

Sturminster Newton Climate Change Review

– drafted January 2016, updated January 2017 (submission)

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Background

The 2016 Local Plan

Policy 3 (Climate Change) of the adopted Local Plan states that neighbourhood plans will be required to consider local community actions that will help to mitigate and adapt to climate change.

The Local Plan policy refers to

- > promoting sustainable transport
- > promoting high standards of sustainable construction including energy and water efficiency measures
- > enabling the production of energy from renewable and low carbon sources at both the large scale and the micro scale
- > avoiding and reducing flood risk
- > the planting of trees, and the inclusion of green space and vegetation within developments.

Neighbourhood plan

Following the decision to prepare a Neighbourhood Plan for the parish of Sturminster Newton, the ‘issues’ consultation held in late 2014 provided a useful insight into local people’s concerns and aspirations for the town. As a result of all the feedback, the vision for the wider neighbourhood plan area was drafted, which included reference to ensuring that development **“will be achieved in a sustainable way... such that it ... minimises its impact on the environment”** and the objectives referred specifically to high standards of design, making sure that development incorporates renewable energy provision wherever feasible, and improving walking and cycling trails through the town and to the wider area.

As the plan has been refined the vision has also been revisited. The reference to minimising its impact has been taken out in the interest of brevity, but the design objectives do include making sure new development is designed to a high standard and positively reinforces local character, where possible use landscaping, materials and technologies (such as renewable energy provision) to minimise environmental impacts.

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The “Climate Change Review” and what this covers

Of the potential elements identified in the Local Plan, a number of these have been dealt with under different topic areas and also picked up under the Strategic Environmental Assessment

Issue	Where this is covered
Promoting sustainable transport	Considered in the transport proposals
Avoiding and reducing flood risk	Considered in review of potential sites for development
The planting of trees and inclusion of green space and vegetation within developments	Considered in the character review regarding open spaces and trees

The remaining two areas (promoting high standards of sustainable construction, and renewable and low carbon energy sources) are covered in this paper

High standards of sustainable construction opportunities

National policy and recent changes

The National Planning Policy Framework (para 96) makes clear that in planning new development, account should be taken of landform, layout, building orientation, massing and landscaping to minimise energy consumption. However in a speech¹ made in March 2015 by the then Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government clarified that neighbourhood plans should not set any additional local technical standards or requirements relating to the construction, internal layout or performance of new dwellings, including (for example) any level of the Code for Sustainable Homes to be achieved by new development. Building Regulations were being improved to provide a national basis for more sustainably designed buildings, primarily through improvements in energy and water efficiency levels and accessibility, and although optional new national technical standards could be required if suitably evidenced (including viability assessment), this should be done through Local Plans and not Neighbourhood Plans.

Local Plan policies

Local Plan Policy 3 makes clear that new buildings should be designed to make best use of solar radiation and passive cooling through the incorporation of passive solar design principles, and incorporate measures to meet the current national targets for energy performance. Development should incorporate measures to reduce water consumption, and measures to reduce the impact of excessive heat. Policy 24 states that proposals for development will be required to justify how the relevant aspects of development form address the relevant design principles and standards of the Local Plan and how the design responds to the local context.

What the Neighbourhood Plan has done

There is limited opportunity to add detail or clarify the general approach taken in the Local Plan, or obvious need to take a different approach. The main point noted from observations and talking to local people was that modern building designs do not always make it easy to retrofit technologies.

As such, the neighbourhood plan text refers to supporting and encouraging (but not requiring) high standards of efficiency and sustainability in construction. Within the design policies, it supplements the Local Plan by adding “Designs should allow for the future incorporation of renewable energy solutions where possible” – this is considered to provide a degree of flexibility, and its consideration can be readily included in the detailed design information requirements under Policy 24 of the Local Plan, as the design principles make specific reference to adaptability and energy efficiency.

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/planning-update-march-2015>

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Renewable energy opportunities

National policy and recent changes

The National Planning Policy Framework (para 97) recognises the responsibility on all communities to contribute to energy generation from renewable or low carbon sources.

