

Planning Policy Statement 22: Renewable Energy

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Front cover

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Introduction

Planning Policy Statements (PPS) set out the Government's national policies for different aspects of land use planning in England. This PPS replaces Planning Policy Guidance Note 22 (PPG22) issued in 1993, the annexes issued in 1994 and the photovoltaics annex issued in 2002.

The policies set out in this statement will need to be taken into account by regional planning bodies and the Mayor of London in the preparation of regional spatial strategies (or the Spatial Development Strategy in London), and by local planning authorities in the preparation of local development documents. They may also be material to decisions on individual planning applications. National policies set out in other planning policy statements or PPGs may also be relevant to consideration of planning for renewable energy.

For the purposes of this PPS, renewable energy covers those energy flows that occur naturally and repeatedly in the environment - from the wind, the fall of water, the movement of the oceans, from the sun and also from biomass¹. Policies in this statement therefore cover technologies such as onshore wind generation, hydro, photovoltaics, passive solar, biomass and energy crops, energy from waste (but not energy from mass incineration of domestic waste), and landfill and sewage gas. The principles for making decisions on waste management are set out in PPG10 (Planning and Waste Management) and Waste Strategy 2000.

As the land use planning system does not extend offshore, the policies do not apply to developments for offshore renewables. Nor does the statement cover combined heat and power (CHP) developments, although, given that some CHP projects are fuelled by a renewable resource, a number of the policies set out here may be relevant.

A companion guide is being produced to accompany this PPS. This will include a technical annex, which gives more details about particular technologies, as well as including a range of good practice guidance on planning and renewable energy.

¹ Biomass is the biodegradable fraction of products, waste and residues from agriculture (including plant and animal substances), forestry and related industries, as well as the biodegradable fraction of industrial and municipal waste.

The Government's Objectives

The Government's energy policy, including its policy on renewable energy, is set out in the Energy White Paper². This aims to put the UK on a path to cut its carbon dioxide emissions by some 60% by 2050, with real progress by 2020, and to maintain reliable and competitive energy supplies.

The development of renewable energy, alongside improvements in energy efficiency and the development of combined heat and power, will make a vital contribution to these aims. The Government has already set a target to generate 10% of UK electricity from renewable energy sources by 2010. The White Paper set out the Government's aspiration to double that figure to 20% by 2020, and suggests that still more renewable energy will be needed beyond that date. The White Paper sets out policies to stimulate the development of new technologies to provide the basis for continuing growth of renewables in the longer term, to assist the UK renewables industry to become competitive in home and export markets and in doing so, provide employment.

Increased development of renewable energy resources is vital to facilitating the delivery of the Government's commitments on both climate change and renewable energy. Positive planning which facilitates renewable energy developments can contribute to all four elements of the Government's sustainable development strategy:

- social progress which recognises the needs of everyone - by contributing to the nation's energy needs, ensuring all homes are adequately and affordably heated; and providing new sources of energy in remote areas;
- effective protection of the environment - by reductions in emissions of greenhouse gases and thereby reducing the potential for the environment to be affected by climate change;
- prudent use of natural resources - by reducing the nation's reliance on everdiminishing supplies of fossil fuels; and,
- maintenance of high and stable levels of economic growth and employment - through the creation of jobs directly related to renewable energy developments, but also in the development of new technologies. In rural areas, renewable energy projects have the potential to play an increasingly important role in the diversification of rural economies.

² "Our energy future – creating a low carbon economy", CM5761, February 2003.

National Planning Policies

Key Principles

1. Regional planning bodies and local planning authorities should adhere to the following key principles in their approach to planning for renewable energy:

(i) Renewable energy developments should be capable of being accommodated throughout England in locations where the technology is viable and environmental, economic, and social impacts can be addressed satisfactorily.

(ii) Regional spatial strategies and local development documents should contain policies designed to promote and encourage, rather than restrict, the development of renewable energy resources. Regional planning bodies and local planning authorities should recognise the full range of renewable energy sources, their differing characteristics, locational requirements and the potential for exploiting them subject to appropriate environmental safeguards.

