

REA response to the Public Bill Committee on the Planning and Infrastructure Bill

The Renewable Energy Association (REA) is pleased to submit this response to the Public Bill Committee on the Planning and Infrastructure Bill. Although our members welcome the proposed changes within the legislation, there are a number of missed opportunities that could assist in the rollout of high-quality, long-term charging infrastructure and faster deployment of solar and storage technologies – helping to deliver on the Government's ambitions in this space.

Summary

The REA sees a significant opportunity for the bill to help in the provision of charging infrastructure from a domestic tariff, through changes to Clause 43 concerning including a provision for cross pavement solution providers and further amendments around planning permission. With further views expressed on the opportunity for this historic bill to make provision for strengthening of tenants' rights around the installation of charging infrastructure which we call the right to charge.

In addition, we must ensure that planning departments are adequately resourced to enact and enforce the new proposals. The recently pledged funding for Local Authorities to employ extra resource is welcome but will fund only 350 new staff – less than one new person per Local Authority.

We understand and support initiatives to safeguard nature and wildlife in planning reforms – we believe these should be mutually beneficial and reinforcing, as highlighted in the recent Review of Environmental Regulations. In particular, the language around proposed 'Environmental Development Plans' is not strong enough to actually deliver the promised benefits.

REA Response

Missed Opportunities for electric vehicle charging infrastructure

Clause 43

The problem:

At present the bill in clause 43 accelerates the installation of public EV charge points by removing the need for street work licences and allowing chargepoint installations to instead be authorised by permits, a much simpler, lower cost process. Currently the bill only provides this for public chargepoint operators.

However, public chargepoints cost up to 10 times for consumers to charge with, in contrast to paying at home. 40% of households today do not have off street parking, meaning they would need to rely on this more expensive way of charging. Currently if they do that, all 40% of these households would be financially **better off by driving a petrol car.**

As many as **4-8 million people** could benefit from a cross-pavement solution, allowing those without driveways to charge at home on the cheaper domestic tariff, allowing them to save around **£1000** a year. A cross-pavement solution provides a long-term, cost-effective way to connect a domestic supply to a vehicle without the need of a driveway. Currently the two main ways of doing this are through a channel solution or AON solution. OZEV's cross pavement guidance¹ provides a description of these.

The total cost of the installation of a cross-pavement solution can be as little as £1000. However, with additional street work licencing costs and planning permission the cost can more than double in some cases. This means that the total payback period for installation can be as much as 4 years, in contrast to the 17 months it would take on average assuming £95 a month in savings vs charging in public according to data collected by the REA.

There is therefore a significant missed opportunity to simplify the installation process.

In addition, planning permission to install the accompanying chargepoint. In England, the cost of planning permission has more than doubled to **£528** from £258. This adds 5 months to the payback period. This means that in 2 tier local authorities, prospective EV buyers may find they are permitted to install a gully to convey the electricity to their car but are barred from installing a charger to supply it. This is clearly an example where current laws have not kept up with new innovations.

The solutions:

1. To resolve the high cost of street work licences which vary in the UK from as little as £500 to as much as £2900 from REA research but this could potentially be higher, Government must amend clause 43 to include cross pavement solution providers and their respective installers, to ensure consumers are protected from unnecessary additional costs.
2. Government must look to exclude domestic chargepoints from needing planning permission. Domestic chargepoints can take up less than a foot square at the front and less than 6 inches deep. Some solutions like the AON solution can also be buried under the pavement, meaning there is no potential for obstruction. Under the last Government changes to permitted development rights ²were sought, including to domestic chargepoint installations. However, we understand that a decision has yet to be reached by Government.

A right to charge

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/cross-pavement-solutions-for-charging-electric-vehicles/cross-pavement-solutions-for-charging-electric-vehicles>

² <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/changes-to-various-permitted-development-rights-consultation>

The problem:

For the 10-15% of drivers in multi-occupancy blocks and those renting or even leasing, the UK has the worst legislative provision out of the 6 largest markets in Europe regarding access to charging infrastructure³. This includes no legal provision regulating the installation of charging points in private environments - all stakeholders, including tenants, landlords, leaseholders and freeholders need to approve the project. No justification is needed to oppose a project, with no legal deadlines or standardised procedures to respond - and no obligation to even answer a request.

After substantial engagement with landlords and chargepoint operators/installers working on apartment charging, fire safety has come up as a key barrier to installation. Some insurers will even go so far as to remove insurance for an apartment block if a chargepoint is installed in the underground car park. This is despite the risk of a fire starting from an EV being 15-20 times lower than a petrol or diesel vehicle⁴.

