

Solar PV on Church-owned Buildings – Short-Term Opportunity

Summary

If PCCs have any churches, parsonages, church halls or other buildings which would be suitable for solar PV panels, and are used a lot during the day, it may be worth fixing the feed-in tariff rate before 1st October. This will give a one year window in which to install the panels and receive that rate. PCCs can work a local community energy organisation to fix the rate, and the organisation may be able to finance, install and maintain the panels free. PCCs would receive discount electricity for 20 years.

If the rate is not fixed, it is very unlikely that it will be financially worthwhile to install panels for several years. Fixing the tariff is free, but an EPC will be required.

Full details

1. The feed-in tariff is a payment for electricity generated from solar PV (and some other renewable technologies). It provides a guaranteed, index linked payment for 20 years. Without it, virtually all roof-top solar PV installations on church-owned buildings would be unviable.
2. Such installations can often save PCCs money, without any capital cost. This is because there are a community organisation called a community benefit society (CBS) can help with pre-registration, and later raise the money for the solar panel installation, as part of a bigger community share issue. If this happens, the PCC will not have to find any money for the panels or associated costs, and will be able to buy electricity at a discount for 20 years.
3. Unfortunately, the feed-in tariff scheme is about to change. The government is proposing to give itself the power to reduce tariff rates without notice, and perhaps to close the scheme completely from January 2016. Its proposals are very likely to be implemented. If they are, it will not be possible to raise investment for the panels, because of the risk the tariff rate will fall, or be removed completely, before the panels are commissioned.
4. There is a way around this, but only until the end of this month. A CBS is can apply for a fixed tariff rate, which will used provide the solar panels are commissioned within one year. This scheme is called “pre-registration”. The process is reasonably straightforward, but this scheme will also close, on 1st October.
5. PCCs therefore have a very short window of opportunity in which to install solar PV, without cost, and benefit from discount electricity. If they wish to do so, these are the steps needed:
 - a. In the next few days, consider whether they have a building with a south-facing unshaded roof (like many churches) which is either used during the day, or could connect an electric cable to a nearby non-domestic building which is.

Solar PV on Church-owned Buildings – Short-Term Opportunity

Some churches could connect to a church hall, for example, or a neighbouring pub or other small business.

- b. Identify a CBS which can pre-register for them, and contact it. Some Diocesan offices, such as Exeter, may be able to help with this.
- c. Discuss with the CBS whether it is willing to make the pre-registration application. Many will be glad to do so, because it will help them assemble a portfolio for a community share issue.
- d. Obtain a current Energy Performance Certificate. These cost between £150 and £500, and last for 10 years. The CBS may be able to help them find a non-domestic energy assessor who can do this work quickly.
- e. Pass the EPC and the building's meter number (MPAN) to the CBS, which will do the application.

There should be no obligation on a PCC to take the matter any further, or to pay any costs other than for the EPC.