

Solar Rally and Lobby of Parliament

Rally: 1pm, The Emmanuel Centre, 9-23 Marsham Street, London SW1P 3DW (doors open 12.30pm)

Mass Lobby: 2.30pm, St Stephens Entrance, Houses of Parliament

Introduction

Thank you for agreeing to come to the mass lobby of Parliament and standing up for solar power. The more people put pressure on MPs to rethink these proposals the better chance we have of delivering a sensible solution for the future. And there is no better way to put pressure on MPs than to meet them face-to-face.

This briefing sets out what you can expect to happen on the day, and how to make the day a real success. But if you still have unanswered questions, do contact martyn@oursolarfuture.org.uk.

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Map – where things are



KEY

A – Emmanuel Centre

B – St Stephens Entrance, House of Commons

C – Westminster Tube Station

What will happen on the day?

Things will kick off with a rally in a hall a few minutes walk from Parliament. We are lining up speakers from the major political parties to be there, and will also use the rally to do a quick briefing you on what happens when we go to lobby MPs.

Then at 2.30pm, we will take the short walk to Parliament, where you will get the chance to meet your MP as part of a “Mass Lobby of Parliament”. The more of us who do this, the more MPs we will get to talk to, and the bigger the impact we will have.

What is a mass lobby?

Not many people realise they can walk into the House of Commons at any time when it is sitting and ask to see their MP. You enter the Central Lobby and fill in a form known as a “green card” and House of Commons staff will set off to try and find your MP so you can speak to them.

A mass lobby is simply a large group of people exercising this right at the same time. This means that as well as the conversation each person has with their MP, people in Parliament are also aware of the fact that many people are queuing outside and coming inside the Palace of Westminster – which gives a general sense of widespread concern to others in Parliament (such as journalists and civil servants who work nearby) as well as to MPs who are not directly lobbied. This makes it important to “brand” the queue with banners or props to show what people are coming for. These cannot however be taken inside Parliament.

The “buzz” created by this is an important part of the day – and often leads to questions or comments being made in Parliament as the lobby progresses (though this depends on what is on the agenda of course).

So how exactly will this lobby work?

We will gather in a queue outside Parliament starting around 2.30pm. In groups of 50-100, we will be allowed through security and into the Central Lobby where you get to fill in a “green card” to call down your MP. At this point House of Commons staff will try to track down your MP – calling their office, leaving messages on a special “message board” the MPs use, and even with doorkeepers searching the Commons library, tearooms and bars to let them know you are waiting for them.

When the MP arrives you will be called to the desk to meet them – so listen out for the tannoy announcements! This usually takes anywhere from 10-30 minutes. Many MPs then take their constituents off for a cup of tea, or to a meeting room or office for a short discussion to get the chance to explain their concerns.

It is possible your MP will not come down – they may be tied up on other business, or not even in Westminster. In this case the Green Card is passed onto the MP, and usually they contact you to apologise for missing your visit and asking how they can help. They sometimes also send a member of staff to talk to you.

Parliamentary security will only allow 50-100 people to wait inside the central lobby for their MP at any time – so people who have not managed to see their MP do need to move on or people outside will be kept waiting longer and longer. And to make sure you are comfortable if you are one of those waiting, **wrap up warm**. Just because the weather has been wierd lately doesn't mean we can guarantee a mild day...it is November after all.

We will have stewards on hand to explain to people what is going to happen when they get inside and what they should do – and to encourage people to move on and let others in if it looks like their MP is not turning up.

Should I bring more than one person?

The more people turn out, the better. So if you can bring a couple of colleagues – especially if they work with you but live in a different constituency so will see a different MP – then please do so.

Obviously however people are busy – and even more so since this stupid decision was announced. So if you can't spare staff, then think of another way you can show their support to your MP. Perhaps they could all sign letters which you could bring along to hand into the MP, and explain they wanted to come, but just could not spare the time because they are fighting to rescue the company from this ridiculous decision. You could even try ask customers to add their names to a letter to deliver the MP – anything that shows the widespread support there is.

I can't get there at 1pm...can I come later?

Technically you can turn up and lobby your MP at any time – but the effect is greater if we all do this together. It would be helpful to be at the rally first – but if that really is impossible, get to the House of Commons as soon after 2.30pm as you can.

What do I say to my MP? What are MPs like?

First thing to remember is that whatever you may think of them privately, most MPs are fairly charming when you meet them, and are not out to intimidate or browbeat their voters (usually because they are well meaning and trying to improve life for their voters, but on occasion this is just for fairly obvious job survival reasons).

Second thing is that they are unlikely to be experts in solar or how FITs work – they have to know a bit about everything. So you are unlikely to be challenged very hard on technical details – this is much more about making them realise the real concern about the impacts in the constituency.

The strongest point to make – which even those sceptical about solar will appreciate – is that it is very difficult to run a business and employ people locally when the Government shifts the goalposts with so little notice. It will help enormously to explain that the industry is happy to see rates fall – indeed that is how FITs work – but it has to be better planned, and the date has to be put back.

