



Department
of Energy &
Climate Change

The Rt Hon Gregory Barker MP
Minister of State

Department of Energy & Climate Change
3 Whitehall Place,
London
SW1A 2AW

www.decc.gov.uk

1 November 2013

SOLAR ENERGY

Following the recent publication of the Department for Energy and Climate Change's Solar PV Roadmap¹, I wanted to take the opportunity write to you in my capacity as Minister of State for Energy and Climate Change and provide an update on our ambitions for solar energy.

Solar PV is one of the priority renewable energy technologies which will assist us to meet our renewable energy targets and help us to deliver secure, cleaner energy at the lowest possible cost to the consumer and ensure security of supply. As costs have fallen dramatically over the last few years solar PV has been increasingly installed in a range of different contexts, from domestic properties up to large-scale, grid-connected facilities.

I am keen for the focus of growth to be firmly on domestic and commercial roof space and previously-used land. Around half a million home owners have now successfully installed solar panels and companies as diverse as Sainsbury's and Bentley have fitted big panels on their buildings.

However, I am very aware of concerns raised by the public about the potential growth of large-scale solar farms, particularly where approval does not appear to take full account of the latest planning guidance. Such inappropriately sited solar PV is something that I take extremely seriously and am determined to crack down on.

Our new Solar PV Roadmap makes it very clear that new solar installations need to be sensitively placed and sets out four guiding principles, which form the basis of the Government's strategy for solar PV. This includes the principle that:

*"Support for solar PV should ensure proposals are appropriately sited, give proper weight to environmental considerations such as **landscape and visual impact, heritage and local amenity**, and provide opportunities for local communities to influence decisions that affect them."*

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/uk-solar-pv-strategy-part-1-roadmap-to-a-brighter-future>



Department
of Energy &
Climate Change

The Solar Roadmap reflects the planning practice guidance for renewable and low energy that was published in July by the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG). This guidance provides advice on the planning issues associated with renewable energy including solar PV and makes it clear, for example, that:

- it is important that the planning concerns of local communities are properly heard in matters that directly affect them
- the need for renewable energy does not automatically override environmental protections
- great care should be taken to ensure heritage assets are conserved in a manner appropriate to their significance, including the impact of planning proposals on views important to their setting
- proposals in National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, and in areas close to them where there could be an adverse impact on the protected area, will need careful consideration
- protecting local amenity is an important consideration which should be given proper weight in planning decisions.

The new planning practice guidance has been produced to help ensure planning decisions reflect the environmental balance in the National Planning Policy Framework and will assist local councils and planning inspectors in their consideration of Local Plans and individual planning applications. We are encouraging local councils to get up-to-date Local Plans in place as soon as possible and to use the Local Plan to set out where renewable energy development should and should not take place.

A full Solar PV Strategy will be published in spring 2014 but in the meantime we will continue to closely monitor solar PV to assess whether additional measures are needed to ensure that it is deployed in a way that is consistent with the vision I have set out and not sited in inappropriate parts of the countryside.

To complement the planning practice guidance published by DCLG, we are continuing to work with industry to promote best practice. The National Solar Centre, a subsidiary of the Building Research Establishment, recently published some interesting ideas on best practice on developing large scale solar PV, drawing on the experience of Cornwall Council in considering site suitability for solar PV deployment (although the Centre's document is branded as "planning guidance", for the avoidance of doubt, this is not Government guidance and does not therefore have any particular status in the planning system).



Department
of Energy &
Climate Change

The National Solar Centre will also be holding a series of seminars across the autumn and winter which will allow the opportunity to discuss in more detail the various factors which should be considered in siting large scale solar PV projects. I hope that these seminars will be a valuable resource for you and your staff.

Yours sincerely

**THE RT HON GREGORY BARKER MP
MINISTER OF STATE FOR ENERGY AND CLIMATE CHANGE**