

**PRESS RELEASE****23 March 2021****IT'S GREEN UP NORTH*****North East among Britain's top performers for renewables***

- ***Industry report highlights 'forests' and 'deserts' of small-scale renewable technologies across Britain***
- ***Sunderland among the biggest investors in solar panels, despite below-average gross household income***
- ***Northumberland among the top local authorities for biomass installations***
- ***The current rate of uptake across Britain means it would take 250 years for renewables to reach all households, a stark contrast against 'net-zero by 2050' target***

An industry report into Britain's uptake of small-scale renewable technologies is lifting the lid on renewable energy 'forests' and 'deserts', highlighting which parts of the country are investing in green energy for their homes – with the North East among the top performers.

The report, titled *Renewing Britain: The Changing Landscape of Home-Grown Energy*, dives into 14 years' worth of data held by MCS – the national standards organisation for renewables – revealing the North East as one of Britain's biggest champions of green energy.

County Durham and Sunderland both rank in the top five local authorities for installations of Solar PV, with 9,390 and 9,310 homes respectively having solar installed.

While the report shows a strong relation between high installation rates and rural locations, areas like Sunderland are bucking this trend.

The city has fewer than one in 100 homes designated as rural yet is proving it boasts one of the highest rates of Solar PV installations in the country (7.6 per cent of homes), driven by the council.

Gentoo, Sunderland's biggest social housing provider, has overseen the installation of Solar PV in thousands of households, thanks to a £10.1 million loan from a UK institutional pension investor.<sup>1</sup> The company's CEO, Peter Walls, has previously spoken out about the benefits of solar installations for combatting fuel poverty, highlighting the fact that 'heat or eat' is a reality for many vulnerable people.

This high installation rate in Sunderland is in direct contrast with the fact that the city has one of the lowest average disposable incomes in the UK. However, with 2,300 homes benefitting from the scheme, thousands of residents will now be able to reduce their heating bills by up to 40 per cent.

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.solarpowerportal.co.uk/news/sunderland\\_social\\_housing\\_gains\\_10\\_million\\_solar\\_loan](https://www.solarpowerportal.co.uk/news/sunderland_social_housing_gains_10_million_solar_loan)

Elsewhere in the North East, Northumberland sits within the top five local authorities for Biomass installations.

Biomass systems burn pellets, logs, or chips to provide a sustainable source of hot water and central heating and are an ideal solution for homes in rural areas, with Northumberland boasting 358 installations.

This puts the county in good company, alongside Cornwall and Wiltshire, as one of the areas that have adopted small-scale renewables.

### **Forests and deserts**

Mapping its own data against official statistics, MCS has identified 'forests' and 'deserts' of renewable technologies across England, Scotland, and Wales.

The company examined the rural and urban nature of each region against the percentage of households with some form of renewable technology installed, and considered other factors such as household income, levels of fuel poverty, and to what extent an area is on or off the gas grid.

Despite the success of the North East, data shows that the number of installations across Britain since 2008 equates to just 100,000 a year. At this rate, it would take 250 years for renewable technologies to reach 26.5 million households: a significant stumbling block for the UK's target of net-zero by 2050.<sup>2</sup>

Since 2008, MCS has registered 1.2 million installations of the five major renewable energy technologies across the country – which include solar panels, Ground-Source Heat Pumps and Biomass technology – generating 34,000GWh-plus of energy, and saving nearly 10 million tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub>e. This is the equivalent to the electricity used to power 9.65 million homes.

The analysis shows that the path of growth has been volatile, with the number of installations spiking and dropping in line with changes to government incentives, including the FiT and Renewable Heat Incentive (RHI).

Ian Rippin, CEO of MCS, says: "The success of the North East, particularly Sunderland's commitment to Solar PV installations, is a real inspiration for urban areas across the country.

"Our research shows areas designated as rural are typically more likely to invest in solar energy. However, Sunderland is proof that urban towns and cities can successfully implement a drive for renewables when local authorities are committed to affecting real change."

Off the back of its report, MCS is lobbying government with three key recommendations for a "carefully considered, long-term roadmap" for the broad adoption of renewables in Britain, and the decarbonisation of homes.

1. **Learn from the successes** of the devolved administrations and other tiers of government identified in the report: in particular, Scotland's "whole-system" approach, which sets the benchmark on a national level.
2. Use those lessons to **set clear, evidence-driven, and ambitious targets** delivered through long-term incentives to close current gaps and drive an increase in installations.
3. **Devise an integrated package of support** for small-scale renewables that is targeted to people and the areas they live. Cost reduction to improve accessibility and consumer awareness founded on impartial, independent advice should be at the heart of any support package.

