

Joint Local Plan Review for West Dorset, Weymouth and Portland

WIND ENERGY BACKGROUND PAPER
ISSUES AND OPTIONS CONSULTATION VERSION

FEBRUARY 2017

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1. Introduction

PURPOSE OF BACKGROUND PAPER

- 1.1 This document is one of a number of background papers produced to support the West Dorset, Weymouth & Portland Local Plan Review.

LOCAL PLAN AND THE REVIEW

- 1.2 In October 2015, West Dorset District Council and Weymouth & Portland Borough Council adopted their Joint Local Plan. The Local Plan sets out a long term planning strategy for the area and includes detailed policies and site proposals for housing, employment, leisure and infrastructure. The adopted Local Plan is the main basis for making decisions on planning applications.
- 1.3 In his report on the examination of the Joint Local Plan, the Inspector indicated that he considered it to be "imperative that an early review is undertaken". The objective of the review is to identify additional housing land capable of meeting housing need to 2036, identify a long-term strategy for development in the Dorchester area by 2021; and reappraise housing provision in Sherborne.
- 1.4 If a review is absent, or the Local Plan becomes silent or out of date because of a lack of progress, the presumption in favour of sustainable development applies and the councils would have less control in determining where development goes. Failure to undertake a review or even start it promptly would be likely to increase the risk of developers submitting planning applications at an early stage.
- 1.5 At the same time as the Review is underway, national planning policy has changed on a wide range of issues including wind energy development.
- 1.6 This background paper provides a general overview of issues relevant to wind energy development and consider the Councils approach to wind energy development (Policy COM11) in the light of new government policy.
- 1.7 It is a working document which will be updated as evidence is acquired and the consultation process proceeds.

2. National Policy and Guidance

- 2.1 To help increase 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 renewable or low carbon sources.
- 2.2 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) paragraph 97 states that “*they should: consider identifying suitable areas for renewable and low carbon energy sources, and supporting infrastructure, where this would help secure the development of such sources;*”

WRITTEN STATEMENT MADE BY: SECRETARY OF STATE FOR COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT (GREG CLARK) ON 18 JUN 2015.

- 2.3 The Written Statement states “When determining planning applications for wind energy development involving one or more wind turbines, local planning authorities should only grant planning permission if:
- i. the development site is in an area identified as suitable for wind energy development in a Local or Neighbourhood Plan; and*
 - ii. 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.”*
- 2.4 Maps showing the wind resource as favourable to wind turbines, or similar, will not be sufficient. Whether a proposal has the backing of the affected local community is a planning judgement for the local planning authority. Where a valid planning application for a wind energy development has already been submitted to a local planning authority and the development plan does not identify suitable sites, the following transitional provision applies. In such instances, local planning authorities can find the proposal acceptable if, following consultation, they are satisfied it has addressed the planning impacts identified by affected local communities and therefore has their backing.

3. Climate Change

- 3.1 Addressing climate change is one of the core land use planning principles which the National Planning Policy Framework expects to underpin both plan-making and decision-taking. To be found sound, Local Plans will need to reflect this principle and enable the delivery of sustainable development in accordance with the policies in the National Planning Policy Framework. These include the requirements for local authorities to adopt proactive strategies to mitigate and adapt to climate change in line with the provisions and objectives of the Climate Change Act 2008, and co-operate to deliver strategic priorities which include climate change.
- 3.2 Further information:
<http://planningguidance.communities.gov.uk/blog/guidance/climate-change/>

RENEWABLE AND LOW CARBON ENERGY

- 3.3 The National Planning Policy Framework explains that all communities have a responsibility to help increase the use and supply of green energy, but this does not mean that the need for renewable energy automatically overrides environmental protections and the planning concerns of local communities. As with other types of development, it is important that the planning concerns of local communities are properly heard in matters that directly affect them. When drawing up a Local Plan local planning authorities should first consider what the local potential is for renewable and low carbon energy generation.
- 3.4 There are no hard and fast rules about how suitable areas for renewable energy should be identified, but in considering locations, local planning authorities will need to ensure they take into account the requirements of the technology and, critically, the potential impacts on the local environment, including from cumulative impacts. The views of local communities likely to be affected should be listened to.
- 3.5 When identifying suitable areas it is also important to set out the factors that will be taken into account when considering individual proposals in these areas. These factors may be dependent on the investigatory work underpinning the identified area.
- 3.6 Identifying areas suitable for renewable energy in plans gives greater certainty as to where such development will be permitted. For example, where councils have identified suitable areas for large scale solar farms, they should not have to give permission outside those areas for speculative applications involving the same type of development when they judge the impact to be unacceptable.

