OUTLINE BRIEFING

Planning for Wind Energy

Informing Local Development Documents

May 2005

TCPA

THE BRITISH WIND ENERGY ASSOCIATION

The Case for Renewable Energy

The Kyoto Protocol, the first legally binding international treaty requiring developed nations to cut their emissions of greenhouse gases, came into force on 16th February 2005. The UK Government has set a domestic goal to go beyond the Kyoto commitment and cut the UK's emissions of carbon dioxide (CO_2) to 20% below 1990 levels by 2010. The Energy White Paper 'Our energy future – creating a low carbon economy' (2003) sets a further more long-term goal of reducing CO_2 emissions by 60% below current levels by 2050.

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A substantial proportion of UK CO_2 emissions come from the energy sector, and increasing use of renewable energy will play a vital role in reducing these. Renewable energy sources currently contribute nearly 3% of the UK's electricity needs. To meet the UK government's renewable energy targets this contribution will need to be increased to 10% by 2010, 15% by 2015, with an aspirational target of 20% by 2020.

Increased development of renewable energy resources is vital to facilitating the delivery of UK commitments on both climate change and renewable energy.

Planning Considerations

Current national planning policy guidance on renewable energy is set out in PPS22: Renewable Energy, published in August 2004. It calls for planning policies at regional and local levels to provide a positive framework, encouraging and promoting the use of the full range of available renewable energy resources. It requires regional renewable energy targets to be set in Regional Spatial Strategies (RSSs); expressed as the minimum amount of installed capacity for the region, and sub-region where appropriate. Local planning authorities will be expected to contribute to regional / sub-regional targets and policies and supporting text in local development documents should reflect this. Targets are to be reviewed on a regular basis and revised upwards as and when they are met. PPS22 emphasises that such targets must not be regarded as a ceiling for development, and will not be used as a reason for refusing planning permission for further renewable energy projects.

Councillors and Planning Officers at High Volts Wind Farm © E.ON UK Renewables

It is essential that all policies and their supporting text in RSSs and LDDs present an objective and robust approach to development. Both positive and negative effects of development should be recognised. Positive effects will be given significant weight in the decision making process - a key principle of PPS22 is that "the wider environmental and economic benefits of all proposals for renewable energy projects, whatever their scale, are material considerations that should be given significant weight in determining whether proposals should be granted planning permission" – in addition to certain adverse effects.

At the local level, PPS22 states that planning authorities should set out the criteria that will be applied in assessing applications for planning permission for renewable energy projects. Planning policies that rule out or place constraints on the development of all, or specific types of, renewable energy technologies

should not be included in local development documents without sufficient reasoned justification.

Guidance and policies within the Core Strategy can be supported by the production of Supplementary Planning Documents (SPD) if considered necessary; it is likely that this will be most appropriate in areas with greatest resource potential.

Wind Energy Proposals

The Practicalities of Development

Wind energy developments can give rise to a number of effects, the type and extent of which will vary depending on the nature and scale of the proposed development and its location. Such effects might include wildlife; nature conservation; visual appearance; landscape; traffic; archaeology & heritage; noise; shadow flicker; or broadcast interference.

In accordance with national planning policy, local planning authorities might wish to consider the following:

Landscape & visual effects

Wind Energy developments are temporary structures which can be removed and the land made good, should other clean energy technologies become commercially viable by the end of the lifetime of the project. Wind energy developments are by their very nature visible structures and while this should not be the reason for refusal in itself, inevitable issues of landscape appearance and change will need to be considered.

In areas of national landscape designations, large scale projects can only be permitted if there are considered to be no significant adverse effects on the special nature of the designation, or where the developer can demonstrate mitigation measures that will overcome these significant adverse effects. They can otherwise only be granted permission where there is overriding national need and an absence of alternative locations outside such designations.

Cruach Mhor © ScottishPower

LPA's should be aware that such criteria are unlikely to be as restraining to small wind systems; given their small scale, the likelihood of such developments producing significant adverse visual effects is greatly reduced.

Effects on wildlife & nature conservation

Planning permission for wind energy projects should only be granted where the developer can demonstrate mitigation measures to overcome any significant adverse effects to wildlife and nature conservation, or where any significant effects are clearly outweighed by the environmental, social and economic benefits of development.

Heritage

Planning permission should be granted where the objectives of designation will not be compromised by development. Any significant adverse effects on the qualities for which an area/monument has been designated must be outweighed by environmental, social and economic benefits.

Cumulative Effects
The cumulative impact of wind generation projects should also be a consideration, though planning authorities should not set arbitrary limits on the numbers of turbines that will be acceptable in particular locations.

Noise
Whilst wind turbines are a new source of noise in the environment there are well-developed guidelines established to ensure that wind farm sites are designed to keep any resulting noise signature within strict night and day limits. Such limits have been determined to lie below the World Health Organisation norms for the avoidance of any sleep disturbance.

Under the Town and Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) (England and Wales) Regulations 1999, developments listed under Schedule 2 will require an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA), to study and evaluate the likely effects of the proposal, both the broad and site specific effects. This process should aim to achieve a balance of all considerations, both benefits and adverse effects of development.

For detailed information on these and other issues concerning planning for the development of renewable energy, please refer to PPS22, and its companion guide. Both documents can be viewed on the internet via the following link:

http://www.odpm.gov.uk/stellent/groups/odpm_control/documents/contentservertemplate/odpm_index.hcst?n=5681&l=3

Renewables in residential/employment developments

BWEA emphasises the contribution that small renewable systems can make, and urges the Council to consider a policy for the mandatory requirement of onsite renewables for all new buildings and renovations to provide electricity for at least 10% of the building's needs (in addition to stringent energy efficiency/building performance requirements). National planning policy encourages this (PPS22, paragraph 7).

The following wording is highlighted as an example:
'All new residential and non-residential developments (either new build, conversion, or renovation) will be expected to incorporate on-site renewable energy equipment to provide at least 10% of the development's energy requirements'

Conclusions

Increased development of renewable energy resources is vital to facilitate the delivery of UK renewable energy targets – one element of the Government's strategy to tackle climate change and secure our energy supplies. Wind energy is part of the solution.

Local Planning Authorities have an invaluable role to play in ensuring the UK targets of 10% of electricity from renewable sources by 2010, and 15% by 2015 are met. The provision of robust and objective planning policies in Local Development Documents will ensure that there is an effective framework in place, from which well-informed and consistent decisions can be made.

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