The second point to make is that FITs was designed to grow a new industry – which it has done successfully with 39,000 jobs now in solar according to the Government. Nothing has changed to suggest we don't need that industry any more – we haven't found climate change isn't true, or found huge reserves of cheap carbon-free power anywhere else. Indeed the only thing that has changed is the price of solar has fallen faster than expected. So to destroy the industry that a couple of years ago everyone said we needed to build to bring costs down is madness.

Finally – be prepared to answer the point about poor people paying for rich peoples solar. You may have community or housing association schemes you can point to which will help dispel this. You could also point out that FITs (across all technologies) have added less than £1 so far. But MPS are concerned about the future – so you should explain that the Conservatives proposed funding FITs from a central fund, not from a levy on bills. There should be nothing to stop the Government implementing this and keeping solar afloat without adding the price onto bills.

What we need to do before the day?

The day will run better if as many people as possible who are coming on the lobby have telephoned their MP and warned them they will be there. It is difficult to make an appointment as there is a danger of being stuck in the queue at the allotted time. However having a mobile or office number so you can update the MP on where you and what time you will get in is a very useful thing to have – you may even be able to encourage your MP to come and meet you in the queue and then you can get away earlier.

These advance contacts also build expectations about the lobby itself – which is useful in itself – and may enable people who find their MP is not going to be present to make other arrangements to lobby them.

Making the most of the lobby in the local media

You should also use your attendance at the lobby to make the most of your local campaign to save FITs – so make sure their local media know you are travelling to Parliament and provide photos of them doing so to maximise the impact of their efforts.

We will have banners/props for people on the day – but feel free to bring your own. These cannot be taken into Parliament, but can be left with stewards, or people still in the queue to be collected as you come back out. There is a model Press Release you can use at the end of this briefing.

Model letter/email to MP

Joe Bloggs MP
House of Commons
London SW1A 0AA

Dear Mr Bloggs

Solar Feed-in Tariffs – Lobby of Parliament, 22nd November

As you will know, the Government is now consulting on a key policy supporting renewable energy with the intention of slashing it in just four weeks time. This could be devastating for *[your company]*, now employing *[number]* people. Indeed, ill-thought out changes to policy could lead to our complete closure, and that of many similar companies.

I will therefore be coming to Parliament as part of a mass lobby by those affected on Tuesday 22nd November. I would very much like to get the chance to speak to you and explain the impacts.

I will be coming with (add if you are bringing colleagues/joining with other companies/bringing a representative of a community/school/housing association scheme with you).

The lobby will begin at 2.30pm, though it is difficult for me to know exactly when I will be able to get into the Central Lobby. It would therefore be very helpful if you could give me a contact number so that I can talk to you on the day and update you on when I expect to get in.

I hope to hear from you soon, and look forward to seeing you on the day.

Yours etc

Model Press Release for local media

LOCAL SOLAR WORKERS GO TO WESTMINSTER TO FIGHT FOR JOBS AND GREEN ENERGY **MPs called upon to stand up for jobs in [your town/city]**

Employees of a rapidly growing solar company in [your town/city] will travel to Westminster on Tuesday 22nd November to call on MPs to stop Government wrecking their business. They will join with other solar supporters from across the country in a Mass Lobby of Parliament.

[Your company] has created 30 jobs in the last two years as they have successfully fitted solar panels to the homes of 200 local homes and businesses. Across the country, Government figures suggest some 39,000 jobs have been created by similar companies – despite the gloomy economic outlook.

However the company now warn that these jobs are at risk, thanks to a Government decision to dramatically cut back support for solar power with just 6 weeks notice.

At issue are the payments made by energy companies to people with solar panels on their homes. These payments, based on a policy used in Germany where 150,000 people work in the solar industry, are known as feed-in tariffs and they means that people installing solar panels are paid for the energy they generate.

The policy has led to far more homes being fitted with solar panels – and as more people have done it, prices have fallen by about a third. Solar companies had expected the support rates to fall in April, to reflect the falling price of installing panels. But now the Government has sprung a much deeper cut of more than 50% on them with just six weeks notice. The sudden announcement has led to cancelled orders, and will leave companies holding stock they may find difficult to sell. It could mean solar fitters being out of work by Christmas.

..... of [your company] said

“We are going to Parliament to remind our MP that Government said it was serious about kickstarting a solar industry. We took them at their word, and have generated local jobs at a time that much of the economy is struggling. And we’ve provided systems to hundreds of homes and businesses that are saving them money and helping cut our carbon emissions.

But all this is at risk if the Government take an axe to this policy. To throw workers in a new, high tech, environmentally sustainable industry out of work at a time like this would be pure madness.

We hope Joe Bloggs MP will see the success we have had and do everything he can to persuade Ministers to keep our solar industry alive.”

ENDS

For further details, contact