

CABINET MEMBER FOR ENVIRONMENT – 13 NOVEMBER 2014

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

Report by Deputy Director for Environment & Economy – (Strategy & Infrastructure Planning)

Introduction

1. The purpose of this report is to seek Cabinet Member endorsement of a draft Position Statement on Major Development Proposals for Ground-mounted Solar PV Arrays (Annex 1).
2. The draft Position Statement provides technical advice to ensure that those matters in which the County Council has an interest are fully considered by applicants ahead of submitting planning applications for solar farms and by local planning authorities when preparing relevant policies in local plans and determining planning applications.
3. The advice in the Position Statement 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. Furthermore, the Policy Statement seeks to complement rather than duplicate government policy in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and advice in the Planning Practice Guidance (PPG).
5. Subject to Cabinet Member approval, the Position Statement will be posted on the County Council web-site as technical standing advice.

Background

6. In the 12 months up to April 2014 the County Council dealt with 30 planning consultations relating to proposals for solar farms. These proposals raised a number of technical issues related to areas for which the County Council has responsibilities or interests.
7. It would provide clarity to local planning authorities and developers if the County Council were to provide technical standing advice on the likely issues and impacts which developers should assess and any necessary mitigating measures, ahead of submission of a planning application.
8. This technical advice could also inform the development of planning policy in district local plans and/or supplementary planning documents should local

planning authorities consider there is local potential for solar farm development within their areas.

9. A decision on an initial draft Position Statement was deferred in July by the Cabinet Member for Environment to allow for a focussed consultation with relevant stakeholders. The current draft of the Position Statement takes account of the feedback from stakeholders summarised at Annex 2 together with an officer response to the comments made. It also refers to further development of government policy relating to solar farm development.

The draft Position Statement

10. 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 ground-mounted solar PV development in principle. However, this support should be subject to there being no significant environmental or visual impacts.
11. 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 is given to environmental considerations and opportunities provided for local communities to influence decisions that affect them.
12. The draft Position Statement complements the PPG which explains that large-scale solar farms can have negative impacts on the rural environment but advises that the visual impact of a well-planned and well-screened solar farm can be properly addressed within the landscape if planned sensitively.
13. The draft Position Statement 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
14. It also seeks to ensure that ground-mounted installations are temporary in nature (up to 25 years) to avoid permanent impacts.

Financial and Staff Implications

15. 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

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

BEV HINDLE

Deputy Director for Environment & Economy (Strategy & infrastructure Planning)

Background papers: Nil

Contact Officer: Linda Currie, Planning Strategy Officer
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