

Residential Solar Advice and Installations	
Executive Summary	<p>The Council's Environmental Charter has pledged the authority to assisting the wider North Norfolk district in achieve net zero carbon emissions by 2045. Furthermore, the Council has set out in its latest Corporate Plan and Annual Action Plan specific goals and objectives to help achieve this, including "Supporting homeowners upgrade the environmental performance of their homes". This is in recognition of the 22% of UK emissions that are produced by domestic heating, lighting and appliances.</p> <p>This paper sets out a proposal for the provision of advice and 'signposting' to householders considering the installation of solar panels.</p>
Options considered	<p>Option 1 – Residents bulk Purchasing Scheme Option 2 – Promote trusted traders from Norfolk County Council website (not exclusive and could also be coupled with the recommended option) Option 3 - The Council sets up its own bank of recommended designers and installers Option 4 Continue to promote solar panels only to those eligible for financial assistance (Do Nothing) Option 5 Partner with a solar advice and installation service (Recommended option)</p>
Consultation(s)	The proposals and the options have been considered by CLT.
Recommendations	<p>To contract with the most suitable company to deliver a combination of solar modelling and impartial advice with optional managed installation for north Norfolk householders at no cost to the Council.</p> <p>To delegate authority to the Director for Place and Climate Change to reach a suitable agreement with an appropriate contractor.</p>
Reasons for recommendations	<p>To help meet the corporate objective: "Supporting homeowners upgrade the environmental performance of their homes."</p> <p>To encourage and support homeowners who can afford to pay for home improvements to upgrade the environmental performance of their homes in line with the Council's corporate objective at minimum cost and risk to the Council.</p>
Background papers	None

Wards affected	All
Cabinet member(s)	Cllr Adam Varley
Contact Officer	Kate Rawlings, Climate and Environmental Policy Manager, Kate.rawlings@north-norfolk.gov.uk

Links to key documents:	
Corporate Plan:	Our Greener Future: Supporting homeowners upgrade the environmental performance of their homes.
Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS)	The recommended approach gives the opportunity to provide a service to residents that will help them manage their ongoing energy costs and reduce their carbon emissions whilst also reducing the district's carbon footprint at minimum cost to the Council.
Council Policies & Strategies	Net Zero Strategy and Action Plan

Corporate Governance:	
Is this a key decision	No
Has the public interest test been applied	
Details of any previous decision(s) on this matter	

1. Purpose of the report

- 1.1 In the Environmental Charter the Council has pledged to help the wider district to achieve Net Zero by 2045. This includes helping households to decrease carbon emissions from heating and other domestic uses. Solar panels are one possible solution to this issue. Whilst the Council has several schemes to help those who cannot afford to pay, a barrier in knowledge and trusted contractors has been identified for those who can afford to pay.
- 1.2 This report aims to provide a solution to help residents decide if solar panels are suitable for their circumstances and to introduce them to a potential trusted contractor to carry out the installation.

2. Introduction & Background

- 2.1. The Council's Corporate Plan includes an objective: "Supporting homeowners upgrade the environmental performance of their homes". So far, actions have been limited to helping those on lower incomes who are eligible for grants such as ECO4 and HUG2 and providing generic advice on our website. The barrier for many in taking the advice one step further has been the lack of trusted advice as to which traders can carry out installations.
- 2.2. Solar derived energy is generally an easy low carbon intervention with households as it is non-intrusive, can be installed with minimum disruption, is highly visible and offers an instant saving on energy bills. In terms of wider district emission targets, solar panels provide locally produced renewable energy, with an average saving of 1.3 – 1.6 tonnes of CO₂ per year from each household.

- 2.3. Many households are interested in solar panels for the reasons stated above. If they are eligible for grants, they are helped through the process as the grant includes advice and access to traders who are managed through the scheme. However, for those who are not entitled to the assistance the next step of getting impartial advice on a suitable scheme e.g. how many panels, return on investment and/or inclusion of batteries and then finding an installer often puts households off from exploring this any further.

