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Exclusive: Flurry of solar farms rush to meet looming FiT deadline

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21 Jul 2011, Jessica Shankleman , BusinessGreen



Solar farm developers look set to beat the clock and deliver at least 16 large projects this month ahead of deep cuts to feed-in tariff incentives that will come into effect from 1 August.

DECC will from next month slash feed-in tariff incentives for all solar installations with over 50 kilowatts of capacity by between 40 and 70 per cent, in response to ministerial concerns solar farm developers will drain the limited funds that are primarily intended for domestic rooftop installations.

Industry players have argued the tariff changes will effectively "kill off" the market for large projects. But while

some developers scrapped projects which were no longer financially viable in the wake of the review, others rushed to meet the current rate of tariffs ahead of the August deadline.

BusinessGreen has learnt at least three large solar projects are set to go live during the next 10 days, and at least another 11 have connected to the grid in the last 10 days. A further two were expected to be completed in Carmarthenshire by next week; however, their status is currently unclear.

A British Gas spokesman confirmed the utility is planning to flick the switch on a 17,000 solar panel rooftop installation next week, which will generate five per cent of power for a Toyota factory in Derbyshire.

Non-profit organisation [OVESCO](#), formed by members of the Transition Town Lewes Energy Group, is also planning to connect the UK's first community-owned solar park to the grid next Saturday, two days before the FiT cut-off date.

Meanwhile, Anesco has today connected a 240MWh rooftop installation at a facility owned by Hampshire Cosmetics in Portsmouth, combining two major solar technologies – thin film and polycrystalline – across a 55,000 square foot roofspace.

Similarly, Lightsource Renewable Energy has developed 11 large projects with backing from Octopus Investments, one of which connected to the grid today on Promens Manufacturing's facility in Suffolk and another 5MW solar farm that will go live on Hawton farm in Cornwall tomorrow.

A spokeswoman for Lightsource said the 11 projects cover a total area of 136 football pitches with almost 118,000 solar panels, generating nearly 30MW and saving 14,700 tonnes of carbon emissions.

Nicholas Boyle, chief executive of Lightsource, said construction workers have raced against the clock to ensure the Promens project was completed today.

"Getting this site online before the August deadline was a considerable achievement and it is a real credit to [contractors] Grupotec for their speed and coordination during design and construction, and to Promens as a company for their commitment to the project and a willingness to do what was needed to get it completed," he said.

The flurry of new projects has drawn a mixed response from solar developers, with some hailing the sector's ability to deliver cutting-edge projects to extremely demanding timelines, while others have voiced fears the rapid rollout could prompt the government to again review the level of feed-in tariff incentives available to both mid-sized and large installations.

Insiders warned that any further early review of feed-in tariff incentives ahead of the scheduled review next year would prove "utterly disastrous" and would completely undermine investor confidence already badly bruised by the unexpected cuts to incentives.

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

Facts Straight

Hi, some of your facts in this article are a little inaccurate! Hampshire Cosmetics is more likely to be 240 kW rather than MW (you quoted 240 MW - which is similar to a nuclear power station!) and Howton Farm was energised yesterday by developer Low Carbon Solar (not Lightsource!).

Posted by Als Parker, 21 Jul 2011

Als

So there's another project too. The difference between Howton and Hawton farm is clearly greater than we realised! Do send over details if you have them. We're told the Hampshire Cosmetics plant will generate 240Mwh per year

Posted by Jessica, 22 Jul 2011

KWp VS years generation

as Als suggests i think theirs slightly misleading numbers in the article if it's expected to generate 240MWh/year as jessica says that leads me to expect it's around a 300KW peak installation two very different numbers

Posted by Paul, 22 Jul 2011

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