This problem is further exasperated by mixed messaging from Government. The current landlord chargepoint grant allows for and encourages chargepoints to be installed in underground and covered car parks up to £30,000 but part S of the Building regulations currently exempts underground car parks from needing to install a chargepoint.

The insurance sector needs certainty through recognisable and deliverable policy intervention to improve fire safety of underground car parks that is deliverable and reduces risk. A recent peer reviewed study highlights that a rethink of how we treat fire safety is needed, identifying the new challenges EVs bring and calls for guidance with mitigation and smart design⁵ to enable the 15% of the population currently being held back, to be allowed to charge at home.

The solution:

1. The Government must work with industry experts to produce evidence led fire safety guidance written from the perspective of what is legally, technically and commercially possible. We understand such efforts have been tried before but to date Government have been unwilling to fund such a report.
2. Following the completion of such a report, the Government should look to use this bill to introduce a right to charge that allows tenants the ability to have a chargepoint installed at their property. We would suggest for shared car parks that one operator should be contracted to install chargepoints across the car park, to prevent inconsistencies in installation and performance. This would solidify tenants rights and enable a quicker and certain transition to electric vehicles.

³ <https://www.transportenvironment.org/articles/right-to-plug-how-to-guarantee-seamless-ev-charging-in-shared-buildings>

⁴ <https://internationalfireandsafetyjournal.com/research-highlights-lower-fire-risk-in-electric-cars-compared-to-petrol-and-diesel-vehicles/>

⁵

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/380008339_Assessment_of_recent_UK_fire_safety_guidance_for_covered_car_parks_and_electric_vehicles

The REA is happy to work with relevant stakeholders to organise a meeting between key stakeholders in this sector to meet with members of the committee to discuss how collaboration can quickly and reasonably move this forward.

The REA has worked with allies in the sector on a joint response concerning both of the above EV related policies with suggested wording for amendments and would be happy to work with signatories to provide additional evidence should the committee desire it.

Wider Comments

Appropriate Planning Department resourcing to enforce changes

We must ensure that planning departments are adequately resourced to enact and enforce the new proposals. The recently pledged funding for Local Authorities to employ extra resource is welcome but will fund only 350 new staff – less than one new person per Local Authority.

Our members have consistently found that lack of resource is slowing down decisions and causing blockages to delivery.

Coordination of Spatial Plans

Several new spatial plans are under development or proposed – Regional Energy Spatial Plans, Local Nature Recovery Plans, and others – it is important these are mutually developed and coordinated as there is also large scale on the way for the Land Use Framework policy.

Importance of safeguards for Nature

REA note the recent Joint letter to Government⁶ from a number of leading nature based NGOs such as The Wildlife Trusts, Woodland Trust, RSPB, and National Trust.

We and understand and support initiatives to safeguard nature and wildlife in planning reforms – we believe these should be mutually beneficial and reinforcing, as highlighted in the recent Review of Environmental Regulations.

In particular, they warn that “in its current form, the language around proposed ‘Environmental Development Plans’ is not strong enough to actually deliver the promised benefits”.

The solution:

We back nature groups calls to:

Prioritise Avoiding Harm: *Developers must first avoid environmental damage before relying on Environmental Delivery Partnerships (EDPs), with harm to protected sites only permitted for overriding public interest.*

⁶ [Charities challenge Ministers: fix the Planning Bill, or nature will pay the price | The Wildlife Trusts](#)

Base Decisions on Science: *New protected features should only be added when clear scientific evidence supports the effectiveness of strategic approaches.*

Guarantee Upfront Benefits: *Environmental improvements must be delivered upfront, especially for irreplaceable or significant damage, with a clear and transparent improvement plan.*

Ensure Net Gain for Nature: *Strengthen the improvement test to require definite, measurable, and significant benefits, rather than just probable improvements.⁷*

*In practice this means **strengthening the language around 'Environmental Development Plans'.***

About the REA:

The REA represents renewable electricity, heat and transport, as well as Electric Vehicle charging infrastructure, Energy Storage and Circular Economy companies. Members encompass a wide variety of organisations, including generators, project developers, fuel and power suppliers, investors, equipment producers, banks, legal firms and insurance companies. Members range in size from major multinationals to sole traders. There are around 500 corporate members of the REA, making it the largest renewable energy and clean technology trade association in the UK.

Our Electric Vehicle Forum RECHARGE UK⁸ consists of around 100 members across the EV sector, ranging from ChargePoint Operators (CPO's), software companies, manufacturers, consultancies, fleet operators and single-issue groups.

This diverse membership gives us unique insight into the whole of the renewable energy and clean technology space which we hope will be of value to this inquiry and we would be happy to provide additional evidence on any of the points raised in our response.

⁷ ibid

⁸ <https://www.r-e-a.net/our-members-forum/electric-vehicles/>