

Lydney Town Council

Working Policy Document – adopted by F/C 11/11/2013

Renewable Energy and Development Policy

Introduction

1.1 This policy builds on the National Planning Policy Framework, the Gloucestershire Structure Plan Review and the Forest of Dean District Council Core Strategy in supporting the Governments Renewable energy obligations and the need to provide electricity at all times. The policy is intended to provide a ‘fine grain’ consideration of how these policies and strategies can be localised in the Town of Lydney. The future major housing developments in Lydney are informed by Core Strategy Policy CSP3 and informed by the associated Good Practice Guidance; *Sustainable energy requirements within Development Proposals* and efforts to improve energy conservation in existing housing stock.

1.2 This document has been produced in accordance with *Planning Practice Guidance for Renewable and Low Carbon Energy* published by the Department for Communities and Local Government in July 2013. The Government states that local and neighbourhood plans are the key to delivering development that has the backing of local communities. When drawing up a Local Plan local planning authorities should first consider what the local potential is for renewable and low carbon energy generation. In considering that potential, the matters local planning authorities should think about include:

- the range of technologies that could be accommodated and the policies needed to encourage their development in the right places
- the costs of many renewable energy technologies are falling, potentially increasing their attractiveness and the number of proposals
- different technologies have different impacts and the impacts can vary by place
- the UK has legal commitments to cut greenhouse gases and meet increased energy demand from renewable sources. Whilst local authorities should design their policies to maximise renewable and low carbon energy development, there is no quota which the Local Plan has to deliver

1.3 The Town Council draws on *TURNING THE TIDE* a community strategic plan prepared for Lydney Area Partnership in August 2002 and the Survey carried out by the Neighbourhood Development Project (NDP) to inform its views about local attitudes to landscape and renewable energy, ensuring that the information contained herein reflects current local/national policy and local opinion.

1.4 An important consideration is the impact on landscape from renewable energy projects. Respondents to *TURNING THE TIDE* consultation in 2002, felt Lydney has an exceptional setting, liked living in small rural town and stressed the importance of recognising and safeguarding this asset. Safeguarding the natural assets of Lydney and particularly green field space was prioritised in the survey of Lydney residents carried out by the NDP in 2012. The public showed overwhelming support for the redevelopment of existing brown field

sites for business and strongly opposed using green field sites for industry. The landscape in Gloucestershire and along the Severn Estuary is particularly highly valued and sensitive. Its ability to absorb any sort of development including renewable energy can only be judged on a localised basis against criteria based policies including localised landscape character assessment. Renewable energy schemes may have visual impacts on the marine and coastal environment and it may be appropriate to also to assess potential impacts on seascape character.

1.5 Local criteria for renewable energy applications informing the Neighbourhood Plan are:

- the need for renewable or low carbon energy does not automatically override environmental protections
- cumulative impacts require particular attention, especially the increasing impact that wind turbines and large scale solar farms can have on landscape and local amenity
- local topography is an important factor in assessing whether wind turbines and large scale solar farms could have a damaging effect on landscape and it is thought that the landscape around Lydney of an escarpment leading to a flat estuary would make tall vertical structures and large horizontal platforms make it extremely difficult to mitigate against harmful effects.
- great care should be taken to ensure heritage assets are conserved in a manner appropriate to their significance, including the impact of proposals on views important to their setting
- proposals in Lydney will be close to the Severn Estuary SPA and will need careful consideration
- protecting local amenity in an area planning major residential development and highly dependent on tourism is an important consideration which will be given weight in planning decisions.

All renewable energy planning applications would have to additionally meet Forest of Dean District Council planning requirements, including screening processes for determination of an EIA assessment, and the Wind Turbine Policy.

2. A General Approach to Renewable Energy Projects

2.1 Anaerobic digestion.

This technology can work very effectively in agriculture, and in the treatment of sewage and food wastes. It is best applied in community or relatively small scale town schemes.

2.2 Ground source heating. To be encouraged in new buildings and emphasised in Good Practice Guidance (CSP3).

2.3 Energy from waste.

We support the diversion of waste from landfill and the use of residual waste for the generation of energy and are not opposed to combustion processes. However we do have concerns about investment in very large-scale facilities because of the environmental impact and existing issues about toxic gases in Lydney.

2.4 Hydro.

There is potential for small scale schemes to harness the energy of our local rivers and proposals by LAiP and the Harbour/Canal sub groups and other community organisations are welcomed subject to the usual planning considerations and assessments of environmental impact.

