

Work starts to install 3,500 solar panels at Metrocentre shopping and leisure complex

Work is under way to install more than 3,500 rooftop and solar car port panels at the North East's biggest shopping centre.

Metrocentre directors are working on initiatives to ensure a more sustainable future for the centre, working with renewable energy and low carbon technology consultant Syzygy Consulting to complete the £2.8m project. Power company ERDF has granted half the cost of the project

The solar panels, covering an area equivalent in size to 88 tennis courts, will be installed on the roof of Metrocentre and on specially constructed solar car ports, with the build already well under way.

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Next March, solar car ports and 46 new EV charging ports will also be added to the Green and Blue Mall car parks, with the total solar power providing emissions-free 'fuel' for 7,230 electric car miles. The project will generate 1,243,800 kWh of electricity per year, enough to energy to power 340 households a year or boil a kettle more than 11.3m times.

It's estimated that the electricity generated from the solar panel installation will result in a reduction of 315 tonnes of carbon dioxide emissions each year, equal to planting 32,500 trees over the system's 25-year Lifetime.

Switching to solar energy will also reduce Metrocentre's grid dependency by 30%, offsetting more than 37% of its total annual electricity use with its own low carbon supply.

Gavin Prior, Metrocentre centre director, said: "We're

delighted to announce we have successfully secured ERDF funding to launch this new and unique renewable energy project. A massive solar panel and car port installation of this kind has never been seen before in a UK shopping centre and upon completion of the project, Metrocentre will have the largest solar panel installation of any UK shopping centre.

“Solar energy is the first stage of building a more sustainable future for Metrocentre, by reducing our carbon footprint and bringing renewable energy to the local community. This project, and others like it, are an integral part of our long-term strategy for the centre which focusses on sustainability and our place in the community.”

Kirsty Berry, director of projects at Syzygy Consulting, said: “Metrocentre’s project is one of the largest and most noteworthy projects in Syzygy’s 10-year history. We are delighted to be driving the delivery of such an important scheme within the ‘Northern Powerhouse’, making a massive contribution to the renewable generation and EV charging capacities both for the centre and within the region.

“The project will provide one of the largest publicly accessible solar car ports and demonstrate the synergies between renewable energy and the electrification of the transport network.”

Coun John McElroy, cabinet member for environment and transport at Gateshead Council, said: “It’s great to see Metrocentre committing to this exciting project, the biggest of its kind at a UK shopping centre, to generate power from solar photovoltaics, and to enable customers with electric vehicles to charge while they shop.

“Gateshead has an ambitious plan to go zero carbon by 2030, and we work in partnership with major stakeholders in the borough like Metrocentre, to embrace this vital agenda, and reduce their carbon footprint.

“As well as providing this key new infrastructure for EVs, Metrocentre already sees 23% of its customers arrive by public transport and we will continue to work alongside the team to further improve public transport provision, and enable more customers to walk and cycle to the centre, to help reduce congestion and vehicle emissions.”

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