

The North East of England

Photovoltaics industry in the North East, opportunities for you



Committed and expanding

- The North East is committed at a strategic level to the development of the photovoltaics industry and market both in the region and beyond.
- Major opportunities exist for companies wishing to invest in a region that has already made progress to develop and grow existing capabilities.
- The New and Renewable Energy Centre at Blyth is now home to the Photovoltaic Technology Centre. The Centre offers assistance with testing and development of solar products.
- The region is also home to the 6 MWP photovoltaic lamination manufacturing facilities at Romag Ltd. Regional companies can also offer expertise throughout the supply chain from design to installation.
- The Northumbria Photovoltaics Applications Centre at Northumbria University is recognised world wide as a leading research and development institute in both PV cells and systems, whilst Durham University has an international reputation for PV materials research.
- The regional development agency, One NorthEast, is leading the development of PV capability and provides the secretariat to the newly established PV-NE network an industry led network of companies active in the PV sector.
- The region boasts three flagship developments in the UK PV industry, the first building integrated PV facade at the Northumbria University, the Doxford Solar Building and the Devonshire Building at Newcastle University.
- The North East is served by excellent sea, air, rail and road links. Five major port facilities, road and high speed rail networks and the two International Airports provide access to the rest of the UK and beyond.

Putting forward the business case

The North East boasts world class capabilities in power generation, renewable energy and environment sectors. Historically the region has been at the forefront of energy development and has already made a strategic shift to ensure it fully exploits its skills, technology and knowledge resource base in the new and developing renewables sector. This shift, coupled with a diverse range of interested organisations, R&D facilities, and a customer focused business support network, makes the North East the place to make your business a sustainable success.

Photovoltaic development past, present and future

The history of photovoltaics in the region has been closely linked to academic excellence in the Northumbria Photovoltaic Applications Centre, who for many years has promoted and progressed innovative PV projects, notably the UK's first building integrated photovoltaic installation at Northumbria University.

Through the dedication and hard work of a small number of organisations a successful supply chain is emerging. Investment in the specialist glass company Romag has secured a working agreement with BP Solar to manufacture bespoke modules. In addition to this, Romag Ltd will also be manufacturing PV roof tiles in association with Marley Tiles.

These progressive developments are being supported at a regional level by strategic organisations such as One NorthEast and Government Office for the North East who have identified renewable energy, micro technologies and related business development as important strands in the region's economic strategy. In particular opportunities have been identified relating to market expansion, awareness raising and addressing technology barriers.

Regional renewable energy targets have been identified for the period 2003 - 2010 for the generation of electricity. The region's capacity and potential is set to grow rapidly and provides excellent opportunities for market exploitation to 2010 and beyond.

Companies and entrepreneurs

The North East is home to a number of dedicated companies involved in the PV supply chain. Their capabilities include installation, system design and operation and maintenance companies.

Working in conjunction with the New and Renewable Energy Centre (NaREC), the region's companies are also supported by the Regional Development Agency's Cluster Team. These activities are focussed on providing development and joint venture opportunities to both 'home grown' businesses and businesses wishing to invest in the region.

A Centre of Excellence

The North East region is proud to host NaREC at Blyth. A recent addition to the facilities at NaREC is the PV Technology Centre. This independent centre offers testing and development facilities to the PV industry and is unique within the UK. NaREC will also house an Electrical Testing Laboratory with a dedicated PV array to investigate interactions between PV systems and the electrical distribution network.

Northumbria Photovoltaics Applications Centre at Northumbria University is a world leader in R&D in photovoltaic cell and system development. The group is currently researching thin film compound solar cells, building integrated system design and performance issues, environmental impact analysis, distributed generation issues and thermophotovoltaic systems. NPAC also has strong links with the new facility at NaREC resulting in complementary expertise spanning all aspects of research and development. Durham University also has an international reputation in PV materials and devices with the Durham Centre for Renewable Energy and the two Universities work closely together to influence research policy in the UK.

People and places

With competitive labour costs and a strong work ethic, the region has a readily available pool of skilled labour for employers to tap into. There are a wide variety of prime Greenfield and Brownfield sites available with excellent port side access across the region. High spec new and refurbished office spaces are available and managed and stand-alone facilities located close to key transportation links and labour pools exist for all sizes of company.

Skills and training

Most labour requirements can be supplied without difficulty, however a wide range of agencies and organisations offering extensive training facilities and support available if precise skills are not available.

Opportunities for training within the PV sector have been identified at a national level. The region is piloting the delivery of training courses focussing on installation of domestic systems. The PV sector is working with other agencies to match learning opportunities to local skill needs. These agencies also work with new and established businesses to help forecast for, and prepare to meet, their needs.

The region's five top class universities all provide a range of relevant degree courses in engineering, together with postgraduate training opportunities, and are supported by a network of 24 further education colleges. There is a track record of providing targeted courses for companies to enhance the skills of their workforce.

Communicating and connecting

The North East can offer businesses with a gateway to the rest of the UK and Europe. The region is served by sea, air, rail and road links. RO/RO container and general freight services operate out of port facilities on both the Tyne and Tees rivers. These ports have close links to the Baltic and Scandinavia and provide easy access for import and export of feedstock and equipment.

Two International Airports also serve the region with Teesside and Newcastle International operating both freight and passenger services worldwide.

To summarise

The region has been highly successful in developing practical partnerships that deliver real development opportunities. Companies locating in the region will benefit from:

- An established and supported supply chain of companies offering services from design through to manufacture
- Competitive operating costs with a flexible and skilled work force together with competitive financial incentives
- Sea, air, rail and road communication links both throughout the UK, Europe and worldwide.

This is coupled with a diverse range of property solutions, R&D facilities, and customer focused business support networks make the North East the region in which to make your business a success.

Contact

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