3. Proposals and Options

3.1. Option 1 – Residents bulk Purchasing Scheme

There is a company known to run a bulk purchase offer available to local authorities. Residents in participating local authority areas can benefit from the bulk buying and installation of solar panels to potentially get a cheaper deal.

This option is not recommended as the emphasis of the scheme is on reducing the cost of solar panels rather than finding the best solution for a resident. Also, there are costs associated with promoting the scheme which the Council is contractually obliged to meet. The scheme is time limited and not always available. Finally, the company which runs the scheme matches the installer with the resident but does not manage or remain liable for any of the installation increasing the level of risk.

3.2. Option 2 – Promote trusted traders from Norfolk County Council website

There are eight PV installers listed on the NCC website for Norfolk. None of these are in North Norfolk. Links could be provided links and solar promoted to our householders, directing them one of these traders. In addition, research could be carried out to see if there are any installers based in north Norfolk and encourage them to register on the site.

This option could be pursued in any event (in conjunction with the recommended option) but is not recommended as a sole solution as it is unlikely to produce a significant step change in solar PV delivery without increasing the resources required from the Council to promote the scheme and engage with installers. However, it does reduce the risk of endorsing one company and the responsibility of managing the trusted traders scheme sits with NCC.

3.3. Option 3 - The Council sets up its own bank of recommended designers and installers

This option is not recommended as it is unlikely to produce a significant step change in solar delivery without increasing the resources required from the Council to promote the scheme and engage with installers. The Council does not currently have the expertise to manage a bank of recommended designers and installers. However, it does reduce the risk of endorsing one company.

3.4. Option 4 Continue to promote solar panels only to those eligible for financial assistance (Do Nothing)

The Council would continue to provide generic advice on solar panels via its website without providing information on next steps in the process this would only be available to residents who were eligible for government grants (which will continue in any event, as long as the funds exist).

This option is not recommended as an alternative to the recommended option as it is likely to substantially limit the number of 'able to pay' households investing in solar panels, since choosing a designer and/or installer is a known barrier to project progress for such householders.

3.5 Option 5 Partner with a solar advice and installation service.

There is a company known to offer a no obligation solar advice service for householders. This uses their own modelling software to design the best solution for individual circumstances without the need for the company to look to maximise their sale or own profit. Should a customer choose to go ahead with the installation, then the company will subcontract the installation to vetted local suppliers, but they remain responsible for the work and continue to be involved in the installation and aftercare.

This option (option 5) is recommended as it is a continuous service (not periodic, annual or one-off) and the company has a direct relationship with the interested householder throughout the process. Discussion can be held with the company about the best way to market the scheme, but there would be no obligation to spend a minimum amount and the Council is free to make the best use of existing promotional channels. The company already works with a number of significant external bodies, including another local authority.

4. Corporate Priorities

This project aligns with Our Greener Future Priority:

Continue our journey to Net Zero by

- Introducing significant new projects which deliver on our Net Zero ambitions
- Supporting homeowners upgrade the environmental performance of their homes
- Strengthening the ability for local communities to deliver on local environmental ambitions and priorities

5. Financial and Resource Implications

5.1. No additional capital or revenue budget is required for this scheme.

5.2. The project will be managed by existing staff within the Climate and Environment team

5.3. There will be a small amount of resource in the first instance (to set up the scheme) required from legal, communications and IT.

Comments from the S151 Officer:

There are no financial costs associated with this proposal. The scheme does need to be monitored to ensure that proper advice and installation continues into the future. There is a reputational risk in being associated with a scheme delivered by a third party if the scheme fails or is delivered below a good standard.

