



SOUNDS GOOD, BUT WILL IT WORK?

Age writers ask how easy it will be to implement the summit's big ideas.

CARBON FOOTPRINTS

IS IT possible that all new buildings in 2020 could be carbon neutral? The British Government thinks so, especially if you focus on domestic housing.

Its Code for Sustainable Homes, released last year, demands that by 2016 all new houses will have no carbon footprint, emphasising improving insulation and renewable energy.

According to Melbourne architect John Macdonald, the idea will be easier to pull off in homes than in skyscraping office blocks, which take more energy to erect and run.

Melbourne's much celebrated CH2 council building in Little Collins Street — the country's first new six-star green building — is about 20% shy of carbon neutrality.

Macdonald, who led the team from architectural firm DesignInc that created it alongside Melbourne city council, says best practice for office blocks still has a long way to go. "If all buildings were six-star we would still need two planets to survive," he says.

The basic steps on the path to carbon neutrality are in place: employ top-shelf insulation; use a high volume of concrete on the surface to help maintain a stable temperature; cover the roof and facade with solar photovoltaic panels; add wind turbines in the gaps around the photovoltaics.

From there we get into more advanced, and developing, technology. Phase-change capsules, for example, run cooled water through ceilings to cut the temperature at



the hottest, busiest time of the day — a better option than air-conditioning. None of this accounts for the greenhouse gas emitted during construction. Carbon offsets will likely be needed to cover that. The whole process becomes easier, of course, if the Government oversees the creation of an efficient, clean energy system to help power the operation through the main grid.

All of this is possible. But research published in Britain earlier this month found most people were not ready for zero-carbon homes. The same, perhaps to a slightly lesser degree, goes for business. Macdonald says: "The technology is there. It's just the will and the money."

ADAM MORTON