

Solar On Alderney Growing Carefully, Fairly And Together



Chris MacGregor

THERE is clearly a great deal of interest in solar power on Alderney. Over recent months we have seen UK and Guernsey-based contractors talking to residents

about installing solar panels and battery systems, and the response demonstrates something very encouraging: many Islanders want to play an active part in Alderney's energy transition. At Alderney Electricity, we welcome that.

We want more renewable energy on the Island and we want customers to have choices about who installs their equipment. We are very happy to work with reputable local and visiting contractors to help make that happen, but as stewards of the Island's electricity system we also have a responsibility that goes beyond any individual installation.

Alderney has a very small, completely isolated electricity system. There is no interconnector to another grid to help absorb sudden changes in generation or demand. Electricity generation and consumption have to remain balanced here on the Island, every second of every day. That means adding solar to Alderney's network is not quite the same as adding solar to a house in Guernsey or the UK. As more systems are connected, they can collectively affect voltage, network stability and the operation of the electricity system. As the Island's network operator, Alderney Electricity has a duty to ensure that changes are

introduced safely, fairly and without compromising the reliability or affordability of electricity supplies for everyone. That is why we have established a clear framework for domestic solar.

Every installation must be discussed with and approved by AEL before work proceeds. New installations require battery storage, appropriate protection and monitoring capability, and must be commissioned before being connected to the network. Exporting surplus electricity to the grid is not currently available as a standard arrangement. The size of system that can be accommodated will also depend upon the property and the capacity of the network in that part of the Island.

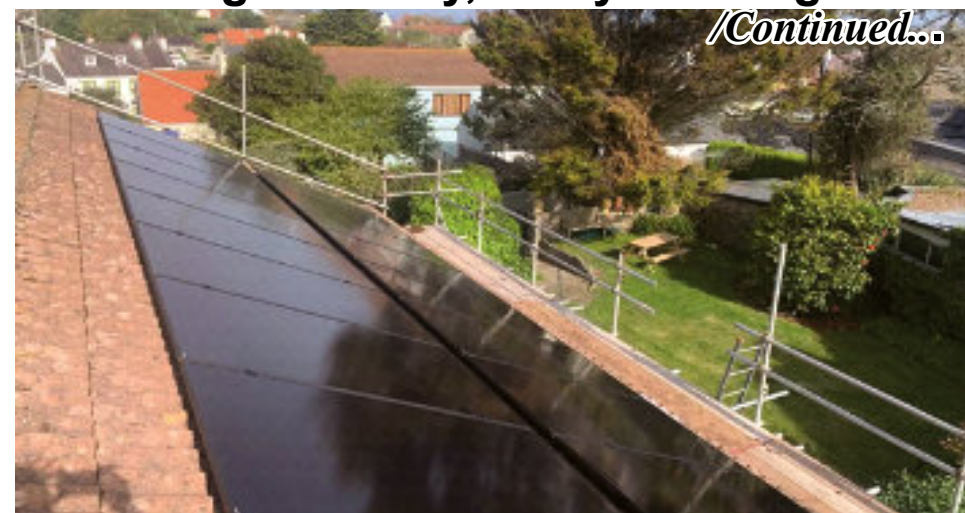
We have also produced an Installers' Guide, setting out the technical and connection standards we expect contractors to follow. We have discussed these requirements with contractors interested in working on Alderney and have been encouraged by their willingness to work within the standards we've set.

There is another important piece of work underway. AEL has commissioned a grid integration and network stability study to help us understand how much distributed renewable generation the existing system can safely accommodate, where the constraints are, and what investment or additional controls may be needed as solar grows. Until that work is complete, we need to manage applications in an orderly way rather than simply allowing installations to connect on a first-come, uncontrolled basis. We already have a list of households interested in installing solar, and our intention is to work with customers and their chosen contractors as capacity becomes available.

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This helps ensure that the process is fair and that one burst of activity in one part of the Island does not inadvertently prevent others from participating later.

There is also an important financial consideration for anyone thinking about investing in solar. Alderney Electricity is currently reforming its tariffs. A large proportion of the cost of providing electricity is the fixed cost of having the power station, cables, substations, engineers and backup capacity available whenever customers need them. As tariff reform develops, we expect more of those costs to be recovered through a fixed system charge and correspondingly less through the price charged for each unit of electricity consumed, so the unit price is likely to go down. Customers should therefore be cautious about calculating the payback on a solar installation simply by multiplying expected generation by today's electricity unit price. The tariff structure is changing, and any responsible installer should take that into account when discussing potential savings.

Our Energy Transition Roadmap envisages a future electricity system with substantially more renewable generation, storage, monitoring and intelligent control. But the transition has to strengthen Alderney's electricity system rather than inadvertently destabilise it.

So our message to residents is simple: if you are interested in solar, please talk to us first. You can then choose the contractor you wish to work with, and we will work constructively with you and them to establish what can safely be installed at your property and when.

We want Alderney's transition to renewable energy to be something that residents, local businesses, visiting contractors and Alderney Electricity build together – safely, fairly and for the long term.

More information, including the application process and our Installers' Guide, is available at: <https://alderney-elec.com/services/solar-and-renewables/>.

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