(iii) At the local level, 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 regional spatial strategies or local development documents without sufficient reasoned justification. The Government may intervene in the plan making process where it considers that the constraints being proposed by local authorities are too great or have been poorly justified.

(iv) 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.

(v) Regional planning bodies and local planning authorities should not make assumptions about the technical and commercial feasibility of renewable energy projects (e.g. identifying generalised locations for development based on mean wind speeds). Technological change can mean that sites currently excluded as locations for particular types of renewable energy development may in future be suitable.

(vi) Small-scale projects can provide a limited but valuable contribution to overall outputs of renewable energy and to meeting energy needs both locally and nationally. Planning authorities should not therefore reject planning applications simply because the level of output is small.

(vii) Local planning authorities, regional stakeholders and Local Strategic Partnerships should foster community involvement in renewable energy projects³ and seek to promote knowledge of and greater acceptance by the public of prospective renewable energy developments that are appropriately located. Developers of renewable energy projects should engage in active consultation and discussion with local communities at an early stage in the planning process, and before any planning application is formally submitted.

(viii) Development proposals should demonstrate any environmental, economic and social benefits as well as how any environmental and social impacts have been minimised through careful consideration of location, scale, design and other measures.

Regional Targets

2. The Energy White Paper indicated that the Government would be looking to work with regional and local bodies to deliver the Government's objectives, including establishing regional targets for

³ The companion guide to this PPS will provide more guidance on these issues.

renewable energy generation. The Regional Spatial Strategy should include the target for renewable energy capacity in the region, derived from assessments of the region's renewable energy resource potential, and taking into account the regional environmental, economic and social impacts (either positive or negative) that may result from exploitation of that resource potential.

3. Targets should be expressed as the minimum amount of installed capacity for renewable energy in the region, expressed in megawatts, and may also be expressed in terms of the percentage of electricity consumed or supplied. Targets should be set for achievement by 2010 and by 2020⁴. Progress towards achieving these targets should be monitored by regional planning bodies. Targets should be reviewed on a regular basis and revised upwards (if they are met) subject to the region's renewable energy resource potential and the capacity of the environment in the region for further renewable energy developments. The fact that a target has been reached should not be used in itself as a reason for refusing planning permission for further renewable energy projects.

4. Offshore renewable generation projects (such as offshore wind, offshore wave and tidal stream), are not covered by the land-use planning system. Regional spatial strategies should contain an indication of the output that might be expected to be achieved from offshore renewables, based on where the electricity comes ashore. The potential to generate substantial amounts of renewable energy from offshore projects should not be used as a justification to set lower targets for onshore projects.

5. Where appropriate, targets in regional spatial strategies may be disaggregated into subregional targets. It may also be appropriate to give a broad indication of how different technologies could contribute towards regional targets. But fixed targets for specific technologies should not be set given that rapid technological change may mean that new sources of renewable energy may be developed in the longer term.

Policies in Regional Spatial Strategies and Local Development Documents

6. Local planning authorities should only allocate specific sites for renewable energy in plans where a developer has already indicated an interest in the site, has confirmed that the site is viable, and that it will be brought forward during the plan period. Planning applications for renewable energy projects should be assessed against specific criteria set out in regional spatial strategies and local development documents. Regional planning bodies and local planning authorities should ensure that such criteria-based policies are consistent with, or reinforced by, policies in plans on other issues against which renewable energy applications could be assessed.

7. Criteria based policies should be set out in regional spatial strategies where these can be applied across a region, or across clearly identified sub-regional areas. These criteria should then be used to identify broad areas at the regional/sub-regional level where development of particular types of renewable energy may be considered appropriate. Other criteria based policies to reflect local circumstances should be set out by local planning authorities in their local development documents. Local planning authorities should, however, only focus on the key criteria that will be used to judge applications. More detailed issues may be appropriate to supplementary planning documents.

