



Should I invest in photovoltaic solar panels?



If you fit solar panels you are paid a wholesale price, by the electricity company you choose, for the units you send into the grid. You may need a smart meter to enable this to be measured. These tariffs would make solar panels a poor investment unless you can consume the energy generated, or are planning to stay in the house for a long time.

Generally, you will be able to consume only about 30 per cent of the amount you generate (a 4kW system generates about 4,200 units). You can improve on this by adding storage. This could be a battery storage system, your electric car with a smart solar charge point, or a water heating storage system such as Solar i-Boost or Immersun.

However, you could find that you can use more of your generated power if you work from home. If the house is empty during the day, you are unlikely to benefit enough to make it worthwhile.

A Solar i-Boost unit (shown) is about £300 and is easy to fit into your existing immersion wiring but is most useful when your immersion heater is fitted at the bottom of your hot water tank. If it is, then, with 4kW of panels, it should be able to supply most of your hot water needs between June and August when the space heating is probably switched off, and contribute to heating the tank at other times of the year.

Adding battery storage is more expensive in that a 4kWh battery (capable of storing 4 units of electricity) might cost £5,000 extra.



You should try to put the maximum of 4kW of panels on your roof if possible, so that on winter days, the panels will still be able to cover “base loads” such as fridge/computer/chargers etc

Solar panels used to be blue with silver edges and rated at perhaps only 180w per panel, but current offerings are black and less noticeable and are 300 or 350 watts per panel which can mean you can now make a 4kW installation out of 12 panels.

The main photo shows a 4kW installation using 290w panels. Expect to pay around £6k for a 4kW installation. Solar panels have quite a high tolerance to positioning – Panels facing South East or South-west will still produce 90% of panels facing due south. Even east or west facing may still give a good return. The installer will be able to calculate the exact figures.