



**Solar Panel Guidance Note for  
Domestic Installation  
December 2011**

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### **Introduction**

The Council wants to increase renewable energy generation and understands that with high fuel prices and the negative effects of climate change, residents want to install solar panels on their homes to provide hot water or to generate electricity. In most cases they are not a problem but occasionally they harm the appearance of an area.

This note provides advice on installing solar panels lawfully by describing the type of installation that does not need planning permission on an existing building (i.e. “permitted development”) and when you will need to obtain planning permission. In either case, visual appearance is an important consideration.

***If you have any doubts about whether your proposal is lawful – even if the suppliers say that it is – please discuss the matter with the Council before proceeding.***

### **Permitted Development**

There are two types of solar panel:- photovoltaic panels or tiles that generate electricity and solar-thermal panels or collectors that heat water.

Either type can usually be installed as “permitted development” if:

- They are on or within the boundary of your home; this can include the roof and walls of your house, the surface of your garden and the roof and walls of buildings within your garden; and
- They do not protrude more than 200mm beyond the plane of the roof slope or wall and are no higher than the highest part of the roof (excluding chimneys).

Occasionally, solar panels may comply with these criteria but will still not be permitted development because of their appearance. Installations must so far as practicable, be sited to minimise their effect on the external appearance of the building and on the amenity of the area.

Harm can often be avoided by placing the panels in unobtrusive positions, trying to configure them in a regular pattern and not extending to the extremities of the roof plane. The percentage of the roof slope covered is a factor to be considered and, if possible, the installation should be symmetrical.

There are a number of products on the market where the panels can be incorporated in a newly tiled roof slope, reducing their prominence and minimising their impact on the wider area - this does not require all slopes on the roof to be replaced.

The colour of the panels and their framing is very important and they should merge with the background colour of the tiles or slates as far as possible.

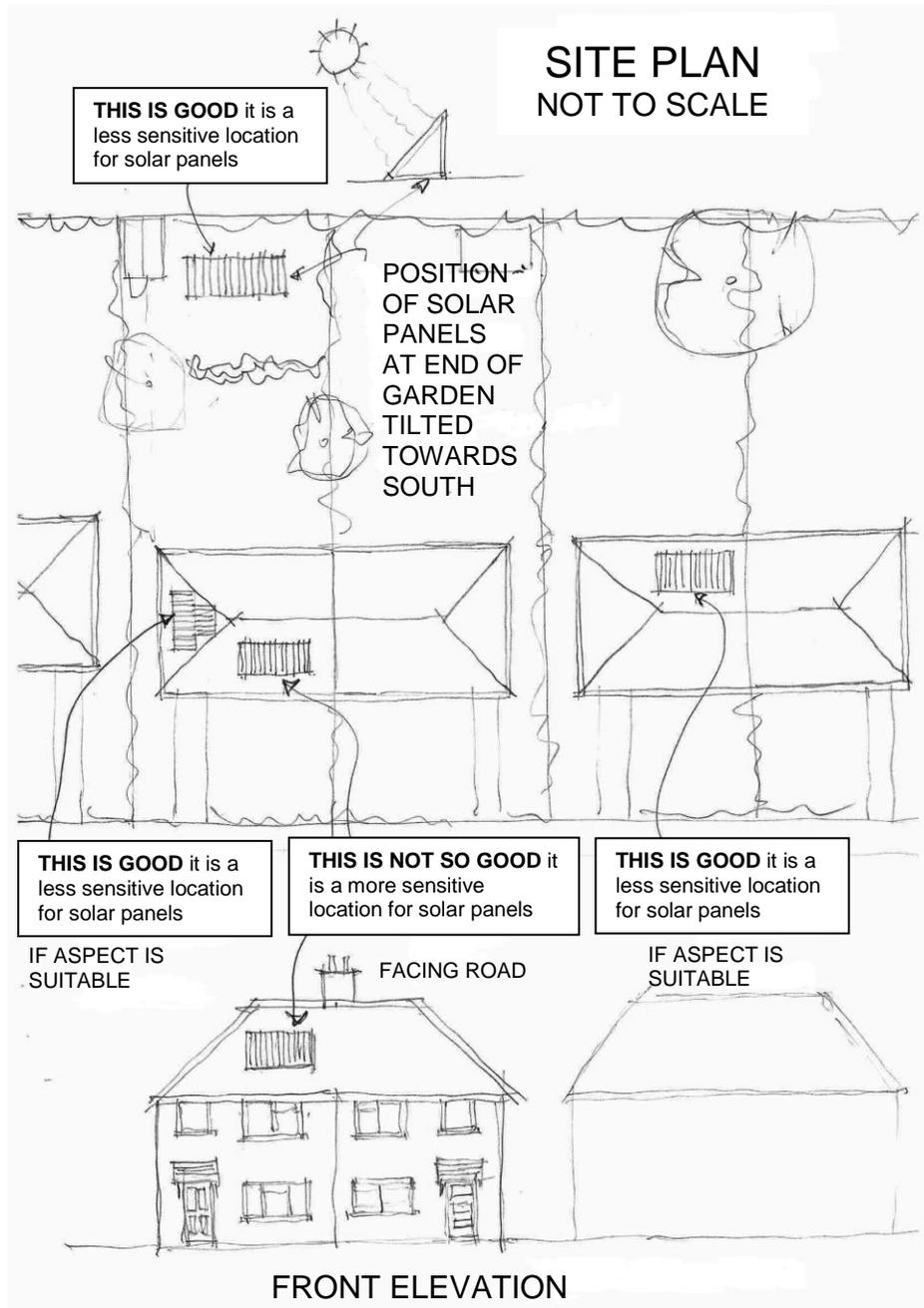
The prominence of the roof slope has to be carefully considered. For example, solar panels sited on a forward-projecting section may be more visible than a recessed part of a front roof slope.