In a Written Statement to the House of Commons² in June 2015 the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government set out new considerations to be applied to proposed wind energy development so that local people have the final say on wind farm applications. He made clear that “When determining planning applications for wind energy development involving one or more wind turbines, local planning authorities should only grant planning permission if:

- > the development site is in an area identified as suitable for wind energy development in a Local or Neighbourhood Plan; and
- > following consultation, it can be demonstrated that the planning impacts identified by affected local communities have been fully addressed and therefore the proposal has their backing.

In applying these new considerations, suitable areas for wind energy development will need to have been allocated clearly in a Local or Neighbourhood Plan.”

Changes to legislation have also increased permitted development rights for solar panels. This allows solar panels on housing, subject to the following criteria:

- > The panels must not exceed the highest part of the roof on which they are installed (or if on the ground, no more than 4 metres in height).
- > The panels must not protrude more than 200 mm beyond the plane of the wall or roof slope on which they are installed (or if on the ground, must not exceed 9 square metres in total or 3 metres in any one dimension).
- > If the property is within a Conservation Area the panels must not be installed on a wall that fronts a highway (or if a stand alone system, must not be nearer to a highway than any part of the house or within 5m of a boundary).
- > If your property is a listed building, you will need to apply for Listed Building Consent.

For other forms of development (eg offices, commercial units, agricultural premises etc) permitted development rights have also been granted for the installation of non-domestic solar panels. In these cases, the criteria are as follows:

- > The panels must not protrude more than 200 mm beyond the plane of the pitched roof or wall on which they are installed.
- > Where panels are installed on a flat roof they must be no higher than 1m above the highest part of the roof (excluding chimneys).
- > The panels must not be installed within 1m of any external roof edge.
- > The panels must not be installed within 1m of a wall or roof junction of that building.
- > If the property is within a Conservation Area the panels must not be installed on a wall or roof-slope that fronts a highway.

There are similar criteria in relation to stand alone systems within the curtilage of such buildings

² <http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-statement/Commons/2015-06-18/HCWS42/>

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Local Plan policies

Policy 22 of the Local Plan sets out in more detail how proposals for renewable and low carbon energy are to be considered. No areas for wind energy development are proposed given that the Ministerial Statement was issued late in the examination of the plan, but the text makes clear that this could be considered through a neighbourhood plan and would potentially be examined further in the review of the Local Plan.

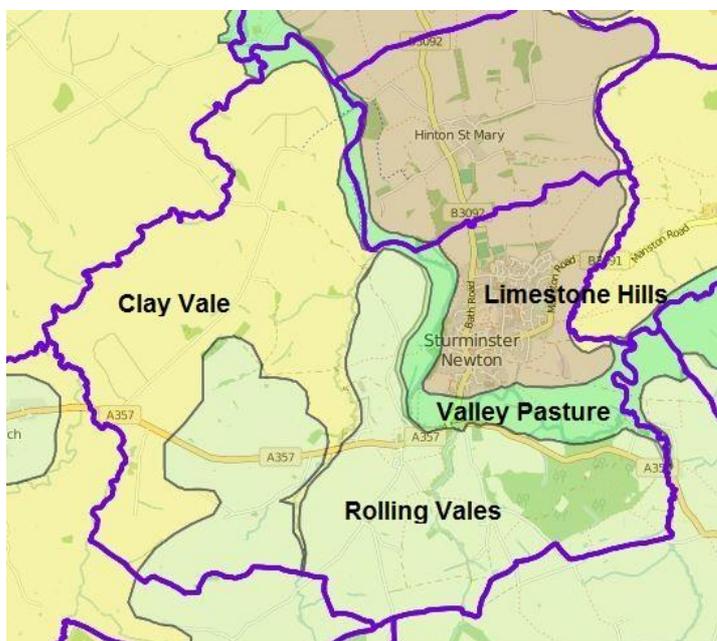
Initial consultation responses

During the initial consultation on issues for the neighbourhood plan (November 2014), people were asked how important to the protection of the landscape versus the implementation of renewable energy schemes in the countryside was. The results showed a clear majority view in favour of landscape protection against the impacts of renewable energy schemes, with only a small percentage of people regarding landscape impact as comparatively unimportant. This suggests that local people see that the protection of quality landscape should take precedence over the provision of renewable energy schemes, desirable as they may be in other ways.

Landscape sensitivity research

The Landscape Sensitivity Study to Wind and Solar Energy Development in North Dorset District, prepared by LUC (April 2014) as part of the evidence base for the local plan, reviewed the landscape characteristics of each area and the likely sensitivity to different scales of wind and solar energy developments.

