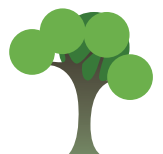


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Integreat Yorkshire, growing people's skills to make great places

# The road to recovery briefings:

## Briefing 3: Planning for community renewables



## Introduction

There is a clear political desire to increase renewable energy generation - some government surveys have shown public support to be as high as 84%.

Recent policy initiatives aim to make tackling climate change a primary objective of the planning system by ensuring that local authorities and regional development agencies place more emphasis on sustainable development. Yet there are still significant planning difficulties to overcome and numerous community renewable projects fall at this hurdle

The vast majority of renewable energy proposals require planning consent, and the nature and extent of the planning issues faced will depend on the scale, location and type of technology being used.

Wind turbines, for example, have been the source of great controversy and encounter more planning obstacles than other renewables. While many people back the principle of green energy, this support diminishes at the prospect of a turbine on the local skyline, and well-organised campaigns against wind farms are common.

Wind turbine schemes have to satisfy planners on a series of other concerns, including dangers to air traffic and wildlife. Noise and shadow flicker can be perceived as problems for people living nearby. It may be necessary to have a full environmental impact assessment, which can cost up to £500,000 for a large wind power scheme.

It can take around three or four years to move the project to the stage of electricity generation, and it is perhaps not surprising that a significant proportion of wind turbine applications are not successful.

Hydro schemes face fewer planning hurdles but still have to meet planners' concerns on issues such as appearance, noise and disturbance during construction. These projects will also have to satisfy the Environment Agency on matters of fish protection and other environmental considerations. They may require an abstraction licence from the agency

Biomass systems are subject to a raft of regulations, including the Clean Air Act, the Waste Incineration Directive, and building regulations.

The best way of alleviating public concern about green energy projects is to ensure early and transparent communication with local communities, using a range of methods. The example of Baywind (below) shows one such approach.

It is also vital to talk to planning authorities right from the start in order to get an initial understanding of the relevant planning concerns that will have to be satisfied, and the level and nature of any scoping work.

Extensive environmental statements may be required, containing assessments of the project's likely effect on issues such as traffic, noise and wildlife, and also air and water quality. The extent and outcome of the assessments will not only influence the chances of gaining planning permission, but will also have a major bearing on the cost, timescale and, ultimately, the feasibility of the project.



The planning process involves technical issues that may require communities to bring in expertise from outside. The links at the end of this briefing list some sources of help.

## Recent developments

The government's moves to reshape planning policy to meet its carbon emission targets should encourage the growth of renewable energy projects.

Two national planning documents launched in recent years have a major influence on regional spatial strategies and local authority plans and policies: planning policy statement 1 (PPS1) on planning and sustainable development, and PPS 22 on renewable energy.

The PPS on climate change, introduced in 2007, sets out how regional and local planning can best support the government's zero-carbon targets while meeting the need for economic and housing development.

Although renewable energy projects must still satisfy planning and environmental safeguards, this document places renewable energy at the heart of planning policy for the first time.

Councils are expected to set percentages of energy under the 'Merton Rule' (see link below) for new developments to be generated from local renewables or low carbon sources.

The guidance should help stimulate councils to deliver a new wave of renewable and community power schemes such as combined heat and power (CHP) plants. In addition, the use of renewables will be required for all new buildings: new homes already have to meet a zero carbon requirement by 2016.

PPS 22 provides guidance on renewable technologies, enabling the planning system to be proactive in ensuring the government's energy targets are met. It says local and regional policies should promote and encourage, rather than restrict, the development of renewable energy resources.

It even allows small scale developments in national parks, areas of outstanding natural beauty and along heritage coasts, provided there is no serious environmental detriment to the area concerned.

The PPS on climate change takes precedence where there is any conflict with any other PPS guidance.

These planning policy statements provide a framework for planning authorities. Councils may have developed specific policy and criteria on green energy projects, and approaches



to renewables may differ markedly from area to area. Higher design specifications incorporating environmental features are becoming more common, with the BREEAM Code for Sustainable Homes (see link) already a mandatory rating for new build.

