



The Observer

Labour's 'rooftop revolution' to deliver solar power to millions of UK homes

Ed Miliband sets new rules on solar panels and approves three giant solar farms as Labour seeks to end years of Tory inaction

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Keir Starmer's Labour government unveils plans for a "rooftop revolution" today that will see millions more homes fitted with solar panels in order to bring down domestic energy bills and tackle the climate crisis.

The energy secretary, **Ed Miliband**, also took the hugely controversial decision this weekend to approve three massive solar farms in the east of England that had been blocked by Tory ministers.

The three sites alone - Gate Burton in Lincolnshire, [Sunnica's energy farm on the Suffolk-Cambridgeshire border](#) and Mallard Pass on [the border between Lincolnshire and Rutland](#) - will deliver about two-thirds of the solar energy installed on rooftops and on the ground in the whole of last year.

Now, before Wednesday's king's speech, which will include legislation for setting up the new [publicly owned energy company GB Energy](#), ministers are working with the building industry to make it easier to buy new homes with panels installed, or instal them on existing ones.

Ministers are looking at bringing in solar-related standards for new-build properties from next year.

At present, while formal planning permission is not required, there are restrictions on where and how high up on buildings they can be placed. There are also restrictions in conservation areas and on listed buildings. These may also be re-examined.



Energy secretary Ed Miliband has granted approval for three giant solar farms. Photograph: Wiktor Szymanowicz/REX/Shutterstock

Miliband, who has promised to **triple the amount of solar power** in the UK by 2030, as well as double onshore wind and quadruple offshore wind, said on Saturday night: “I want to unleash a UK solar rooftop revolution. We will encourage builders and homeowners in whatever way we can to deliver this win-win technology to millions of addresses in the UK so people can provide their own electricity, cut their bills and at the same time help fight climate change.”

His officials insisted the new government was showing its willingness to “take on the Nimbys” as part of the fight against the climate crisis.

As one of his first acts last week, Miliband lifted the Tories’ de facto **ban on the building of new onshore windfarms**.

Miliband’s rapid moves on solar power were welcomed by UK energy experts, who said they would speedily rectify a huge imbalance in the use of renewable energy in Britain.

At present, most power from renewable sources is concentrated in the north but has to be transmitted to the south, where demand is most intense. “Unfortunately, these transmission lines are congested and power supplies from the north to the south are often curtailed,” said Sugandha Srivastav, of Oxford University’s Smith School of Enterprise and Environment.

“Instead, gas generators have to be turned on to provide electricity for households in the south, and as we all know, after the Russian invasion of Ukraine, gas can be extremely expensive. So solar in the south is going to fix a key problem. It will keep power costs low, which is what we desperately need.” In addition, the opening of the Gate Burton, Sunnica and Mallard Pass solar farms will increase the nation’s capacity for using solar radiation to generate electricity. “The three farms will have a capacity of around 1.35 gigawatts, which is almost 10% of current capacity- so this is very welcome,” said Hamish Beath, an energy consultant at Imperial College London.

However, the decisions have caused local outcries. The Tory MP for Rutland and Stamford, Alicia Kearns, said she was “utterly appalled” by Miliband’s decision to give the go-ahead to the Mallard Pass farm.

The government hit back, saying the move was justified on the grounds it will provide clean energy to power about 92,000 homes over the next 60 years.

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Opening the door to more large solar power farms will have to be quickly followed by improvements to the National Grid, experts also say. "We need to think urgently about how we transmit and distribute electricity," added Srivastav. "The demand for power is only going to go up as we electrify society and if we cannot get electricity to where it needs to be, we will be in an untenable situation."

Speaking before the king's speech, Starmer made clear his priorities would be to stimulate economic growth - including through a green energy revolution - in order to provide the necessary wealth for improving public services.

The speech will include a bill to enforce tough new spending rules and strengthen the role of the Office for Budget Responsibility. It will mean significant fiscal announcements must be properly scrutinised.

It will also include plans for a national register of children who are failing to attend school under a new law to stop them becoming part of the lost Covid generation. Councils will be required to monitor so-called "ghost children" and keep records of those being home-schooled.

The education bill will also make it a legal requirement for all primary schools to have a breakfast club and for branded items of uniform that a school can insist upon to be limited to three, to help family budgets.

The prime minister said: "There is no time to waste. We are hitting the ground running by bringing forward the laws we will need to rebuild our country for the long term.

"From energy, to planning, to unbreakable fiscal rules, my government is serious about delivering the stability that is going to turbocharge growth that will create wealth in every corner of the UK.

"The task of national renewal will not be easy and this is just the downpayment on our plans for the next five years, but the legislation set out at the king's speech will build on the momentum of our first days in office and make a difference to the lives of working people."

There will be legislation on setting up a national wealth fund to drive investment into the UK, and the recruitment of a new border security command. The package of bills will also focus on building more houses, improving public transport, and measures allowing devolution to local leaders.

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