A review of the main conclusions on sensitivity (below) shows much of the area being of moderate-high to high sensitivity for all but small-scale schemes. Heightened sensitivity due to prominence in views is also a recurring theme. The river corridor around the south and west of the town is considered the most sensitive area.



Landscape Character	Sensitivity to wind energy	Sensitivity to solar PV energy
Limestone Hills (North Dorset Limestone Ridges)	Sensitivity to single turbines less than 35m high is low-moderate . Sensitivity to 2-4 turbines less than 35m high or to single turbines less than 65m high is moderate . Sensitivity to 2-4 turbines up to 65m in height, or up to 4 turbines between 66-99m, is moderate-high . Sensitivity to all other scales of wind energy development is high . Sensitivity might be higher where: the landscape is undulating or steeper in form; or the location is prominent in views from the AONB	Sensitivity to solar PV developments of less than 1 hectare is low-moderate , sensitivity to developments of 1-10 hectares is moderate , sensitivity to 10-30 hectares schemes is moderate-high and sensitivity to larger developments is high . Sensitivity might be higher where: the landscape is undulating or steeper in form; the fields are irregular in form; or the location is prominent in views from the AONB

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Landscape Character	Sensitivity to wind energy	Sensitivity to solar PV energy
Clay Vale (Blackmore Vale)	Sensitivity to the introduction of single turbines less than 35m high is moderate and sensitivity to 2-4 turbines of this height is moderate-high . Sensitivity to all other scales of wind energy development is high . Sensitivity might be higher where: location is prominent in long views	Sensitivity to solar PV developments of less than 1 hectare is low-moderate ; sensitivity to developments of 1-10 hectares is moderate ; sensitivity to larger developments is high . Sensitivity might be higher where: location is prominent in long views, field sizes are small or uniformly pastoral, or no woodland blocks or well treed field boundaries to screen views
Rolling Vales (South Blackmore Rolling Vales)	Moderate-high sensitivity to single turbines of less than 35m height and high sensitivity to larger or multiple turbines. Sensitivity might be higher where: the turbine breaks the skyline or is not associated with a farm complex.	Low-moderate sensitivity to developments of less than 1 hectare, moderate-high sensitivity to solar PV developments of 1 to 10 hectares and high sensitivity to larger developments. Sensitivity might be higher where: the location is on an exposed or significantly undulating slope, or could detract from the green, patchwork character of the landscape, as observed from elevated viewpoints
Valley Pasture (Upper Stour Valley: Sturminster Newton)	Sensitivity to all scales of wind energy development is high .	Sensitivity to all scales of solar PV development is high .

Monitoring

The CPRE report Renewable Energy Generation & Progress Towards 2020 Targets (March 2015) records 23 approved renewable electricity generation installations in North Dorset, most of which are operational, including anaerobic digestion, hydro, photovoltaic and wind technologies. Together these have a combined capacity of over 63MW and annual output of 89GWh. This means that, together with roof-mounted photovoltaics, North Dorset has already reached 88.6% of its renewable energy generation target, with 5 years remaining. On this basis no additional pro-active intervention is likely to be required to meet the 2020 target.

What the Neighbourhood Plan has done

Given the relatively high sensitivity of the surrounding landscapes and the good progress being made towards achieving the renewable energy targets, no further work was undertaken to identify specific areas for large-scale wind or solar energy development through the Neighbourhood Plan. The Neighbourhood Plan does take steps to consider how important views are defined, recognizing that within the area such schemes could be particularly intrusive in wider views unless carefully sited, designed and potentially screened with landscape planting.

The potential for biomass-based renewable energy schemes was noted, in terms of a district heating system, which would have the same level of landscape impact and could support farmers as an alternative crop (given the difficulties cited in dairy farming). Following consultation with the landowners the potential for a district heating system, which could potentially provide both heat and energy efficiently and effectively to homes and the community facilities proposed on the northern edge of the town, has been included as a matter to investigate further in these site-specific policies.

The other potential renewable energy source raised through consultation was in respect of hydro power, linked to the river Stour. Given that this would be a matter for the landowner in consultation with the Environment Agency and would potentially be supported under existing Local Plan policies, no further action was taken.