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<sup>2</sup> 1.2m installations over 12 years averages at 100,000 per annum (accepting current rates at around 73,000 per annum), assuming one installation per household. Does not include 2020 data. 26.5m homes – ONS data.

Rippin concludes: “Domestic renewables have come a long way since 2008, when just 43 installations were recorded, with short, sharp injections of support for consumer incentives having been shown to drive temporary demand.

“Above all, what our report shows is that Britain is a divided country when it comes to the investment in small-scale renewables, with myriad factors affecting uptake. However, true change is happening at a local authority level; something which central government should learn from.

“MCS and the wider the industry is here to continue supporting the government as we move into a crucial period in addressing the climate emergency.”

MCS is overseen by the MCS Charitable Foundation, which works to increase public confidence, awareness and access to renewable energy and low carbon solutions across the UK.

Adrian Ramsay, chief executive officer of the MCS Charitable Foundation, commented: “This report is a really valuable tool for policymakers, researchers and the renewables sector in understanding the trends and patterns of the last 14 years, and setting agendas to deliver the transformational change the industry needs to create a resilient and greener future.”

MCS is at the heart of three new government incentive schemes, including the Green Homes Grant, a Smart Export Guarantee in place of the FiT, and consideration of a Clean Heat Grant to replace the RHI from 2022.

*Renewing Britain* intends to help government and industry to learn from thriving markets (forests) and identify barriers in areas where renewables have made little or no penetration (deserts).

**ENDS**

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## **NOTES TO EDITORS**

### ***About *Renewing Britain: The Changing Landscape of Home-Grown Energy 2008 – 2021****

Delivered by MCS (Microgeneration Certification Scheme), this eye-opening report shines a light on Britain’s relationships with small-scale renewable technologies over the past 14 years. Analysing data from the MCS Installations Database (MID), it offers a comprehensive analysis of what has gone before, providing an opportunity for learning and growth in line with net-zero by 2050 targets.

View and download the full report online here [www.renewingbritain.com](http://www.renewingbritain.com)

### **Fast facts about renewable technologies in the North East**

- County Durham and Northumberland each have more than 10,000 small-scale renewable installations.
- No. of Solar PV installations:
  - County Durham, 9,390
  - Sunderland, 9,310
- Sunderland has one of the highest rates of Solar PV installations in Britain (7.6 per cent).
- In absolute numbers (not considering number of households), the top five local authorities for Biomass were The Highlands (1,313), Cornwall (504), Aberdeenshire (435), Scottish Borders (395), Dumfries and Galloway (384) and Northumberland (358).

## **Top 10 areas of home-grown energy**

1. Orkney Islands - 20.80%
2. Western Isles - 14.95%
3. Mid Devon - 14.56%
4. Stirling - 14.10%
5. Peterborough - 13.04%
6. South Cambridgeshire - 12.61%
7. South Hams - 12.19%
8. Torridge - 12.08%
9. Mid Suffolk - 11.44%
10. South Norfolk - 11.20%

## **Areas with the lowest home-grown energy**

1. Wandsworth - 0.79%
2. Lambeth - 0.79%
3. Hackney - 0.78%
4. Islington - 0.75%
5. Camden - 0.73%
6. Tower Hamlets - 0.69%
7. Hammersmith and Fulham - 0.61%
8. City of London - 0.58%
9. Westminster - 0.49%
10. Kensington and Chelsea - 0.30%

## **About MCS**

[www.mcscertified.com](http://www.mcscertified.com)

With energy costs constantly rising and climate change affecting us all – low-carbon technology has a bigger and bigger role to play in the future of UK energy.

We're here to ensure it's a positive one.

Working with industry we define, maintain and improve quality – certifying products and installers so people can have confidence in the low-carbon technology they invest in. From solar and wind, to heat pumps, biomass and battery storage, we want to inspire a new generation of home-grown energy, fit for the needs of every UK home and community.

## **About MCS Charitable Foundation**

<https://www.mcscharitablefoundation.org/>

MCS Charitable Foundation is an independent UK-wide charity, whose mission is to accelerate the widespread adoption of renewable energy and low carbon technologies.

With growing concern about the climate emergency and energy costs on the rise, the need to advance low carbon solutions has never been greater. MCS Charitable Foundation wants everyone to have access to affordable and reliable renewable energy, so that we can have warm, comfortable homes as part of a resilient, zero carbon future.

For more information, visit <https://www.mcscharitablefoundation.org/projects>.