In the case of front facing dormers, careful thought should be given as to where new solar panels will be sited.

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Roof slopes facing a road or public footpath are normally highly visible to the public. If solar panels are positioned on these slopes they can be very prominent and could possibly spoil the appearance of neighbourhood. This is because they can appear alien to the traditional architectural character of the Borough. This conflict can sometimes be avoided by using panels which are integrated into the roof, or by siting them where they cannot be seen from the road. If a back garden is sufficiently deep this can be achieved by positioning them on the ground & angling them towards the sun. Subject to space, they may be further hidden from view by low vegetation.

Non south-facing roof slopes may be a less prominent option, but possibly at the cost of generating capacity.



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### **Solar Panels on Listed Buildings and in Conservation Areas**

There are further limitations in Conservation Areas and on Listed Buildings. In Conservation Areas, planning permission is required for solar panels installed on a wall forming the principal or side elevation of the house or on a wall of a building within the garden of that house if it would be visible from a highway.

Eleven Conservation Areas within the Borough have no permitted development rights for solar panels. Residents in these Conservation Areas should always consult the Conservation or Planning Officers to explore if there are options which would be less visible after which a planning application must be made and approved before any solar equipment is installed.

Listed Building Consent is required for all installations on the exterior of a listed building. The Council will ensure that the historic character and architectural appearance of a Listed Building is protected, including its roof and the materials from which it is constructed.

If surrounding gardens are large enough, there may be a position where panels could be unobtrusively sited provided they do not compromise the "setting" of the Listed Building. Further information can be found on the [English Heritage website](#).

### **What should I do if I'm thinking about installing solar panels on my home?**

If you need further advice please contact the Council. Write in or speak with one of our Planning Officers; providing details of your proposal; and they will tell you whether you will need planning permission. Even if your proposal is permitted development we strongly recommend that you apply for a Lawful Development Certificate. This will formally confirm that your proposal is lawful and will be useful if you sell your house<sup>1</sup>. Details of how to make an application for a Lawful Development Certificate or for Planning Permission can be found [here](#). The current fee for a Certificate is £75 and £150 for a retrospective planning application.

### **What happens if I ignore the Guidance Note and just put the solar panels up?**

If you install your solar panels without obtaining either a Lawful Development Certificate or the necessary consent and your installation is unlawful, you could be subject to enforcement action. In such circumstances, where the work can be made lawful, we will try to find a solution with you.

If the matter is not resolved the Council may take enforcement action, dependent upon the degree of harm caused. If the installation is not permitted development, a retrospective planning application may be requested and, if that is refused by the Council, there is a right of appeal.

If a homeowner does something that is unlawful, they run the risk of incurring additional costs to themselves. Such situations should be avoided by following the above advice.

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<sup>1</sup> Without a Certificate you may find that problems arise during the legal search process.

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**Contact details and useful links**

**Epsom and Ewell Borough Council**

For advice on whether or not you will need planning permission please contact the Borough Council preferably in writing or by e-mail. If you want to meet a Planning Officer face-to-face, you can do so without an appointment between 10.00 and 11.00 on any weekday at the Town Hall.

**Contact Us:**

Use our [contact form](#)

**Tel:** 01372 732000

**Txt:** 07950 080202

**Address:**

Epsom & Ewell Borough Council  
Town Hall  
The Parade  
Epsom  
Surrey  
KT18 5BY

**Actio<sub>2</sub>n Surrey**

Actio<sub>2</sub>n Surrey is a partnership project that offers homeowners impartial advice on how to reduce energy in the home or install a renewable technology, like solar panels. It's supported by several councils across Surrey, including Epsom & Ewell. Just some of the things available through Action Surrey are; impartial and practical energy advice, discounted insulation, a trusted installer network for renewable technology, and case studies of residents who have been there and done it. For more information please call 0800 783 2503 or visit the [Action Surrey](#) website.

**Energy Savings Trust**

The Energy Saving Trust is the UK's leading impartial organisation helping people save energy and reduce carbon emissions. For more information visit the [Energy Savings Trust](#) website.

**Directgov**

This is digital service provided by central government for people in the United Kingdom, providing a single point of access to public sector information and services. It provides impartial information about domestic energy saving and generation, including solar power. For more information visit the [Directgov](#) website.

**Climate Change and Your Home**

This is an English Heritage website designed to help homeowners understand more about the potential impacts of climate change and ways to save energy if they own or manage an older home. For more information visit their [website](#).