

CABINET MEMBER FOR THE ENVIRONMENT - 24 July 2014

DRAFT POSITION STATEMENT: MAJOR DEVELOPMENT PROPOSALS FOR GROUND-MOUNTED SOLAR PV ARRAYS

Report by Interim Deputy Director – Strategy & Infrastructure Planning

Introduction

1. The purpose of this report is to seek Cabinet Member endorsement of a Position Statement on Major Development Proposals for Ground-mounted Solar PV Arrays (Annex 1).
2. The guidance in the draft Position Statement is intended to ensure that those matters in which the County Council has an interest are fully considered by local planning authorities in the formulation of planning policy in local plans and by applicants ahead of submitting a planning application for a solar farm.
3. The advice does not seek to duplicate the role of the local planning authority in the development management process. An applicant should first contact the relevant local planning authority for pre-application advice: the County Council will feed in advice on a proposal via the local planning authority through the agreed Single Response process.
4. Subject to Cabinet Member approval, the Position Statement will be posted on the County Council web-site as standing advice.

Background

5. In the last 12 months the County Council has dealt with 30 planning consultations relating to proposals for solar farms. These proposals have raised a number of technical issues related to areas for which the County Council has responsibilities or interests.
6. It would provide clarity to local planning authorities and developers if the County Council were to provide standing advice on the likely issues and impacts which developers should assess and any necessary mitigating measures, ahead of submission of a planning application.
7. It could also inform the development of planning policy in district local plans and/or supplementary planning documents.

The draft Position Statement

8. In view of the benefits of solar PV development in helping to reduce carbon emissions, reduce reliance on fossil fuels and provide local energy security as well as its contribution to creating jobs in the local economy, the County

Council should support the development of solar PV development in principle. However, this support should be subject to there being no significant environmental or visual impacts.

9. This is consistent with national policy which is to substantially increase the deployment of renewable energy across the UK, including solar PV, but which seeks to ensure that ground-mounted solar PV developments are appropriately sited, proper weight given to environmental considerations and opportunities provided for local communities to influence decisions that affect them.
10. The draft Position Statement seeks to ensure that ground-mounted installations are temporary in nature (up to 25 years) to avoid permanent impacts.
11. The draft document sets out advice on a number of technical matters to ensure that proposed schemes:
 - are appropriately sited
 - respect local landscape, heritage and visual amenity
 - mitigate transport impacts, including to rights of way
 - take account of opportunities to enhance bio-diversity

Financial and Staff Implications

12. The publication of a Position Statement which makes developers and local authorities aware of the issues the County Council expects to be considered right from the beginning of the application process could potentially save County officer time in providing pre-application advice and in assessing and responding to planning consultations.

RECOMMENDATION

13. **The Cabinet Member for Environment is RECOMMENDED to endorse the Position Statement: Major Development Proposals for Ground-mounted Solar PV Arrays**

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Background papers: Nil

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