

Llywodraeth Cymru  
Welsh Government

Eich cyf/Your ref P-05-814  
Ein cyf/Our ref LG/00712/18

David John Rowlands AM

government.committee.business@wales.gsi.gov.uk

24 April 2018

Dear David

Thank you for your letter of 27 March, regarding petition P-05-814 All New Builds In Wales to Have Solar Panels.

The petition requests all new build houses in Wales are fitted with Solar Panels to improve our carbon footprint and help the environment.

Last year the UK Government ratified the Paris Agreement, signed by 195 international governments. The agreement sets both the context for tackling the causes and consequences of climate change and for the decarbonisation of the global economy. Here in Wales we have strengthened our action on climate change through the Environment (Wales) Act 2016, which sets a decarbonisation framework for Wales with a minimum of 80% reduction by 2050 and a supporting carbon budgeting framework. Wales has made great progress in decarbonising power supplies. Since 2010 electricity generation from renewable sources has trebled and last year provided 32% of our electricity. Our Wellbeing Goals require us to do this in a way to deliver maximum opportunities for communities and minimises the costs.

In September 2017 I announced the following ambitious targets for energy generation in Wales:

- Wales to generate 70 per cent of its electricity consumption from renewable energy by 2030
- 1 gigawatt (GW) of renewable electricity capacity in Wales to be locally owned by 2030
- Renewable energy projects to have at least an element of local ownership by 2020

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Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

A key element of Wales' decarbonisation will be the energy mix we generate. Solar photovoltaic (solar PV) is an important part of the energy mix in Wales. There are already almost 49,000 solar PV installations across Wales, generating 10% of the total electricity from renewables.

If we are to limit the impact on energy bills from new energy generation we need to invest in low cost, low carbon, generation and flexibility technologies such as storage. Grid improvements and smart technology will also play key roles in the roll out of renewable technologies.

I have spoken frequently regarding the impact of UK Government's decisions in 2015 to exclude onshore wind and solar technologies from Contracts for Difference auctions and to reduce levels of Feed in Tariffs, which have caused a dramatic reduction in the viability of renewable energy projects. I wrote again on this to the UK Government last November, setting out a common position on support for renewable energy in Wales, signed by a range of Welsh stakeholders. The statement set out our collective view of the economic, social and environmental benefits from enabling the continued deployment of onshore wind and solar developments in Wales and strongly urged restoring this support. I wrote again recently in connection with the consultation on the Contracts for Difference mechanism and will continue to press the UK Government to restore support for the most affordable technologies, providing a route to market for more renewables and minimising the costs to bill payers.

Over the last few years Welsh communities and businesses have benefited from adopting renewable technologies. Farmers, rural and urban businesses, homes and communities have all taken control of their energy use and invested in generation, providing more certainty around their bills and helping Wales on its decarbonisation journey. This has both secured jobs in those organisations and created skilled posts in delivery and maintenance.

Using our buildings to generate energy will play an important part in our drive to decarbonise Wales. Our academic institutions are leading in this field looking into the opportunities solar technologies provide. Swansea University's Specific innovation centre has constructed the UK's first energy-positive classroom. Plans have been approved which will see the same approach adopted in 16 new homes to be built by social housing group Pobl, in Neath Port Talbot. The concept uses a combination of solar cells, battery storage and a revolutionary steel frame which draws solar-heated air through tiny perforations for heating and warm water. If the Neath project is successful, there is the opportunity to roll out the system to a further 1,200 homes, as part of the £1.3bn Swansea Bay City Deal.

Whilst we very much encourage this "buildings as power stations" approach, solar generation has a specific profile. This could lead to significant over-supply in summer with limited supply during high demand winter months. As generation is most efficient when used at source, we encourage the installation of solar PV for self use or local use. In future we expect to see closer matching of local supply with demand, using smart technology, demand side management and storage, in order to avoid increasing peaks and troughs which will be expensive to manage.

Our climate change and carbon budgeting responsibilities mean we need to take every opportunity to reduce our existing emissions. It is, therefore, important for the impact of new development to be minimised which is why I have announced my intention to review Part L (Conservation of fuel and power) of the Building Regulations starting this year.

Our last Part L consultation in 2012 (changes implemented in 2014) incorporated a preferred option for a 40% improvement to building regulation energy efficiency requirements for new housing. The consultation responses expressed concerns regarding the impact of the proposed changes on an already depressed housing market which was seriously affected by a downturn in the economy at the time. The changes brought forward following the consultation introduced an 8% improvement over previous requirements for new housing, the main difference from the 40% improvement being no on site renewable energy requirements (solar photovoltaic (PV) was used as proxy) were necessary to achieve the target. The 8% improvement could be achieved by improvements to the building fabric.

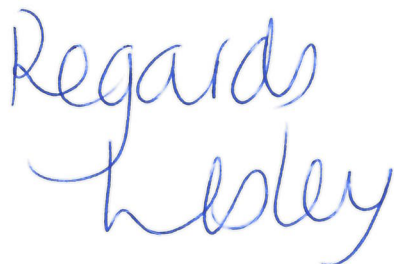
In contrast, the 20% improvement we implemented in 2014 for new non domestic buildings puts us ahead of other parts of the UK whilst giving real encouragement to the installation of renewables such as solar PV.

The housing market has changed since 2012, with house builders registering increased profits and the capital cost of solar PV reducing. We are currently in the process of concluding a procurement exercise to appoint a lead consultant to inform the Part L review. It is envisaged the scoping study for the review will be completed this summer, consultation on proposals are currently planned to take place later this year.

The Building Regulations are technology and fuel neutral so we do not prescribe or prohibit any particular form of heating or energy generation. This means the emission targets we set for new buildings do not act as a barrier to innovation. The part L review will not, therefore, mandate a particular technology (such as solar PV), however, it could through improved emissions targets, encourage the use of renewable energy technologies as they become more cost effective.

Our national planning policies, as contained in Planning Policy Wales (PPW) complement the building regulations by supporting the development of renewable energy. PPW states the planning system in Wales should facilitate new development which enables decarbonisation. It promotes sustainable building design principles as being integral to the design of new development. We have published design guidance which gives advice on how these principles can be incorporated into new development proposals.

We have extensive permitted development rights in place so solar panels can be fitted to existing residential properties without the need for planning permission. We will shortly be consulting on options to increase the scope for non-domestic buildings to install solar panels on their roofs without the need to seek planning permission.



**Lesley Griffiths AC/AM**

Ysgrifennydd y Cabinet dros Ynni, Cynllunio a Materion Gwledig  
Cabinet Secretary for Energy, Planning and Rural Affairs