- 3.7 In the case of wind turbines, a planning application should not be approved unless the proposed development site is an area identified as suitable for wind energy development in a Local or Neighbourhood Plan. Suitable areas for wind energy development will need to have been allocated clearly in a Local or Neighbourhood Plan. Maps showing the wind resource as favourable to wind turbines or similar will not be sufficient.
- 3.8 Further information:
<http://planningguidance.communities.gov.uk/blog/guidance/renewable-and-low-carbon-energy/>

NEIGHBOURHOOD PLANNING

- 3.9 Neighbourhood plans are an opportunity for communities to plan for community led renewable energy developments. Neighbourhood Development Orders and Community Right to Build Orders can be used to grant planning permission for renewable energy development. To support community based initiatives a local planning authority should set out clearly any strategic policies that those producing neighbourhood plans or Orders will need to consider when developing proposals that address renewable energy development.

EUROPEAN RENEWABLE ENERGY DIRECTIVE

- 3.10 As part of the European Renewable Energy Directive the UK now has a legally binding target to generate 15% of the UK's total energy needs from renewable sources by 2020. This is a UK wide target and although no local targets have been set by government it is clear that the government expects local authority areas to play their part in meeting the national 2020 renewable energy target.

BOURNEMOUTH, DORSET AND POOLE RENEWABLE ENERGY STRATEGY TO 2020 (JANUARY 2013)

- 3.11 The Bournemouth, Dorset and Poole Renewable Energy Strategy to 2020 (January 2013) proposes an aspirational target of at least 15% of Dorset, Bournemouth and Poole's energy needs to be met from renewable sources by 2020. However, to reflect the expectation that approximately 7.5% of this will be delivered via renewable energy resources considered by Government as 'national' resources, regardless of local action, this Strategy will focus on delivering a secondary target of a minimum of 7.5% of Dorset's energy needs to be met from local renewable energy resources over which we have more influence and control.
- 3.12 This Strategy is a non-statutory document which aims to set out a clear, shared ambition for renewable energy in Dorset and identify where local action should focus to maximise the benefits for Dorset while protecting and enhancing our

unique environment. While it is clearly intended to create a positive and proactive climate for the deployment of renewable energy, it will be for developers, organisations, communities or individuals to come forward with specific proposals. The exact type, size and location of technologies installed on the ground will be determined by individual planning applications, which will ensure detailed site specific constraints are considered.

3.13 Further information:

<https://www.dorsetforyou.gov.uk/article/422937/Dorset-Energy-Partnership-DEP>

4. Current Approach

- 4.1 Policy COM 11 of the adopted Local Plan sets out the approach for all forms of renewable energy development other than wind energy development. The policy includes a positive strategy that allows proposals for generating heat or electricity from renewable sources (other than wind energy) where possible, providing that the benefits of the development significantly outweigh the harm.

5. Reason for Change

- 5.1 The exclusion of wind energy development from policy COM11 was a late modification to the policy as a result of a change to national policy.
- 5.2 National planning policy asserts that applications for wind energy development will only be allowed if the development site is identified as suitable for wind energy in either a Local or Neighbourhood Plan. Wind energy applications must also demonstrate that the planning impacts identified by local communities have been addressed and therefore the proposal has their backing.
- 5.3 The review of the local plan presents an opportunity to consider the councils approach to wind energy development in light of the new Government policy.

6. Proposed Approach

- 6.1 National policy states that local planning authorities should "*consider identifying suitable areas for renewable and low carbon energy sources, and supporting infrastructure, where this would help secure the development of such sources*".
- 6.2 Suitable areas for renewable energy development would need to be identified and allocated in either the local plan or a neighbourhood plan. In either case national policy is clear that sites must be supported by the local community.
- 6.3 A local plan allocation would give greater certainty as to where such development will be permitted, as the councils should not have to give permission for speculative wind energy applications when they judge the impact to be unacceptable.
- 6.4 In identifying suitable areas for wind energy development the councils would be contributing positively towards increasing the supply of renewable and low carbon energy. Consideration would need to be given to the rich diversity of the local environment including the Dorset AONB and the World Heritage Site designations and the ability to secure community support.
- 6.5 An alternative route would be to rely on local initiatives for wind energy development, led by local communities and delivered through neighbourhood plans.
- 6.6 In either case, individual planning applications will continue to be considered on a case by case basis, with consideration given to the appropriateness of a project's scale and design in that location.
- 6.7 In order to draw-out the community's views on this subject, the issues and options document asked the following question.

25-i. Should the councils allocate suitable sites for wind energy through the local plan or rely on locally led initiatives such as neighbourhood plans?