8. Local planning authorities may include policies in local development documents that require a percentage of the energy to be used in new residential, commercial or industrial developments to come from on-site renewable energy developments. Such policies:

(i) should ensure that requirement to generate on-site renewable energy is only applied to developments where the installation of renewable energy generation equipment is viable given the type of development proposed, its location, and design;

⁴ The technologies covered should be those eligible for the Renewables Obligation (see the consultation paper on the Renewables Obligation Order 2002 at <http://www.dti.gov.uk/renew/ropc.pdf>) and the draft Renewables Obligation (Amendment) Order 2003 at <http://www.dti.gov.uk/energy/renewables/policy/roorderamend2003.pdf>

(ii) should not be framed in such a way as to place an undue burden on developers, for example, by specifying that all energy to be used in a development should come from on-site renewable generation.

Further guidance on the framing of such policies, together with good practice examples of the development of on-site renewable energy generation, are included in the companion guide to PPS22.

Locational Considerations

International Designated Sites

9. Planning permission for renewable energy developments likely to have an adverse effect on a site of international importance for nature and heritage conservation (Special Protection Areas, Special Areas of Conservation, RAMSAR Sites and World Heritage Sites) should only be granted once an assessment has shown that the integrity of the site would not be adversely affected.

10. If the renewable energy development would have an adverse effect on the integrity of an internationally designated nature conservation site, planning permission should only be granted where there is no alternative solution and there are imperative reasons of overriding public interest, including those of a social or economic nature⁵.

National Designations

11. In sites with nationally recognised designations (Sites of Special Scientific Interest, National Nature Reserves, National Parks, Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, Heritage Coasts, Scheduled Monuments, Conservation Areas, Listed Buildings, Registered Historic Battlefields and Registered Parks and Gardens) planning permission for renewable energy projects should only be granted where it can be demonstrated that the objectives of designation of the area will not be compromised by the development, and any significant adverse effects on the qualities for which the area has been designated are clearly outweighed by the environmental, social and economic benefits.

12. Regional planning bodies and local planning authorities should set out in regional spatial strategies and local development documents the criteria based policies which set out the circumstances in which particular types and sizes of renewable energy developments will be acceptable in nationally designated areas. Care should be taken to identify the scale of renewable energy developments that may be acceptable in particular areas. Small-scale developments should be permitted within areas such as National Parks, Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and Heritage Coasts provided that there is no significant environmental detriment to the area concerned.

Green Belts

13. Policy on development in the green belt is set out in PPG2. When located in the green belt, elements of many renewable energy projects will comprise inappropriate development, which may impact on the openness of the green belt. Careful consideration will therefore need to be given to the visual impact of projects, and developers will need to demonstrate very special circumstances that clearly outweigh any harm by reason of inappropriateness and any other harm if projects are to proceed. Such very special circumstances may include the wider environmental benefits associated with increased production of energy from renewable sources.

⁵ The Conservation (Natural Habitats &c) Regulations 1994 set out the legal requirements to be met in respect of European nature conservation sites and protected species where it is intended to grant planning permission for a project. Further guidance is currently provided in PPG9. The Government will also be publishing a draft Circular "*Biodiversity and Geological Conservation - Statutory obligations and their impact within the planning system*" which will provide administrative guidance on the legislative framework at both international and national level for the protection of sites and species.

Buffer Zones

14. Regional planning bodies and local planning authorities should not create "buffer zones" around international or nationally designated areas and apply policies to these zones that prevent the development of renewable energy projects. However, the potential impact on designated areas of renewable energy projects close to their boundaries will be a material consideration to be taken into account in determining planning applications.

Local Designations

15. Local landscape and local nature conservation designations should not be used in themselves to refuse planning permission for renewable energy developments. Planning applications for renewable energy developments in such areas should be assessed against criteria based policies set out in local development documents, including any criteria that are specific to the type of area concerned.