2.5 Biomass.

The burning of wood or other biomass crops such as miscanthus is usually associated with combined heat and power generation. Care needs to be taken to ensure that benefits are not lost in transporting feedstock long distances or that excessive planting of biomass crops does not create a monoculture alien to the farmed landscape. Any significant increase in the use of land for biomass production would also reduce the area available for producing food and the field diversity and landscape around Lydney. More use of local wood fuel for heating can encourage better woodland management with landscape and biodiversity benefits and is supported if it does not lead to a loss of ancient woodland, or a general reduction in afforested areas.

2.6 Solar.

On a limited scale solar panels can be relatively easily absorbed in the landscape. There are a number of different panel designs and not all are suitable for prominent positions such as on roofs. We welcome most domestic applications that are now permitted development. Large scale solar arrays need to be considered against their negative impact on sensitive landscapes such as the Severn Estuary or the Forest of Dean escarpment and views. The deployment of large-scale solar farms can have a negative impact on the rural environment, particularly in very undulating landscapes. Particular factors that our Neighbourhood Plan considers include:

- encouraging the effective use of previously developed land, and discouraging use of greenfield land
- that solar farms are normally temporary structures and planning conditions can be used to ensure that the installations are removed when no longer in use and the land is restored to its previous use
- the effect on landscape of glint and glare (see guidance on landscape assessment at paragraphs 39-40 July 2013) and on neighbouring uses and aircraft safety
- the extent to which there may be additional impacts if solar arrays follow the daily movement of the sun
- the need for, and impact of, security measures such as lights and fencing
- great care should be taken to ensure heritage assets are conserved in a manner appropriate to their significance, including the impact of proposals on views important to their setting. As the significance of a heritage asset derives not only from its physical presence, but also from its setting, careful consideration should be given to the impact of

large scale solar farms on such assets. Depending on their scale, design and prominence, a large scale solar farm within the setting of a heritage asset may cause substantial harm to the significance of the asset

- the potential to mitigate landscape and visual impacts through, for example, screening with native hedges
- the energy generating potential, which can vary for a number of reasons including, latitude and aspect

All the above technologies (2.1-2.6) are scalable and are particularly suitable for local smaller scale schemes. In general, we support dispersed renewable energy generation rather than major centralised facilities – though scale will be determined by local factors.

3. Wind Power

3.1 In Lydney and most of Gloucestershire it is now apparent that there is limited scope for wind turbines without unacceptable visual damage to the landscape both for large and relatively small turbines. Proposals would need to be judged on their individual merits and be subject to clear assessment of their visual effects.

3.2 National Planning Policy Framework, Policies EN.3 and NHE.1 of the Gloucestershire Structure Plan Review and Policy CSP.1 of the Core Strategy mean that due to the vertical nature of industrial scale turbines (those above 20 metres to tip) any development in Lydney would be the principle feature of the area emphasising the presence of the turbine which would result in an unacceptable adverse impact on the visual amenity of the area.

3.3 The growth of Lydney as a prime quality residential area raises issues about the wellbeing and physical and psychological health of residents a key determinant of which would be the proximity of residential houses to wind turbines. Lydney Town Council recommends significant separation distances between wind turbines and residential premises in the interests of residential amenity, including safety. The key contribution to the Local Plan from the Parish of Lydney will be housing. High quality residential developments need to be well located desirable accommodation and not be impacted on by large scale wind turbine developments.

3.4 Evidence suggests that there is a risk of collision between moving turbine blades and birds and/or bats. Other risks including disturbance and displacement of birds and bats and the drop in air pressure close to the blades which can cause barotrauma (lung expansion) in bats, which can be fatal. The estuary and escarpment around Lydney are home to large population of common and rare species and the impacts on birds and bats should therefore be assessed in conjunction with full assessments of the impact on the biodiversity of the area.

4. General issues

4.1 Cumulative landscape impacts and cumulative visual impacts are best considered separately. The cumulative landscape impacts are the effects of a proposed development on

the fabric, character and quality of the landscape; it is concerned with the degree to which a proposed renewable energy development will become a significant or defining characteristic of the landscape. These will be key issues in the sensitive landscape surrounding Lydney.

4.2 Cumulative visual impacts concern the degree to which proposed renewable energy development will become a feature in particular views (or sequences of views), and the impact this has upon the people experiencing those views. Cumulative visual impacts may arise where two or more of the same type of renewable energy development will be visible from the same point, or will be visible shortly after each other along the same journey. Hence, it should not be assumed that, just because no other sites will be visible from the proposed development site, the proposal will not create any cumulative impacts.

4.3 The Lydney Neighbourhood Plan affords communities to plan for community led renewable energy developments. Community initiatives should be conformant with this policy, be supported by the Town Council and be able to demonstrate a majority of support in the local community affected and benefitting from the proposals through a ballot or other means agreed with the Town Council. Micro-wind, hydro and small scale rooftop or brownfield solar collective enterprises (See DEFRA Schemes) are encouraged. 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.

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