

Call to let people use energy they generate

MPs urging a change in law to allow communities to power themselves instead of selling electricity to the grid

By **Helena Horton**

HOMEOWNERS should be allowed to create their own green electricity and sell it to their neighbours, the chairman of the environment committee has told the Government. Currently, those who create renewable energy using solar panels or hydroelectric dams have to sell it back to the grid, rather than using it to power their own homes or those of their neighbours.

Philip Dunne MP, chairman of the Environment Audit Committee (EAC), has written to Kwasi Kwarteng, the Business Secretary, asking him to cut the red tape and allow local communities to power themselves.

He argued that allowing people to profit from green energy would create more projects across the country, helping the UK to reach Net Zero.

The MP for Ludlow explained: "It must make sense for local projects to be able to consume the electricity they're generating, partly because the grid is posing a real barrier for some of these projects getting off the ground.

"Getting a grid connection is both incredibly costly and time-consuming. There are many schemes that have been held up by the inability of the grid to absorb them at the rate they pop up. There is a failure of the grid to absorb supply in remote places."

If it were possible to power local homes directly from electricity generated from neighbourhood projects, it would make it financially viable to invest in green electricity, he added.

Mr Dunne has personally joined a

local scheme in Ludlow, where 50 investors set up a hydroelectric dam that produces enough energy to power 40 homes. However, they have to sell the electricity back to the grid, and cannot use it locally.

A new report from the EAC recommends that regulatory and grid-connection barriers are removed to allow community projects to sell their energy to their local communities.

It argued that ministers could look to the Netherlands for examples of successful harnessing of this potential. There, 70,000 citizens are "off-grid" – part of local energy schemes, powered by electricity from solar, bio-gas, wind and hydroelectric dams.

Mr Dunne said of his own community energy scheme: "I think people would love to be able to use the energy in their homes around the river."

He believes the initiative could take off if it would save people money, adding: "If people can invest in something that will lower their own bills, then that's an incentive."

He added: "I think there's real potential here and I feel it is disappointing it was not really identified in the energy white paper ... I hope the new BEIS [Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy] minister will seize the moment and pick up our recommendations and run with it. It's self-help that doesn't require large amounts of government subsidy."

One day, he hopes, every new house will be built with solar-panelled roof tiles, and make large reductions to their energy bills.

He said: "We are doing an inquiry into

the sustainability of the built environment and I know Tesla brought out a solar-panelled roof tile which they launched with fanfare in America – it certainly hasn't got here – but one of the main construction suppliers has developed his own.

"That is something I am really interested in, as if we can start building new houses with solar panel roof tiles as part of the construction, it can become a normal part of construction and people can at least partially power their own homes and lower their energy bills."

70,000

Number of citizens in the Netherlands who are part of local power schemes creating green energy

