



Green Energy - Solar

Introduction

Generating electricity from solar panels is nothing new but interest in both domestic and commercial installations has recently risen, in part due to the introduction of Government-led incentives. Other green technologies are similarly supported and are subjects of separate Acorus fact sheets.

Solar or photovoltaic panels can either be roof or wall mounted on existing or new buildings or, in some cases, ground mounted.



Planning Policy

The Annex to Planning Policy Statement 1 - Planning and Climate Change and Planning Policy Statement 22 - Renewable Energy provides a useful insight into National Policy. Broadly speaking, planning guidance seeks to promote and encourage, rather than restrict, the development of renewable energy resources. The wider environmental and economic benefits of all renewable proposals are material considerations that should be given significant weight in determining whether proposals should be granted planning consent.

Special consideration should be given to location, scale, design etc and consultation with both the local planning authority and consultees, including

neighbours, is recommended. Depending on the scale of the proposal, an environmental impact assessment may be required as part of an application.

Do I Need Planning Permission?

In many cases fixing solar panels to the roof of a single dwelling house is likely to be considered 'permitted development'. If you live in a flat, Listed Building, Conservation Area or World Heritage Site consultation with the local planning department is advisable.

Building Regulations do normally apply. It is important that checks are made regarding an existing roof to ensure it has the ability to carry the panel weight which could be 9-20kg/m². Otherwise some structural enhancement may be necessary.

For ground mounted panels planning permission is normally required. Sites will generally be no more than 5MW in size (up to 15 hectares depending on site and irradiation factors) and typically granted temporary planning permission for 25 years.





Location and Site Selection

The four key issues to consider at the outset relate to the suitability of the site, the existing land use, the surrounding landscape and the proximity to a connection to the national grid.

Ideally suited for marginal land or brownfield sites as opposed to the Best and Most Versatile Land (BMLV) which is generally protected, the land needs to be close to a grid connection - ideally no more than 2km from a substation with spare capacity.

Ideally land should not be within Green Belt or an environmental designation (i.e. SPAs, SACs, RAMSAR and World Heritage Sites, SSSIs, NNRs, National Parks, AONBs etc). Schemes should however be supported unless it can be demonstrated that the objectives of designation of the area will be compromised by the development.

Any solar development must be able to show environmental, social and economic benefits.

In planning a scheme, consider the need for access tracks (ideally keep to a minimum in order to avoid unnecessary disturbance to land and ensure it is capable of being returned back

to its former condition), buildings (for housing the electrical inverter to convert direct current (DC) into an alternating current (AC) to be supplied to the National Grid) and security fencing.

Renewable Energy Feed-in-Tariffs (FiTs)

Driven by the Energy Act 2008 which came into force in April 2010, these FiTs incentivise low carbon electricity generation. For solar schemes these tariffs are available to projects up to 5MW in capacity. They offer guaranteed long term contracts with income generated from two elements; a generation tariff and an export tariff. These tariffs are index-linked to the Retail Price Index (RPI) and are next reviewed in 2012. The latest tariff rates are available from the Department of Energy and Climate Change (DECC) website (www.decc.gov.uk).

Acorus Services

Acorus consultants can advise on all planning aspects relating to various types of low carbon projects such as PV, wind and anaerobic digestion. Regardless of the scale of the project, we can assist in sourcing land for clients to rent or purchase, and once terms are agreed then liaise with the local planning authority and facilitate your planning application. Please contact us to discuss your proposals further.



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