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*To all Local Authorities*

22 April 2014

## SOLAR PV STRATEGY

I wrote to you on 1 November 2013 regarding the Government's ambitions for solar energy. Since then, we published on 4 April a comprehensive UK Government Solar Strategy. I'd like to update you with the main points in that publication.

We strongly support solar PV. As our new Solar PV Strategy makes clear, it is now one of the priority renewable energy technologies. It will help us deliver secure, cleaner energy at the lower possible cost to the consumer. It gives households more control over their energy bills. Additionally, it will help the UK meet its renewable energy targets.

However, the main message from the Strategy is that we are keen to **focus growth of solar PV in the UK on domestic and commercial roof space** and on previously-used land. There are many good examples of this throughout the UK: over 500,000 homes now have solar panels; solar has been deployed on transport infrastructure such as London's Blackfrairs Bridge or Southend Airport; and large factories such as Bentley or Jaguar have large solar roofs. We are looking at making this easier, including by working with the Department of Communities & Local Government (DCLG) to ease permitted development rights for larger rooftop installations.

There is still a place for larger-scale field-based solar in the UK's energy mix. But the Solar Strategy makes it very clear that new solar installations need to be sensitively placed. It sets out four guiding principles, including 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."*

In many cases, there is a role for Local Authorities in considering planning applications for solar developments. In such cases, I would draw your attention once again to DCLG planning guidance which was revised and strengthened in July last year. This stresses 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.

I would encourage your planning officers to familiarise themselves with this planning guidance. It is designed to help ensure planning decisions reflect the environmental balance in the National Planning Policy Framework. It should hopefully assist you in your consideration of Local Plans and individual planning applications

We are working closely with the UK solar industry to help build understanding around the Solar PV Strategy. I understand, for example, that the industry is holding a conference entitled 'Large Scale Solar UK' from 29 April to 1 May at Kelham Hall. If your planning experts intend to take part, they will be invited to a free workshop on community engagement. I do hope they will find that valuable.

The Solar PV Strategy can be downloaded at:

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

Further information on the free workshop on community engagement can be found at:

<http://largescale.solarenergyevents.com>

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'G. Barker', with a stylized flourish at the end.

**GREGORY BARKER**