Central Bedfordshire

Renewable Energy Guidance Notes

Introduction

1.0 Introduction

1.1 Renewable energy is a broad term covering a range of sustainable energy sources which cannot be depleted. National policy actively promotes and supports the development and deployment of renewable energy. The government has committed to generating 15 per cent of energy from renewable sources by 2020 (through the European Renewable Energy Directive). This will in turn contribute the commitments made in the Climate change Act (2008) to reduce green house gas emissions by 34%, from 1990 levels, by 2020 and 80% by 2050.

1.2 At the local level policies in the emerging Development Strategy for Central Bedfordshire take a positive approach to renewable energy generating schemes providing their impact can be made acceptable. This Supplementary Planning Document has been produced to expand upon the policies contained in the emerging Development Strategy. Its purpose is to assist the interpretation and application of those policies and in particular help steer development to locations where the impact will be reduced or where there is demonstrable benefit to new communities.

1.3 Central Bedfordshire is producing a series of renewable energy planning guidance notes will be provided to steer and assist developers and communities in bringing forward their development ambitions.

1.4 These will focus on ensuring that planning applications for the most appropriate and effective renewable technologies are targeted to the most suitable places in Central Bedfordshire, ensuring that the area can contribute towards the delivery of national targets for carbon reduction and deployment of Renewables, whilst at the same time protecting and enhancing all of the local features and assets that make Central Bedfordshire such a great place to live and work.

1.5 This approach, supported by a series of technical guidance notes for development management purposes considering a range of Renewables technologies is in line with national policy, as set out in the UK Government's Renewable Energy Roadmap (2011). This states that encouraging a diverse mix of energy sources, including renewables, is the best way to meet the UK's decarbonisation objectives, protect consumers against rising energy prices and ensure the lights stay on. Therefore providing clarification on the planning issues relating to a range of Renewables technologies will support the deployment of a wider range of technologies in Central Bedfordshire, allowing the most appropriate use of technology in the most appropriate location.

1.5 Currently, guidance notes have been produced that focus on wind generation and solar farms. These consider the capacity of the landscape to accommodate such developments in Central Bedfordshire alongside a range of sensitivities including biodiversity, heritage and communities.

1.6 Future guidance notes will be produced (as deemed necessary) to provide advice on Biomass, Energy from waste, District and decentralised heating, along with any emerging technologies that come to the fore.

1.7 What do the Renewables Guidance notes do and don't provide:

a. The guidance notes do not allocate sites for Renewables.

b. Does not rule out sites, but does provide the Council's view on what would or wouldn't be suitable in an identified location.

c. Allows for a greater consideration of local issues in balance of broad national planning policy.

d. Help steer and provide for a mix of technologies in line with national energy roadmap.

e. Provide advice on the implementation of the Council's emerging policy on Renewables, but are not a policy in their own right.

f. Provide a consistent level of guidance for development management purposes.

g. They highlight areas that would be more or less sensitive to Renewable developments.

h. Allow the developer to factor the implications of mitigating impacts in to their scheme for proposals in those areas deemed more sensitive at the very earliest opportunity

i. The guidance notes are not the Council's strategy for mitigating and adapting to climate change – this is covered by the Council's Climate Change Strategy which is far broader in scope and details specific actions going forward.

1.7 The Council's Climate Change Strategy sets out the range of activities and measures across all areas of the Council's operations that will contribute to mitigating and adapting to the impacts of climate changes. This makes reference to the relevant policies in the Council's emerging Development Strategy and represents a positive and proactive approach to tackling climate

National planning policy – NPPF and EN1

1.8 This guidance is shaped by the requirements of national planning policy, which ultimately steers and shapes how the Council's planning policies are set within the emerging Development Strategy. With regards to renewable energy generation development the key points are as follows.

National Planning policy framework (NPPF) and emerging government guidance.

1.9 The NPPF sets out the key national planning priorities for England and is a material consideration in planning and development management decisions. It

states that to contribute to the increase in the use and supply of renewable and low carbon energy, local planning authorities should recognise the responsibility on all communities to contribute to energy generation from these sources. They should:

a. have a positive strategy to promote energy from renewable and low carbon sources;
b. design their policies to maximise renewable and low carbon energy development while ensuring that adverse impacts are addressed satisfactorily, including cumulative landscape and visual impacts;
c. consider identifying suitable areas for renewable and low carbon energy sources, and supporting infrastructure, where this would help secure the development of such sources;
d. support community-led initiatives for renewable and low carbon energy, including developments outside such areas being taken forward through neighbourhood planning.

1.9 With regards to wind energy developments the NPPF states that in assessing the likely impacts of the potential development, identifying suitable areas, and in determining planning applications for such development, planning authorities should follow the approach set out in the National Policy Statement for Renewable Energy Infrastructure (read with the relevant sections of the Overarching National Policy Statement for Energy Infrastructure, including that on aviation impacts).

1.10 Where plans identify areas as suitable for renewable and low-carbon energy development, they should make clear what criteria have determined their selection, including for what size of development the areas are considered suitable. This is covered in the guidance note for wind generation.

1.11 When determining planning applications, local planning authorities should:

- not require applicants for energy development to demonstrate the overall need for renewable or low carbon energy and also recognise that even small-scale projects provide a valuable contribution to cutting greenhouse gas emissions; and
- approve the application if its impacts are (or can be made) acceptable. Once suitable areas for renewable and low carbon energy have been identified in plans, local planning authorities should also expect subsequent applications for commercial scale projects outside these areas to demonstrate that the proposed location meets the criteria used in identifying suitable areas.