Most community renewables will require planning permission and often an environmental impact assessment. This is complex and technical work and communities will usually need expertise to guide and sometimes lead them through the process.

This can add great expense to a project before it has even got to the stage of being a viable proposition for investors, but organisations such as Planning Aid have officers available in the Yorkshire region who may be able to help communities access expert advice free of charge. For other sources of help and advice, see the links below

Community ownership of renewable energy projects has become common through co-operative society structures and share offers. This approach can often ease the planning application process because it builds up local support for the scheme.

Organisations such as Energy4All and H2oPE work hand in hand with communities on developing sites and may take on the time and some of the costs of drawing up the planning application.

## Case Study – Harlock Hill, Cumbria

The six turbines at Harlock Hill in Cumbria are not only generating enough clean electricity to meet the needs of 1,700 homes and offsetting around 6,000 tonnes of carbon dioxide emissions – they have also provided over £2,500 in energy efficiency grants to the local community, around 1,500 low energy light bulbs and a healthy return to shareholders.

The turbines are owned by the Baywind Energy Co-operative, which was set up in 1996, after seven residents of Ulverston and Barrow-in Furness pooled skills ranging from engineering to accountancy to promote the generation of renewable energy.

A co-operative was formed to buy the wind turbines from a developer, and a series of share offers raised £2m from the 1,300 members of the co-operative in just three years. Half of the investment came from people living in Cumbria and North Lancashire, extending the local involvement for the project.

As a voluntary condition for obtaining planning consent for Harlock Hill, Baywind formed an energy conservation trust for the local community, to which it gives 0.5% of the annual income generated.

Baywind has been determined to foster and maintain a good relationship with local people and the turbines were sensitively sited. A large mailshot and adverts in the



national press, along with extensive local media coverage, helped to create interest in the scheme and to clearly communicate its plans and objectives.

Baywind later formed Energy4All, an organisation which is helping to set up community-owned wind farms across the country. It provides the experience, expertise and administrative systems for new co-operatives to get started and then to manage their own projects.

Energy4All has amassed a wealth of knowledge of the planning issues facing wind turbine schemes. It estimates that just 40% to 50% of applications for wind farms in England are currently successful, and that the average time to develop a wind farm now stands at around four years. It finds that well organised campaigns against proposed wind farms are common.

In response, it has devised an Energy4All Steps feature on its website (see link) to guide communities through the various stages of the planning and development process for small scale wind farms.

### **Expert view: Tim Sutherland, Future Energy Yorkshire**

Planning permission is an important hurdle in developing low carbon or renewable energy projects. When gaining planning permission, a project moves a significant step further in its development, project risks reduce, viability increases and, most importantly, it is easier to attract finance.

This process is necessary to ensure projects contribute to the long term strategic goals of the local planning authority and do not significantly damage the wider environment. Planning should also be a means of validating projects, ensuring that all the correct steps are taken to mitigate risks, and that the project delivers maximum benefits for the locality.

In April 2008 the UK Government changed its approach to residential microgeneration, relaxing planning requirements for schemes of less than 50 kW. For renewable projects greater than 50 kW, assessment criteria or planning requirements will vary depending on technology, scale and local authority requirements. Detailed planning guidance on these circumstances can be found in the links section below.

Developing renewable energy projects and gaining planning permission is not easy and will require a great deal of patience and perseverance. In some cases, you will be expected to have done significant research, gathering evidence, conducting consultations and identifying project risks.

Some of this activity, such as environmental impact assessments (EIAs), may require the appointment of specialist services. Costs for such services should be identified right from the start, as in some cases they can jeopardise a project's viability.

EIAs are a common requirement for renewable energy projects. They are an important



procedure that ensures the likely effects of a new development on the environment are fully understood before planning permission is granted.

Community-led renewable energy projects do stand the best chance of gaining planning permission, as they are more likely to have the backing of local people and thus minimise the potential for local opposition.

