

RISE

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Solar Panels in Conservation Areas

Quick guide

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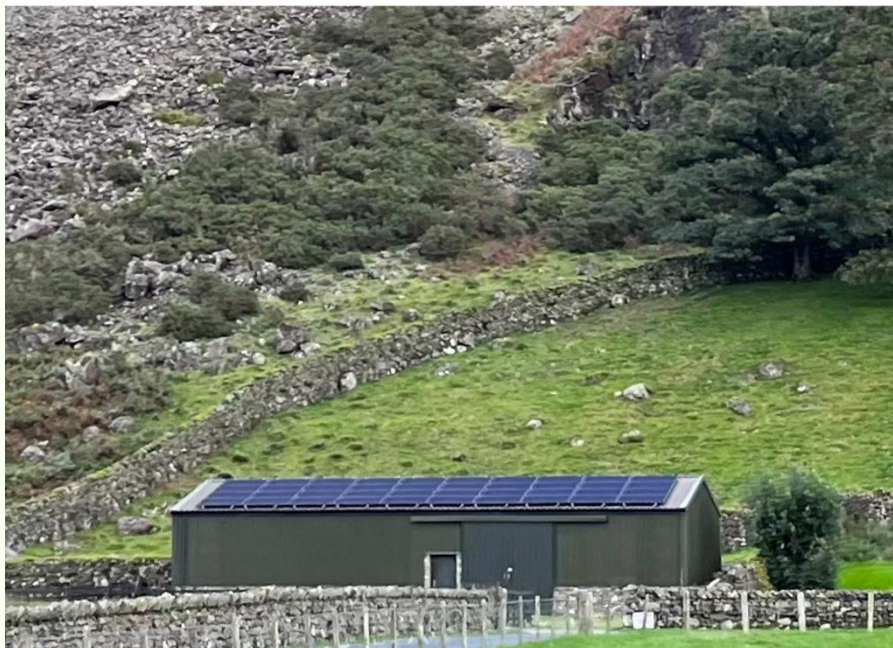
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Introduction

Fitting solar panels can be challenging in areas where there are restrictions on planning and properties are protected in their visual character. Across England there are different categorisations that can impact upon what can happen to buildings in those areas. These include:

- **Conservation areas:** A designated area that is protected due to its historical, architectural, cultural, or environmental significance.
- **National Parks:** These are protected landscapes due to their special qualities. The national parks are there to conserve and enhance the natural beauty, wildlife, and cultural heritage of the landscape.
- **Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty:** A designated area that has significant landscape value and is protected for conservation due to its natural beauty.
- **Listed buildings:** These buildings are legally protected for their special architectural or historical interest.

As you might imagine, there can be resistance around fitting solar panels in these buildings or areas, especially where the site contributes to the area's protected characteristics. But it's not impossible! Organisations like the National Trust, which manages a high number of protected landscapes and buildings, have shown how solar panels can be fitted in a sympathetic way.



Source: lakedistrict.gov.uk

Fitting solar panels in protected areas

It's usually a good idea to seek local advice from the responsible body. As solar panels are now relatively well-understood, these organisations almost always have guidance for those wanting to fit them.

To reduce the planned visual impact of the solar panels, the [Lake District National Park](#) suggests:

- **Colour:** The colour and finish of the solar panels should be chosen to blend with the roof it is mounted on and any surrounding buildings
- **Framing:** Panels without frames, or black framed panels, should be used where framed panels would detract from the building
- **Symmetry:** Panels should be laid in a symmetrical pattern. Aerials and flues should be moved to facilitate a symmetrical solar installation
- **Size:** Panels should cover the entire roof of a building
- **In-roof or on-roof panels:** Where possible fit in-roof panels
- **Visibility:** The location of a solar system can impact on the roof of the settlements. Try to avoid fitting to the main elevation of the roof, as in the one seen from where it is most commonly viewed

Observing such guidelines will help applicants obtain planning permission for solar panels, where it is required. Formerly considered very challenging, cases like the installation of solar panels on the roof of the grade I listed chapel at [King's College Cambridge](#), demonstrate that it is possible when sensitively navigated. This is because there is a growing recognition of the need to balance environmental and building conservation with environmental sustainability. Neither should have a greater priority.

Listed building consent

If the building is listed or affects the setting of a listed building, there is a requirement to get permission through the listed building consent process. The process for this is to start by talking to the local authority conservation officer. This will help you understand what is possible or not, and the likelihood of success.

“When the planning authority considers whether to grant or to refuse and application, it must give particular attention to the desirability of preserving the building, its setting and those features which make it special.” Source: historicengland.org.uk.

Working with the local teams will help develop these applications, and a willingness to be flexible and sympathetic to the building's significance will increase your chance of success.

Solar doesn't have to be roof mounted

Where it is not possible to fit solar panels to a building, thinking differently may help with getting permission. If the fitting of them on the roof of a building is not an option, what are the other options? Could you use ground mounted solar as an alternative?



Source: ecoinstaller.co.uk

Biodiversity

Installing solar panels on a building will usually involve disturbance on the roof and loft. This could cause an impact to nesting and roosting birds and bats.

"If you suspect bats and birds may be affected you can seek further advice from your local authority, Natural England..."

Source: malvernhillsaonb.org.uk.

Where nesting birds are unprotected, a bird proofing system may need to be fitted alongside solar panels. This is usually netting or similar product that prevents birds from nesting underneath the solar panels.

Ground mounted solar panels can support biodiversity. The space around ground mounted solar panels can become a great place for wildflower planting and other biodiversity measures. If the area is fenced off, it can also become a haven for small animals like mice, voles and shrews, which thrive where they can be protected from natural predators.

Understand the Carbon ambitions of the area

The fitting of solar panels will help reduce the carbon footprint of a building. Aim to understand and maximise these savings fully, as being able to communicate this to the responsible organisation will demonstrate the contributions of your work to their net zero targets. This should increase your chance of negotiating for new technology successfully!

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