

George Ferguson: Let's make the most of that God-given sun

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It is great to see a [Bristol](#) church leading the way in something that really matters. This week's news that the Redland Park United Reform Church has installed the largest solar panel array in the city on its south-facing roof is significant.

I look forward to the day when such an installation ceases to be news and becomes a matter of practical good sense.

This Redland church now has the bit between its teeth, and encouraged by the attention, is determined to make itself as self-sustaining as possible. After all, for those that believe that the sun is God-sent then it is so appropriate that the church should be setting an example.

They may have been a year ahead of the game – and now it will become a no-brainer to install photo voltaic panels on small and large roofs as the Government have followed the shining example of [Germany](#) in introducing a series of 'feed in tariffs' from April 1 that will make it worth our while. The most attractive incentives are for existing householders. I expect to see hundreds of Bristol homes taking up the offer under the Clean Energy Cash Back scheme over the next 12 months and benefiting from a real income from their energy regeneration, amounting to a significant saving on energy bills.

So what are the advantages – and will I be taking up the offer? The advantage is that for the investment that a household makes, for which energy mortgages should be available, the return should be around eight per cent, which compared to current return on money in the bank, is very attractive.

On a typical three-bedroom house using say 3,000kWh of energy a year, a well-installed system on a south-facing roof should generate about 2,000kWh earning £800 over electricity savings of well over £100. All this is to be extended to heating systems in April 2011 so that even greater savings can be made.

OK I live in a far from typical space with no bedrooms – but it makes sense to me – and if I apply early I could have the double benefit of a £2,500 grant as well. This will come to an end in six weeks, so speed is the essence. However it still makes sense even when the grants phase out.

So while I realise this is a major investment – it will cost around £10,000 – it is much better than most other investments, and will more than cover any borrowing costs.

Let's put Bristol in the forefront of this initiative and make sure we have a greater take-up per head of population. Let's make the most of that God-given sun.