Emerging government guidance - ‘Planning practice guidance for Renewable and low carbon energy’

1.12 In July 2013 the government issued new ‘Planning practice guidance for

Renewable and low carbon energy'. This replaces PPS 22. Further guidance is expected from DECC on Community engagement for Wind Farm Developers in autumn 2013. Both of these documents provide further interpretation on how planning policy should be applied in relation to renewable and low carbon energy developments.

1.13 This new planning practice guidance broadly sets out that:

- The need for renewable energy does not automatically override environmental protections and the planning concerns of local communities
- Decisions should take into account the cumulative impact of wind turbines and properly reflect the increasing impact on (a) the landscape and (b) local amenity as the number of turbines in the area increases
- Local topography should be a factor in assessing whether wind turbines have a damaging impact on the landscape (i.e. recognise that the impact on predominantly flat landscapes can be as great or greater than as on hilly or mountainous ones)
- Greater care should be taken to ensure heritage assets are conserved in a manner appropriate to their significance, including the impact of proposals on views important to their setting.

Overarching National Policy Statement for Energy (EN-1) and National Policy Statement for Renewable Energy Infrastructure (EN-3)

1.14 The NPS's set out national policy for delivery of the nationally significant energy infrastructure, including renewable energy. They are a material consideration in decision making on applications that fall under the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended).

1.15 As a material consideration the NPS's will be considered on a case by case basis and weighed up by the Council's Development Control Committee alongside other material considerations relating to that particular planning application (such as layout and height of the development, design, appearance and materials used, impact on visual amenity, number of jobs created etc). The NPS's set out assessment principles for judging impacts of energy projects. Those principles can be used by local planning authorities in preparing the local impact reports. The specific principles relating to each of the main criteria areas are focussed on in the technology specific guidance elements of this SPD.

The emerging Central Bedfordshire Development Strategy – Policy 46: Renewable and low carbon energy development

1.16 The Council's Development Strategy, when adopted is also a material consideration in the assessment of planning applications and if the proposed

development satisfies the requirements of the Polices within then it should be approved.

1.17 The Council recognises the environmental, social and economic benefits of renewable energy and is committed to work with renewable energy developers to deliver most appropriate sized and located schemes, with the most effective technology, in a way that is fully compliant with Central Bedfordshire's planning policy requirements.

1.18 In order to manage the impacts of renewable energy the emerging Development Strategy includes a specific Renewable and low carbon energy development policy (detailed below).

Policy 46: Renewable and low carbon energy development

The Council recognises the environmental, social and economic benefits of renewable or low-carbon energy. It will work with developers to ensure that proposed developments are:

- directed to those areas where negative impacts can be most effectively mitigated. Any unavoidable adverse impacts, including cumulative impacts, such as noise, pollution and harm to visual amenity, should be mitigated through careful consideration of location, scale, design and other measures;
- have good accessibility to the transport network;
- located and designed so as to have no unacceptable adverse impact on heritage assets, sensitive landscapes such as the Chilterns AONB, or any area identified through the Landscape Character Assessment as being of high sensitivity; green belt areas and townscapes.
- All developers of renewables schemes are required to engage with all affected stakeholders, including local communities, at the earliest stage in order to proactively mitigate impacts and provide adequate compensation and benefits.

Where a district heating scheme is proposed, where technically and economically viable and appropriate, all occupiers must be connected to that installation.

1.19 Renewable energy development should be directed to areas where the negative impacts can be most effectively mitigated and made acceptable. This, alongside ensuring comprehensive community involvement and the deployment of the most appropriate Renewable energy in technology in the most appropriate areas, are key underlying principles to this Policy.

1.20 Those areas most suitable for each of the renewable energy technologies will be highlighted in the technology specific guidance notes that form part of this document. The criteria used for identification of these areas will also be outlined and discussed in these documents. It is important to note that any development proposals outside these areas will have to demonstrate how its location, scale and design meet these criteria, as supported by NPPF.

1.21 Renewable energy proposals requiring regular access to transport network will be required to demonstrate how negative impacts are avoided or mitigated to acceptable levels.

1.22 The Council will support community-led initiatives for renewable and low carbon energy where other impacts have been satisfactorily mitigated. It is also key that developers of renewables schemes take a proactive approach to working with affected communities at the earliest stage in order to mitigate impacts and to provide adequate compensation and direct benefits.

2.0 Electricity Generating Capacity

2.1 Best practice guidance, such as BRE's '*Planning guidance for the development of large scale ground mounted solar PV systems'* recommends that planning applications for commercial scale Renewables should be accompanied by an estimate of the energy generation capacity of the proposed development. This is also information that the council would like to accompany planning applications for commercial scale Renewables. This should show:

i) Installed capacity of the proposal (MW): This is the power generated when the equipment is working at full capacity.

ii) Capacity factor: This is the factor that compares actual/expected production over a given period of time with the amount that would be generated if the equipment able to deliver at full capacity for the same period.

iii) Estimated annual production (MWh per annum): This is the estimated annual production of electricity based upon the installed capacity and capacity factor.

iv) Number of residential properties electricity equivalent: This is the number of residential properties that would be powered by the estimated annual production based upon the Great Britain average domestic consumption of 3,300 KWh per year[1]. Where the equipment will provide electricity primarily for a commercial or single buildings use e.g. a wind turbine linked to warehousing or visitors centre, then an estimate of the proportion of the building electricity to be supplied should be given.

2.2 Why is this information useful?

2.2 The NPPF states that '…when determining planning applications, local planning authorities should not require applicants to demonstrate the overall need for renewable or low carbon energy'.

[1] From Ofgem Factsheet 96, 2011

2.3 However this is considered useful background information and helps put the proposal in to a context that can easily be understood. It also helps support the principal in Policy 46 of the emerging development strategy of ensuring the ‘most appropriate technology is located in the most appropriate place’.