6. Legal Implications

- 6.1. The Council will enter into a contract with the company to administer a scheme to provide appropriate impartial advice and modelling for north Norfolk householders at no cost to the Council.
- 6.2. As this contract has no value, the Council's usual procurement rules do not apply. The Council has only been able to establish that there is one company providing such an offer. The Council has issued a Voluntary Ex-Ante Transparency (VEAT) Notice to make sure that we have fully explored the market and allow any challenge. The VEAT will expire on 24 October 2024.
- 6.3. The Council will not enter into a contract for the installation of any solar panels – any contract will be between the householder and the installer.

Comments from the Monitoring Officer

The Council could enter into such an agreement providing members are satisfied that it is in accordance with the Council's advertising and sponsorship policy, in particular paragraphs 2.3 and 2.4 of the policy, detailing the necessity for such to align with the Council's goals. A link to our policy is set out here:

nnorfolkdc.sharepoint.com/sites/RecordsCentre/NNDC/Records/Forms/AllItems.aspx?id=%2Fsites%2FRecordsCentre%2FNNDC/Records%2FSponsorship_and_Advertising_Policy%2Epdf&parent=%2Fsites%2FRecordsCentre%2FNNDC/Records

The Council would need to ensure that there are adequate safeguards in any contract and in any advertising to protect the Council, including an adequate disclaimer, and transparency as to any payments made. Further contact with eastlaw may assist with ensuring there are sufficient clauses within the contract to protect the Council's interests and reputation

7. Risks

- 7.1. Endorsing or promoting any company provides a potential reputational risk to the Council. This would need to be mitigated by carrying out due diligence on any company before entering into the agreement and whilst the partnership is active.
- 7.2. Many 'able to pay' households miss out on cheaper and greener electricity because they do not know who to use for advice and installation. Whilst recommending one company, the Council will make it clear that other companies are available, and customers should get other advice and quotes for comparison (signposting to the Trusted Trader scheme will help mitigate any risks).

- 7.3. The Council could equally be exposed to a reputational risk by doing nothing in this area having identified a barrier to installation and then not helping residents to overcome it.
- 7.4. Doing nothing increases our risk of failure to meet the Council's Net Zero targets and Corporate Plan objectives.
- 7.5. Legal risk is minimised as the customer does not have a direct contract with the Council.
- 7.6. As the contract has no value the Council's normal procurement rules do not apply however to mitigate any risk from challenge and to ensure that the Council has considered all options available in the market, the Council has issued a Voluntary Ex-Ante Transparency (VEAT) notice.

8. Net Zero Target

- 8.1 The Council's Net Zero Strategy and Action Plan has successfully prioritised and installed solar PV on many of the Council's assets including the Council Office and the carport at the Reef Leisure Centre. Part of the legacy of these projects is to inspire residents to also invest in solar technology.
- 8.2 In the Environmental Charter the Council has pledged to help north Norfolk decarbonise by 2045. It has said it will look beyond its own estate to work alongside residents to influence positive change and reduce carbon emissions. This proposal is considered to provide a robust way of assisting with this aim.
- 8.3 Whilst delivering other projects, such as Home Upgrade Grants and the Net Zero Communities Project, it has been identified that the knowledge of where to start on these projects and obtaining reliable advice from a properly regulated independent company are significant barriers to action.

9. Equality, Diversity & Inclusion

- 9.1. The purpose of this project is to increase the number of residents who can make an informed decision on whether solar panels are suitable for their property and individual circumstances.

10. Community Safety issues

- 10.1. No community safety issues have been identified.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The Council has a corporate objective of "Supporting homeowners upgrade the environmental performance of their homes." The Council already has a number of schemes to assist households that cannot afford such improvements but other projects have identified barriers that prevent those who can afford to pay from moving forward with home energy improvements. This proposal has identified a solution that will help

overcome some of these barriers by providing practical advice and installation services about solar panels for north Norfolk householders via a third party.

Recommendations:

- To contract with the most suitable company to deliver a combination of solar modelling and impartial advice with optional managed installation for north Norfolk householders at no cost to the Council.
- To delegate authority to the Director for Place and Climate Change to reach a suitable agreement with an appropriate contractor