## Checklist

1. Size up the challenge. Community renewables face costly and complex planning procedures and the odds may be stacked against you. Talk to local planners early on. Understand the hurdles you will face, the information you will have to gather and the likelihood of success. Calculate the costs and where this money will come from – investors will generally not be keen until they know the project has planning permission.
2. Talk to people and listen to their feedback. Be open with the local community. Clearly explain the environmental, economic and social benefits of your project. Consider using leaflets, exhibitions, media campaigns and one-to-one meetings with residents to address concerns and counter misconceptions.
3. Share your project. Consider setting up a co-operative structure. Giving local people a genuine stake in the project brings many benefits, including wider understanding and support for your proposals.
4. Get help. You need expertise to negotiate the complexities of the planning system. Do you have this within your organisation? If not, contact Planning Aid or consider working with specialist organisations that develop community renewables (see links below).
5. Be prepared to change. Even the most environmentally worthy, well thought out and well communicated schemes can face opposition from local people and rejection by planners. Be flexible and be prepared to mitigate the impact of your project – even at the expense of your generating capacity.

## Find out more:

### National organisations

[www.communities.gov.uk/publications/planningandbuilding/planningpolicystatement1](http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/planningandbuilding/planningpolicystatement1) - planning policy statement 1 on sustainable development.

[www.communities.gov.uk/publications/planningandbuilding/pps22](http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/planningandbuilding/pps22) - planning policy statement 22 on renewable energy.



[www.lowcarbonbuildings.org.uk/info/permitted](http://www.lowcarbonbuildings.org.uk/info/permitted) - changes to permitted development rights for domestic renewable technologies introduced on 6 April 2008.

[www.berr.gov.uk](http://www.berr.gov.uk) - Department for Business Enterprise and Regulatory Reform. Contains a section on renewable energy and a full overview of the planning process. Includes report Good Practice and Community Involvement in Wind Energy Developments.

[www.planningrenewables.org.uk](http://www.planningrenewables.org.uk) - Information for local authority planners and councillors dealing with planning applications for renewable energy developments, including wind, biomass, waste-to-energy and solar. Includes a resource bank.

[www.planningportal.gov.uk](http://www.planningportal.gov.uk) - The Planning Portal is the government's one-stop-shop for planning and building regulations and researching government policy.

[www.breeam.org](http://www.breeam.org) - The Code for Sustainable Homes.

## Yorkshire and Humber

[www.goyh.gov.uk](http://www.goyh.gov.uk) - Government Office Yorkshire and The Humber - the regional spatial strategy to 2026.

[www.yhassembly.gov.uk/Our%20Work/Sustainable%20Development/](http://www.yhassembly.gov.uk/Our%20Work/Sustainable%20Development/) - Yorkshire and Humber Assembly. Describes what the assembly is doing in the areas of climate change, energy, waste, biodiversity and sustainable production and consumption.

## Other information

[www.planningaid.rtpi.org.uk](http://www.planningaid.rtpi.org.uk) - Planning Aid. Free advice on planning issues for community groups.

[www.energysavingtrust.org.uk/cafe](http://www.energysavingtrust.org.uk/cafe) - Energy Savings Trust. Information on planning issues and case studies.

[www.bwea.com/index.html](http://www.bwea.com/index.html) - The British Wind Energy Association. Latest news and information sources on wind energy.

[www.energysteps.coop](http://www.energysteps.coop) - Energy4All Steps. A step-by-step guide for generating community wind projects including advice on planning.

[www.british-hydro.co.uk](http://www.british-hydro.co.uk) - advice and resources for developing mini hydro schemes.

[www.biomassenergycentre.org.uk](http://www.biomassenergycentre.org.uk) - Biomass Energy Centre - comprehensive resources and advice on biomass technology, including information on relevant legislation.

[www.chpa.co.uk](http://www.chpa.co.uk) - The Combined Heat and Power Association. News and resources. Includes report Community Energy: Urban Planning for a Low Carbon Future.



<http://www.fey.org.uk/site/MarketDevelopment/TechnologyInformation/AnaerobicDigestion/PlanningandAD/tabid/265/language/en-GB/Default.aspx> - Anaerobic Digestion.

[www.merton.gov.uk/living/planning/planningpolicy/mertonrule.htm](http://www.merton.gov.uk/living/planning/planningpolicy/mertonrule.htm) – Information about the 'Merton Rule'.

