

RENEWABLE ENERGY AND LOW CARBON STUDY REVIEW PAPER (DECEMBER 2017)

Background.

The key Bolsover specific study underpinning energy efficiency and renewable energy proposals in the Local Plan for Bolsover District is the Renewable Energy and Low Carbon Study for Bolsover District.

The Study was completed in May 2009. There have been significant changes since this time in both national guidance, and later evidence base studies. This Statement sets out details of the Study; later relevant evidence base considerations; and how the Study has informed policies in the Local Plan for Bolsover District.

The Study

The Study:

- assessed the District's low and zero carbon resources for the district;
- considered the potential of a range of different types of renewable energy resource in the district to make a contribution to the District's energy supply;
- suggested a policy framework to inform policies in the emerging Local Plan

The Study assessed the following potential renewable energy resources in the District:

- Large wind power development
- Small Wind Power development
- Biomass
- Photovoltaics
- Solar thermal
- Ground source heat pump
- Hydroelectricity

In terms of resource potential, the main source of renewable energy identified for the district was large wind power schemes, followed by biomass. In the case of large wind power schemes, the identification of potential sources of supply did not include the constraints imposed by what might be considered acceptable on landscape and visual grounds. In fact due to the presence of woodland areas, air safeguarding zones, and the presence of important landscape features, such as the limestone ridge running down the district, the potential for large scale wind energy schemes is severely constrained.

The study was based on:

- The (then) national policy of changes to the Building Regulations towards zero carbon new homes by 2016;

- The (then) emerging Regional Spatial Strategy and quantum's for using renewable energy and development policies within it;
- The (then) emerging Core Strategy targets of 8,100 residential dwellings & 200 ha of employment land.

Significant changes

There have been significant changes at both national and local level since the Study was published. These include:

- The Government's UK Renewable Energy Roadmap 2011. This document outlined the national commitment to increase the use of renewable energy. The roadmap was updated in 2012 & 2013. The 2013 update stated 'The Government's commitment to cost effective renewable energy as part of a diverse, low carbon and secure energy mix is as strong as ever. Alongside gas and low carbon transport fuels, nuclear power and carbon capture and storage, renewable energy provides energy security, helps us to meet our decarbonisation objectives and brings green growth to all parts of the UK'. The Government retains strong ambitions for renewables into the next decade.
- As a later part of the Council's Evidence Base, a study to review and update the evidence base and emerging policies relating to affordable housing, including an economic viability study was commissioned in 2012. In terms of viability, the Study found that overall viability in the district was so low that any new market housing in the District would be unlikely to be able to deliver any affordable housing. The proposed changes to the Building Regulations for a mandatory increase in energy efficiency measures (the Code for Sustainable Homes), would make the delivery of affordable homes difficult. In March 2014 the Government announced that the requirement to incorporate energy efficiency measures as set out in the Code for Sustainable homes would cease. However, viability in the District remains marginal (a viability assessment of the policies in the Local Plan is currently being undertaken). In recent years the Council has had to suspend its affordable housing policy to secure the delivery of housing. Given this challenging situation, it is considered that there would still be insufficient viability in new homes in the District to impose significant on-costs such as those in the Code for Sustainable Homes.
- In March 2012 the Government introduced the National Planning Policy Framework. The Framework notes that planning plays a key role in helping to shape places to secure radical reductions in greenhouse gas emissions, minimising vulnerability and providing resilience to the impacts of climate change, supporting the delivery of renewable and low carbon energy and associated infrastructure. Local plans should contain a positive strategy to promote energy from renewable and low carbon sources... consider identifying suitable areas for renewable and low carbon energy sources.

- In June 2015 the government updated their planning practice guidance noting that increasing the amount of energy from renewable and low carbon technologies will help to make sure that the UK has a secure energy supply, reduce greenhouse gas emissions to slow down climate change and stimulate investment in new jobs and businesses. Whilst the Guidance acknowledges the need for a positive policy to promote the delivery of renewable and low carbon energy, it also stresses that local communities need to be listened to and their views taken into account. In the case of wind turbines, these need to be allocated in a Local or Neighbourhood Plan.
- In June 2015 it was announced that new onshore wind farms would be excluded from a subsidy scheme from 1 April 2016, a year earlier than expected. Following this in September 2015, Planning Magazine noted that the recently introduced planning rules requiring community backing for onshore wind turbines have prompted developers to withdraw schemes.

Conclusion

The backdrop to the Study has changed significantly, particularly in relation to the revoking of the Regional Strategy, and national advice.

The NPPF, and NPPG set out and underline the Government's commitment to renewable and low carbon energy. However there are now no national mandatory standards for housebuilding to help achieve this.

In relation to policies in the Local Plan, the hierarchy of energy usage is still considered to be relevant. The need to encourage more sustainable patterns of development is embedded throughout the Local Plan. The need for sustainable design is also addressed in a policy in the Plan. A criteria based policy balancing the needs for renewable energy and wider planning considerations is also included.

The situation in relation to large wind farms has changed considerably due to the factors identified above. Against this backdrop, the potential for commercial wind farm development indicated by the study may be seen as overly optimistic.

On this basis it is considered that the Local Plan cannot identify with any degree of confidence that any part of the district may be suitable for large windpower schemes. On that basis no areas for wind energy have been allocated as part of the Local Plan.