



# Golden opportunity to get greener homes advice for free

Want to make some low-cost changes to your home? Want to reduce your heating bills? Now is your chance to get some professional advice from an architect and help the homeless, too. Cathy Power explains

**T**HE ROYAL Institute of the Architects of Ireland (RIAI) and the Simon Communities of Ireland have launched the seventh RIAI Simon Open Door Weekend. People in Kildare can log on to [www.simonopendoor.ie](http://www.simonopendoor.ie) to book a one-hour consultation with the local RIAI architect of their choice in return for a €50 donation to the Simon Communities of Ireland.

All architects give their time for free and every cent raised goes directly to the charity. Over a thousand people took part in the initiative last year and almost €250,000 has been raised.

This year, the Simon Open Door will take place over Saturday and Sunday, 7 and 8 May. One of the themes of this year's campaign is sustainability and low-cost changes that will help people to make their house a home while also reducing their energy bills. The Simon Open Door Weekend provides people in Kildare with an opportunity to change the way they look at their home and see if they are using their space in the smartest and greenest way.

Improving the energy efficiency of a home does not have to be costly and the Simon Open Door architects will be giving advice on small improvements that can deliver a big difference in terms of both energy usage and costs.

Vivian Cummins from Vivian Cummins Architects, Athy is one of the participating architects in Kildare. He has been an architect for 28 years.

He is taking part in the Simon Open Door Weekend because "the RIAI Simon Open Door Weekend gives Kildare people a chance to improve their own home while also helping those who are experiencing homelessness.

Another participating architect in Kildare, Scott Wallace from Scott Wallace Architects, Maynooth, who has been an architect for 20 years, added that "during your hour-long consultation, you can explore your options – to create more space to suit a growing family or to make your house more energy efficient to live more sustainably and keep down the bills. There is no project too big or small. Architects can give advice on anything from extensions to insulation, boilers, windows and lighting."

Other practices participating in Kildare are AMK Architects.

Also speaking at the launch was Mary Lee Rhodes, chairperson of Simon Communities of Ireland. She said: "The current economic crisis is impacting on us all, but most heavily on those the margins of our society; people who are homeless, people who are at risk of homelessness and people with many related needs. Simon Community is about believing in people; believing in the people who turn to the eight local Simon communities around the country every day, believing in the thousands of volunteers and Simon

supporters, and believing that with the appropriate housing, care and support people can and do leave homelessness behind. Now, more than ever, we need the support of the public."

She added, "We are delighted to once again partner with the RIAI on this excellent initiative. On behalf of everyone at the Simon Communities of Ireland, I want to sincerely thank all the architects who have signed up to give their services free

of charge again this year and to those members of the public whose donations demonstrate the kindness and generosity being shown to Simon during difficult times."

# Top tips for a greener home

Here are some of the top tips from leading green architect, Bill Scott from Scott and MacNeill, on how to make your home greener:

- When replacing appliances, buy AAA-rated units
- Do not run the fridge too cold
- Minimise how much you use your tumble drier
- Install low-energy lighting.
- Draught-proof the doors, windows, trapdoor and pipe entries to your attic
- Keep room ventilators open
- Insulate the hot water tank and its pipe work circuit from boiler
- Use your boiler rather than electricity to heat hot water
- Close off the heating circuits for the house during summer
- Upgrade your boiler if it is pre-1998 or non-condensing type
- Upgrade your heating and hot water controls to zoned heating with local time clock and thermostatic temperature controls so that they are only on when you need them
- Install solar hot water, if possible
- Check your attic insulation. Use a minimum 250mm quilt, carefully spread between and over the joists. Ensure your attic is adequately ventilated
- Plan ahead to insulate external walls and replace doors and windows with well-insulated airtight units



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Andrew Blaker, age 2 from Coestown, Dublin, pictured here in Merrion Square, Dublin at the launch of the 7th annual **RIA** Simon Open Door Weekend which takes place on the 7 and 8 May 2011. In exchange for a €50 donation to the Simon Community of Ireland, the public can log onto [www.simonopendoor.ie](http://www.simonopendoor.ie) to book a one-hour consultation with an **RIA** architect nationwide

Photo: Robbie Reynolds/CPR