

PLANNING PRACTICE GUIDANCE FOR RENEWABLE AND LOW CARBON ENERGY

Lead Officer – John Groves, Head of Nuclear Energy and Planning

To advise Members of new guidance which has recently been issued by the Government with regards to Renewable and Low Carbon Energy.

Recommendation: That Members note the report.

Resource Implications: None

1.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

1.1 The Government has recently issued guidance which provides advice on the planning issues associated with the development of renewable energy. The document relates to a range of renewable energy sources and does not relate just to wind turbines. The guidance has emerged from protracted debate over the balance between the need to secure and deliver energy from renewable sources and the environmental and amenity impact of wind generated energy in particular. This guidance should be read alongside the National Planning Policy Framework and is a material consideration in making planning decisions. It replaces the Companion Guide to PPS22 which is now cancelled.

1.2 The guidance clarifies a number of issues with regards to renewable energy developments which are summarised below:-

- The need for renewable energy does not automatically override environmental protections and the planning concerns of local communities
- Cumulative impacts require particular attention, especially the increasing impact that wind turbines and solar farms can have on landscape and local amenity as the number of turbines in an area increases.
- Local topography is an important factor in assessing whether wind turbines and large scale solar farms could have a damaging effect on landscape and recognise that the impact can be as great in predominantly flat landscapes as in hilly or mountainous areas.
- Great 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.

- Proposals in National Parks and AONB's, and in areas close to them where there could be an adverse impact on the protected area will need careful consideration.
- Protecting local amenity is an important consideration which should be given proper weight in planning decisions.
- Local Planning Authorities should not rule out otherwise acceptable renewable energy developments through inflexible rules on buffer zones or separation distances.

1.3 Although the guidance considers all forms of renewable energy development the section detailing wind energy will be of most relevance to Members. It identifies the following planning considerations for wind energy proposals:-

- Noise impacts
- Safety considerations in terms of proximity to buildings, power lines, air traffic, defence operations, radar and the strategic road network
- Interference on electromagnetic transmissions
- Ecology impacts
- Impacts on heritage assets and their setting
- Shadow flicker and reflected light, particularly with regards to neighbouring properties
- Cumulative landscape and visual impacts. It advises that cumulative landscape and cumulative visual impacts are considered separately.

1.4 Cumulative landscape impacts are defined as the effects of a proposed development on the fabric, character and quality of the landscape. It is concerned with the degree to which a proposed wind energy development will become a significant or defining characteristic of the landscape.

1.5 Cumulative visual impacts are concerned with the degree to which proposed renewable energy development will become a feature in particular views (or sequence of views), and the impact this has upon the people experiencing those views. Cumulative visual impacts may arise where two or more of the same type of renewable energy development will be visible from the same point, or will be visible shortly after each other along the same journey.

1.6 **Conclusion**

The guidance is useful particularly as it provides confirmation that the historic approach taken by the Council in determining planning applications relating to

renewable energy development is largely consistent with the new guidance. The availability of the Cumbria Wind Energy SPD which provides a capacity assessment of each landscape type based on a landscape appraisal and the Cumbria Landscape Character Guidance Toolkit are of value and have given credibility to any decisions made. This historic approach has properly reflected the balance applied when considering the potential benefits of a scheme against any adverse impacts. It is not anticipated that this guidance will result in the need any significant change in the way renewable energy proposals are either assessed or presented to Members.

As members might be aware the Inspector considering the emerging Core Strategy/Local Plan had delayed issue of his report largely to enable this guidance to be taken into account. Adoption of the local plan later in the year will provide robust and up to date policies which can inform decisions about the grant of planning permission.

Members were provided with a copy of the guidance at the last Planning Panel meeting in August.

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Background Papers: Planning Practice Guidance for Renewable and Low Carbon Energy, DCLG, July 2013