, generate and use energy. To upgrade your home, making it warmer and more energy efficient through a wide range of grants, simply visit the SEAI website*[*here*](https://www.seai.ie/grants/home-energy-grants/)*.*

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