

## **Solar Panels – The light at the end of the planning tunnel**

It seems slightly ironic after such a spectacularly dull summer, but new planning rules in Wales have been introduced to make it simpler for people to install micro-generation equipment, including solar panels, in their homes.

Micro-generation in simple terms is the means by which heat and/or electricity can be generated at a domestic or community level in a low or zero-carbon way. It is an increasingly popular alternative to mass central energy production and provision. Micro-generation is widely seen as an important part of the development of sustainable energy sources.

The Welsh Assembly Government's commitment to tackling climate change and fuel poverty benefits from this move to reduce the red tape that previously faced property owners hankering after their own energy supply.

As far back as March 2007, WAG issued its 'Microgeneration Action Plan for Wales'. Along side its broader focus on large scale renewable energy schemes, such as the development of wind, wave and tidal power and biomass plants, these smaller domestic and community schemes were seen as worthy of governmental support as part of the wider energy policy for Wales.

A little over two years later, with effect from 1st September 2009, the installation of micro-generation equipment will no longer require planning permission, and as long as basic height and siting conditions are met, communities and individuals will be free to start generating their own solar power, thus lowering energy bills and their carbon foot print into the bargain.

Whether the changes encourage property owners and communities to establish microgeneration schemes remains to be seen, although it is likely that more such projects will be put in place as targets for reducing carbon emissions become more stringent. In the public sector certainly, microgeneration is a key consideration for those concerned with property management. Schools and Universities are also prime candidates for biomass and solar micro-systems.

Planning aspects aside, there are legal considerations to look at too. This is particularly true of community schemes where microgeneration affects a number of households and/or commercial users. In the event that a scheme generates more energy than required by the end users, that excess energy may be sold back to energy companies via an energy power purchase agreement. Schemes therefore offer the opportunity to generate revenue as well as energy.

The changes in Wales come before the Green Energy Bill, which looks at the same microgeneration issues, completes its journey through the UK Parliament. Wales, then is leading the way on microgeneration as per WAG's desire to 'outperform' the UK generally in it's commitment to carbon reduction.

Now all we need, for all those shiny new solar panels, is some sun!

(The Town and Country Planning (General Permitted  
Development)(Amendment)(Wales) Order 2009 No. 2193(W.185)

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