



Solar battery village set to power new green revolution

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Some 40 homes in Oxspring, Barnsley, will take part in the £250,000 pilot scheme
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A village in South Yorkshire is running a trial of solar technology that could cut bills and help whole towns to embrace renewable energy.

In the £250,000 pilot, funded by Northern Powergrid, smart batteries will be given to 40 council houses in Oxspring near Barnsley to store energy from solar panels. The scheme should help residents to save money by allowing them to use energy generated during the day in the evenings and nights.

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Solar panels normally feed unused electricity to the grid. While the surplus may be wanted elsewhere, it can create problems on sunny days by overloading older network infrastructure. Surges could lead to blackouts or damage, so operators sometimes limit the numbers of panels permitted in a particular scheme. The new system will reduce this higher-risk output.

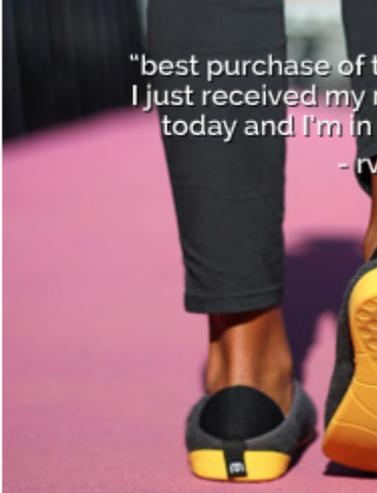
The smart batteries will be installed in 30 homes that have panels and ten neighbouring homes without them.

Similar technology has been tested elsewhere but it is the first time the focus has been on protecting the network in order to enable wider use of solar energy.

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Panels and batteries have been successfully used in tandem to provide power on the Scottish island of Eigg since 2008, but the "Eiggtricity" scheme uses a communal solar farm rather than rooftop panels.

The Yorkshire scheme's organisers said some households with solar panels were already cutting their energy bills by 50 per

The batteries are managed by software that calculates generation and demand for power and also takes into account each home's pattern of usage to maximise the benefits of storage.

Andy Heald, director of Energise Barnsley, the community energy company involved, said that they had been able to install solar panels on only two in three homes in the area so far because of existing grid constraints.

He added: "Solar power is a key part of Barnsley council's plan to reduce high levels of fuel poverty in the region. Battery costs are falling rapidly and storage has huge potential to accelerate the national roll-out of solar and improve the lives of vulnerable people." Moixa, the company that makes the batteries, said that linking them in a "virtual power plant" made the wider grid more efficient, greener and cheaper to run.

Northern Powergrid said the pilot could enable panels to be installed on more homes across the country using existing infrastructure, saving operators millions of pounds, which could be passed on to customers.

Elaine Marsh, an 81-year-old widow who will take part in the pilot scheme, said: "The solar panels already save me about £12 a month and the battery should give me even bigger savings because I'll be able to use the energy from the daytime at night. It's a big help for people on limited incomes and I hope it's rolled out for others."

Matthew Lockwood, an energy expert at Exeter University, said: "Pressure on the grid from household solar panels isn't a big problem at the moment but it's likely to become one as more people turn to renewables. Batteries look like an excellent way to address it, so this is an important test."

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