Other locational considerations

16. As most renewable energy resources can only be developed where the resource exists and where economically feasible, local planning authorities should not use a sequential approach in the consideration of renewable energy projects (for example, by giving priority to the re-use of previously developed land for renewable technology developments). However, in preparing local development documents and in discussions with developers, planning authorities should recognise that some previously developed sites, whilst being unsustainable in terms of other land uses (e.g. a site in a remote location unsuitable for housing) may offer opportunities for developing some forms of renewable energy projects.

17. Many types of renewable energy developments are capable of being accommodated in urban as well as rural areas. Regional planning bodies and local planning authorities should therefore ensure that criteria included in regional spatial strategies and local development documents are appropriate for, and cover the specific requirements of, both urban and rural areas.

Other Considerations

Small Scale Renewable Energy Developments

18. Local planning authorities and developers should consider the opportunity for incorporating renewable energy projects in all new developments. Small scale renewable energy schemes utilising technologies such as solar panels, Biomass heating, small scale wind turbines, photovoltaic cells and combined heat and power schemes can be incorporated both into new developments and some existing buildings. Local planning authorities should specifically encourage such schemes through positively expressed policies in local development documents.

Landscape and Visual Effects of Renewable Energy Developments

19. The landscape and visual effects of particular renewable energy developments will vary on a case by case basis according to the type of development, its location and the landscape setting of the proposed development. Some of these effects may be minimised through appropriate siting, design and landscaping schemes, depending on the size and type of development proposed. Proposed developments should be assessed using objective descriptive material and analysis wherever possible even though the final decision on the visual and landscape effects will be, to some extent, one made by professional judgement. Policies in local development documents should address the minimisation of visual effects (e.g. on the siting, layout, landscaping, design and colour of schemes).

20. Of all renewable technologies, wind turbines are likely to have the greatest visual and landscape effects. However, in assessing planning applications, local authorities should recognise that the impact of turbines on the landscape will vary according to the size and number of turbines and the type of landscape involved, and that these impacts may be temporary if conditions are attached to planning permissions which require the future decommissioning of turbines.

21. Planning authorities should also take into account the cumulative impact of wind generation projects in particular areas. Such impacts should be assessed at the planning application stage and authorities should not set arbitrary limits in local development documents on the numbers of turbines that will be acceptable in particular locations.

Noise

22. Renewable technologies may generate small increases in noise levels (whether from machinery such as aerodynamic noise from wind turbines, or from associated sources - for example, traffic). Local planning authorities should ensure that renewable energy developments have been located and designed in such a way to minimise increases in ambient noise levels. Plans may include criteria that set out the minimum separation distances between different types of renewable energy projects and existing developments. The 1997 report by ETSU for the Department of Trade and Industry should be used to assess and rate noise from wind energy development⁶.

Odour

23. In handling planning applications for anaerobic digestion, local planning authorities should consider carefully the potential impacts of odour and the proposals put forward for its control. In cases where odour would have an impact, such plants should not be located in close proximity to existing residential areas.

Biomass Projects and Energy Crops

24. For biomass projects, the need to transport crops to the energy production plant does have the potential to lead to increases in traffic. Local planning authorities should make sure that the effects of such increases are minimised by ensuring that generation plants are located in as close a proximity as possible to the sources of fuel that have been identified. But in determining planning applications, planning authorities should recognise that there are other considerations (such as connections to the Grid and the potential to use heat generated from the project) which may influence the most suitable locations for such projects.

Wind Turbines

25. Regional spatial strategies should not include specific policies relating to the impact of wind turbines on airport operation, radar and aircraft, and neither they nor local development documents should include policies in relation to separation distances from powerlines, roads, and railways. It is the responsibility of developers to address any potential impacts, taking account of Civil Aviation Authority, Ministry of Defence and Department for Transport guidance in relation to radar and aviation, and the legislative requirements on separation distances, before planning applications are submitted. Local Planning Authorities should satisfy themselves that such issues have been addressed before considering planning applications.

⁶ "The assessment and rating of noise from Windfarms" ETSU for the DTI available at <http://www.dti.gov.uk/energy/renewables/publications/noiseassessment.shtml>