# **Position Statement on Solar PV for Hertfordshire Maintained Schools**

# Introduction

Hertfordshire County Council has received several enquiries from both schools and solar photovoltaics (PV) providers regarding the suitability of installing PV on the roofs of ‘maintained schools’ within Hertfordshire. This position statement provides an overview of the county council’s position on these issues.

# Responsibilities of Hertfordshire County Council

Hertfordshire County Council is responsible as the owner and manager of a significant proportion of the schools within Hertfordshire.

As part of future investment plans, the council is committed to being a net-zero greenhouse gas county by 2050, following policy commitments within the [**Sustainable Hertfordshire Strategy**](https://www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/microsites/sustainable-hertfordshire/sustainable-hertfordshire.aspx). This requires a 90% reduction on the baseline emissions for the council to reach this target. The council also has an additional target to be carbon neutral in its own operations by 2030. In line with these targets, there is a significant challenge on the council to decarbonise buildings in its ownership.

# Funding Availability

The council does not currently have any budget available for dedicated funding for the provision of solar PV systems onto schools within Hertfordshire, however the council is reviewing opportunities for implementing this type of project through alternative mechanisms. For example, we have previously been awarded funding to support the provision of PV through the Salix Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme (PSDS).

Given the financial pressures facing the UK currently, in addition to the high costs of energy, the council recognises the importance of this issue and are working to identify opportunities to decarbonise school buildings.

# Opportunities and Challenges

The county council is keen to enable schools to decarbonise and is open to exploring innovative mechanisms for facilitating this. Various schemes are available currently which do not require capital investment for delivery, instead recovering costs through energy savings over several years (typically 15-25 years).

These proposals will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis for maintained schools within Hertfordshire; however, there must be due consideration around the existing condition of the building fabric of the school, as well as any proposed changes to the structure, operation, or use of the site within the timeframe of any such agreement. Additionally, The Council will consider the liabilities placed both on the school and Hertfordshire County Council throughout any such agreement, as well as the terms of the agreement to determine whether this is considered favourable to proceed with. The council are keen not to act as a barrier to decarbonisation efforts for solar PV projects, however it must be determined that any potential negative implications for the school or the council are fully understood and considered.

Maintained schools should be aware that only Hertfordshire County Council as the freeholder can grant an agreement for use of the property by a 3rd party.

Academies should be aware that the lease arrangements they have with Hertfordshire County Council may require prior formal consent both for any alterations as well as the grant of any agreement to a 3rd party to opearate the same.

# Common Issues

Some of the common issues with these proposals are outlined below:

## Impacts on Roof Repairs and Maintenance

These schemes often impose additional responsibilities and liabilities on both the school and/or the County Council, particularly around the suitability of the roof (which may not have been designed to cater for the installation of solar panels). Whilst surveys will be undertaken through these schemes prior to commencement of the agreement, any ongoing maintenance works to the school roofs will likely incur additional costs, as this may need to either remove these panels or work around them in situ.

## Uncertain Cost Implications for Schools

These models typically promote cheaper electricity rates when compared to national grid rates (as this doesn’t need to account for losses in electricity transmission through the national grid). However, as these prices vary significantly with energy markets, it can be difficult to accurately assess the cost implications to the school, particularly over longer timeframes. Some providers will highlight that schools can obtain a profit share of this; however, this is often unclear in terms of actual income that will be received by the school. This is also discretionary within some proposals.

## Loss of Management Control of Roof

Where a ‘lease’ is granted to facilitate the installation of panels on the roof, the current owner of the building (either The School or The Council) will lose control of these areas for the duration of the agreement (e.g. 15-25 years). This may increase the difficulty of undertaking regular maintenance to these areas of the building during this time. This may also inhibit future expansion and alteration proposals for the school during the timeframe of this agreement.

## Post-agreement Responsibilities

Some of these agreements promote the provision of panels to the school at the end of the agreement, which is typically perceived as a benefit. However, where these panels are at end of life, this means there is no allowance within the contract for the removal of the system, which will therefore fall on the school as a cost to bear, or on The Council.

## Termination of Contract

Where some proposals are identified as ‘licences’ the detail of the proposal may be more comparable to a ‘lease’. This introduces complexities around termination of these contracts, which are typically not in the favour of the asset owner/occupier, and instead benefit the 3rd party.

# Current Status

Hertfordshire County Council are committed to delivering sustainable outcomes across the schools’ estate and will continue to review and consider any new proposals we receive. However, these are often comprehensive and detailed documents and therefore there may be some delays in our response on new requests whilst these are evaluated.

In recent years Hertfordshire County Council has received various requests for schools within the county to explore community energy schemes from different providers. To date, we have not reviewed a proposal that has not presented more negative implications for both the school and The Council compared to the benefits of these panels.

However, we will continue to explore alternative options with the view to securing the best outcome(s) for schools. We welcome further discussions on this and other sustainability opportunities with local authorities within Hertfordshire.

# Further information

Hertfordshire County Council have developed recent guidance around the different types of schools within Hertfordshire, and key considerations for [**implementing solar PV installations on schools**](https://thegrid.org.uk/leadership-and-management/climate-change-and-sustainability/decarbonising-the-hertfordshire-estate). For any other questions regarding the feasibility of these schemes, please contact Hertfordshire County Council at [**DCDRequests@hertfordshire.gov.uk**](mailto:DCDRequests@hertfordshire.gov.uk).