

SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

INTRODUCTION

1. One of the greatest opportunities that local authorities have for delivering their statutory obligation to promote sustainable development and the Government's sustainable energy targets is to shape the nature of future development through the planning process. To this end, a partnership of local authorities in North Yorkshire commissioned Land Use Consultants and the National Energy Foundation to prepare planning guidance to encourage the appropriate development of sustainable energy within the County.
 2. This guidance focuses on:
 - developing positive planning policies within Local Development Documents covering: sustainable energy use, integration of renewables within buildings; and stand alone renewable energy and combined heat and power (CHP) developments;
 - implementing and monitoring sustainable energy policy objectives;
 - understanding the landscape sensitivity of areas within North Yorkshire to renewable energy developments; and
 - assessing renewable energy proposals in relation to their impact on landscape character.
 3. A summary of the key findings and recommendations of the guidance is set out below.
- ## CREATING A POSITIVE LOCAL PLANNING POLICY FRAMEWORK
4. The guidance sets out nine key recommendations on creating a positive policy framework for sustainable energy. These include:
 - Recommendation 1: Energy Hierarchy**
 - 5. The energy hierarchy should be adopted as the overarching framework for energy policy within the Regional Spatial Strategy and local development documents. Whilst the hierarchy suggests a prioritisation for energy activity, it is recommended that it should not be applied in a strictly sequential manner. Instead, development should be encouraged which minimises energy demand, improves energy efficiency and develops renewable energy technologies as part of an integrated approach, as that is the only sustainable way of reducing the dependence on fossil fuels.
 - Recommendation 2: Sustainable Design**
 - 6. All local planning authorities within North Yorkshire should ensure appropriate coverage of sustainable energy measures in their development plans, supported where possible by appropriate development briefs and design guides, explaining to developers how these policies should be implemented. Local authorities may wish to set out the categories of sustainable energy measures that they wish to see included in new developments.

7. Developers should be required to show that they have addressed sustainable energy issues as part of a broader statement on sustainable design and construction.

Recommendation 3: Energy Use Assessments - Commercial

8. Developers should be required to provide evidence that they addressed sustainable energy issues by reference to accredited assessment schemes such as BREEAM. Local planning authorities should request developers to ensure that all new office, industrial, or retail development at least meet BREEAM's 'very good' accreditation.
9. Local planning authorities should require that all major applications must undertake an energy use assessment (measured in carbon) of the electricity heating and cooling requirements of the proposed development. In addition developers should also demonstrate the steps taken to apply the energy hierarchy, to ensure that the energy demand of the development will be met in the most efficient way.

Recommendation 4: Energy Use Assessments - Domestic

10. Local planning authorities should encourage developers to ensure that all new dwellings at least meet:
- Building Research Establishment Ecohomes 'very good' standard where there is access to the mains gas network and 'good' standard in areas off the mains gas network; or

- the Government's Standard Assessment Procedure (SAP) levels of in excess of 85¹; or
- the National Home Energy Rating (NHER) 9.0 rating.

11. The choice of which energy rating is used should be at the discretion of the local authority.

Recommendation 5: On-site Renewable Generation Policy

12. Local authorities should require all developments, either new build or conversion, with a floor space of 1000m², or ten or more residential units, to incorporate on-site renewable energy equipment to reduce predicted CO₂ emissions by at least 10%.

Recommendation 6: On-site Renewable Generation Condition

13. When drafting conditions related to securing on-site renewable generation, reference should be made to the need for local authorities to be satisfied that the installed technologies will provide energy for the development and that they will be permanently retained and maintained for as long as the buildings remain.

Recommendation 7: Stand-alone Renewable Energy Criteria Based Policies

14. Development plans should:
- positively encourage the development of all forms of renewables and give support to the 2010 and 2020 sub-regional targets for renewable energy;

¹ Under the revised SAP 2005 ratings this figure will be lower.

- set out how the local authorities anticipate they will contribute towards the County target;
- require the need to consider the social, environmental and economic benefits of proposals at a national, regional and local level as material considerations that should be given significant weight in the decision making process;
- set out the criteria in which renewable energy proposals will be permitted, covering issues such as:
 - appropriateness of the location and scale of the proposal in relation to:
 - its impact on visual amenity and the character and sensitivity of the landscape (state that size, location and design of proposed development should be informed by landscape character assessment);
 - the potential for cumulative impacts;
 - accessibility by road or public transport.
 - need to avoid unacceptable environmental or amenity impacts (such as noise, dust, odour etc.);
 - need to ensure that the proposed development does not compromise the 'openness' of the green belt;
 - need to ensure that the proposal does not compromise the objectives of nationally designated areas;
 - need to ensure that the proposal does not compromise the integrity of internationally designated areas and features and/or species of nature conservation importance.

- express positive support for developments of an appropriate scale within National Parks and AONBs. State that size, location and design should be informed by landscape character assessment; and
- express positive support for the development of community renewable energy schemes.

Recommendation 8: Combined Heat and Power (CHP) Policies

15. Local authorities should include policies and proposals within their LDDs encouraging the development of CHP schemes. Developers should be required to assess the feasibility of integrating CHP and district/ block heating or cooling infrastructure (along with renewable energy technologies) into new developments of over 1000m².

Recommendation 9: Integration with other Policies and Strategies

16. Local authorities should seek to ensure that other policies that are complementary to, and mutually supportive of sustainable energy use, are included in wider council strategies and initiatives, especially Community Strategies.

IMPLEMENTING SUSTAINABLE ENERGY POLICY

17. If North Yorkshire is to achieve its target of generating 194MW of electricity from renewable sources by 2010 and 350MW by 2021, the policy recommendations outlined above will need to be backed up by appropriate development control decisions and implementation mechanisms. Chapter 4 of the guidance sets out

the various tools which are available to local planning authorities to help in the delivery of sustainable energy policy. These include:

- site selection and allocation;
- permitted development;
- local development orders;
- planning conditions and obligations;
- site acquisition and investment;
- supplementary planning documents; and
- public awareness and support.

Recommendation 10: Implementation Mechanisms

18. It is recommended that where appropriate local authorities should seek to maximise the use of these implementation mechanisms to assist in the delivery of sustainable energy policy.

LANDSCAPE SENSITIVITY ASSESSMENT

19. An assessment was undertaken of the sensitivity of different landscapes within North Yorkshire to sustainable energy development. The following broad conclusions were drawn in relation to wind, biomass and hydro development.

Wind

20. The study found that areas of high landscape sensitivity to wind energy developments include:

- upland areas e.g. North York Moors and Pennines, smaller scale valleys within upland areas e.g. Wensleydale and Eskdale, key skylines and distinct/ recognisable landforms e.g. Howardian Hills.

21. Areas of medium-high or medium sensitivity include:

- transitional² landscapes/landforms, lowland areas with strong visual connections with hill scarp slopes,

22. Areas with medium low or low sensitivity include:

- lowland wooded agricultural areas, areas influenced by settlement and industry. and areas of coastal settlement, e.g. south of Selby.

Biomass

23. The planting of biomass crops has the potential to change landscape character positively or negatively depending on location. This however falls outside planning control; only biomass installations and their associated environmental and amenity impacts (including traffic impacts) can be considered by local authorities in determining biomass proposals. The landscape sensitivity study therefore assessed the landscape sensitivity of introducing a large biomass plant into the landscape of North Yorkshire.

² Transitional areas are areas that are dominated in character by other landscapes around them, and often show a gradation of features typical of other landscape types either side. They therefore form a transition between these other landscape types, with a subtle transition of characteristics such as walls gradually being replaced by hedges as typical boundaries.

24. Areas of high and medium high sensitivity to biomass installations include:

- upland remote treeless areas, transitional areas, tranquil/remote rural areas, and smaller scale rural valleys eg North York Moors, Pennines and Howardian Hills and Yorkshire Wolds.

25. Areas of medium low and low sensitivity include:

- areas of intensive agriculture, areas around modern/large settlements and areas influenced by industry e.g. Vales of York and Pickering.

Small Scale Hydro

26. For hydroelectric schemes, the study reviewed 40 potential hydro sites which were used in the AEAT 2002 and 2004 studies to calculate the indicative targets for hydro development in the County. These sites are deemed to have the greatest potential for development within North Yorkshire. The study found that most of the identified sites have medium to low sensitivity, four are located in remote narrow wooded valleys which are of high sensitivity and five of the sites were inaccessible and as such no assessment could be undertaken.

27. Sites of high sensitivity include gorges/ upland streams and isolated weirs. Sites of low sensitivity include rural locations in villages and industrial/business parks.

28. Detailed information on the findings of the landscape sensitivity study is included in Chapter 5, Figures 1-7 and Appendices 4 and 5. Guidance was also produced on the criteria that local planning authorities and developers should consider using when assessing

the impact of a proposed renewable energy development on the landscape. This is set out in Chapter 6.

29. It is important to note that the landscape sensitivity study cannot be prescriptive at a site level, it is intended to provide broad guidance on the relative sensitivity of the landscape of different areas of North Yorkshire. It cannot be used to indicate whether a specific development site is suitable or not. Furthermore the results of the study need to be interpreted with care as it should not be inferred that areas with high sensitivity are not suitable for any wind energy developments or vice versa.

30. Finally it should be recognised that landscape and visual impacts are only one of the issues that need to be taken into account when assessing the suitability of a renewable energy development. Clearly there are many other factors which will also influence decisions. These include national and regional policy considerations, the benefits of the scheme and potential impacts on biodiversity, archaeology and cultural heritage etc.

NEXT STEPS

31. In its present form, this document constitutes non-statutory, informal guidance on planning for sustainable energy in North Yorkshire. Although it has not been endorsed individually or jointly by the regional and local authorities, the document was prepared with significant inputs from them and from other stakeholders.

32. To maintain the momentum and level of debate that the preparation of this guidance has generated, we recommend that a sub-regional Sustainable Energy Planning Working Group be established. The Group could comprise the steering group that

was set up to oversee the production of this guidance and other stakeholders, as appropriate. The aim of the Group should be to secure a high level of consensus or 'Memorandum of Agreement' between local authorities in relation to the guidance as a whole or aspects of it. This would help to ensure a consistent approach across the county, and could be used as a step towards adopting the Guidance as council policy in each authority.

33. Having secured consensus between the authorities on the guidance to be followed, the Sustainable Energy Planning Working Group should focus on promoting key aspects of the guidance in the emerging Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS). The RSS could also refer to the guidance as an example of a sub-regional partnership approach which could be replicated across the Region.
34. The Working Group could also promote the use of guidance by local authorities (and the National Park Authorities) in the preparation of their Local Development Frameworks. This should include both the policies of the Core Strategy Development Plan Documents (DPD) and other DPDs as appropriate, and the preparation of Supplementary Planning Documents (SPD). As part of this process of policy development, the Group could provide a valuable a forum for exchanging information and best practice on sustainable energy planning.