

# Northumberland Local Plan

## Renewable Energy Supplementary Planning Document - Scoping Document

June 2016



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## 1. Introduction

### About this consultation document

**1.1** The Council is going to prepare a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) to provide further detail on the planning policies for renewable energy in the emerging Northumberland Local Plan Core Strategy.

**1.2** This consultation document sets out the Council's initial views on the scope and content of the proposed SPD and is seeking feedback prior to preparing a draft SPD for consultation.

**1.3** Chapter 2 of this document provides some more detailed explanation of the rationale for the proposed SPD, Chapter 3 provides detail on the proposed structure of the SPD and the technologies that it is proposed to provide detailed advice on and Chapter 4 provides detail on the suggested content for the guidance.

### How to respond to the consultation

**1.4** Specific consultation questions have been included throughout this consultation document to identify the issues that the Council would particularly welcome views on.

**1.5** You can provide comments in the following ways:

- Online at: <http://northumberland.limehouse.co.uk/portal/spd/renewableenergy/scoping>;
- By email to: [PlanningStrategy@northumberland.gov.uk](mailto:PlanningStrategy@northumberland.gov.uk); or
- By post to: Strategic Planning and Housing, Northumberland County Council, County Hall, Morpeth, Northumberland, NE61 2EF.

**1.6** The consultation period runs from **15 June 2016** to **27 July 2016** and your comments should be received by the Council no later than **4pm** on **Wednesday 27 July 2016**.

### Next steps

**1.7** Following the consultation on this document, a draft Renewable Energy SPD will be prepared. The feedback received from the consultation on this scoping document will be used to help inform the contents of the draft document.

**1.8** The draft document will be published for public consultation and this will provide an opportunity to comment on it. The feedback on the draft SPD will be used to help finalise SPD. The Council will then adopt the SPD and it can be used as a material consideration in reaching decisions on planning applications.

**1.9** A full timetable will be identified for the preparation of this SPD following an analysis of the feedback from the consultation on this scoping document.

## 2. Background

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### 2. Background

**2.1** This section explains the context for preparing a Renewable Energy SPD, including the rationale behind the need to prepare it and the linkages with the emerging Core Strategy.

#### **Role of a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD)**

**2.2** The main purpose of a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) is to add further detail to specific policies contained within statutory planning policy documents.

**2.3** An SPD may cover a particular theme (for example affordable housing or design) or it may cover the development of a specific site or area (for example a town centre, a conservation area or an area identified for comprehensive redevelopment).

**2.4** Once adopted, the contents of a SPD are a material consideration when making decisions on planning applications.

**2.5** SPDs are prepared by the Council in consultation with the community but are not subject to independent examination as is the case for 'Development Plan Documents' such as the Core Strategy. So although they are a material consideration in making decisions on planning applications they do not carry as much weight as Development Plan Documents in decision making.

#### **Linkages to the Northumberland Local Plan Core Strategy**

**2.6** The emerging Core Strategy contains three policies that deal specifically with renewable energy:

- Policy 65 provides an overarching policy for renewable energy development that is applicable to all technologies and proposals;
- Policy 66 provides specific policies for assessing proposals for onshore wind energy; and
- Policy 67 provides specific policies for assessing proposals for solar photovoltaic farms.

**2.7** The Renewable Energy SPD will provide an opportunity to give greater clarity and detail on the policy criteria in the renewable energy policies contained in the emerging Core Strategy.

**2.8** The policies for renewable energy in the pre-submission draft are subject to proposed major modifications. Consultation on these proposed major modifications is taking place between 15 June 2016 and 27 July 2016. The policies incorporating the proposed major modifications are shown in Appendix A of this document for information and the consultation document as a whole can be viewed online at [http://northumberland-consult.limehouse.co.uk/portal/planning/core\\_strategy/csम्म](http://northumberland-consult.limehouse.co.uk/portal/planning/core_strategy/csम्म).

#### **Purpose and scope of proposed Renewable Energy SPD**

**2.9** Renewable energy development in Northumberland is an important issue. The abundant natural resources of the County provide opportunities for renewable energy and this has resulted in significant development pressure, particularly for wind turbine

development. The benefits from renewable energy development have to be balanced with the need to protect the local environment and communities from the adverse effects that may arise as a result of development taking place. The importance of Northumberland's landscapes and natural and historic environment is recognised through the existence of designations such as the Northumberland National Park, Northumberland Coast Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, North Pennines Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and Hadrian's Wall World Heritage Site. The Renewable Energy SPD will seek to provide guidance to ensure that new renewable energy infrastructure is delivered in locations where local environmental impact is acceptable.

**2.10** Feedback from consultation on the Core Strategy, including consultation workshops on renewable energy that were held during these consultations, have identified that there is a need to provide some further detail on the policy criteria contained within the policies for renewable energy.

**2.11** Earlier versions of the Core Strategy identified that it was considered that there was a need for an SPD to be prepared to add further detail on the approach to wind energy. However, it is now considered that the scope of the SPD could be usefully expanded to provide guidance on the development of other forms of renewable energy, particularly solar photovoltaic farms which, like onshore wind energy, has a specific policy in the Core Strategy.

**2.12** This will help applicants by providing advice on the matters that should be addressed in order to make successful planning applications for renewable energy developments prior to applications being submitted and also help decision-makers when assessing the acceptability of proposals.

**2.13** The SPD will not include offshore developments, such as offshore wind farms, as these will not be within the Local Planning Authority area of Northumberland County Council. Nonetheless the principles in the SPD would help to guide responses that Northumberland County Council may make if consulted on offshore proposals.

### Question 1

Do you agree that the SPD should be expanded to include renewable energy technologies other than onshore wind energy?

## 3. Renewable Energy SPD – Proposed structure

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### 3. Renewable Energy SPD – Proposed structure

**3.1** This section details the suggested structure of the Renewable Energy SPD and suggests options for the structure of the guidance.

#### Proposed structure of the SPD

**3.2** It is proposed that the Renewable Energy SPD is structured as follows:

- Introduction
  - Overview of the purpose of the SPD
  - Status of the document
  - Overview of the document structure
- Background
  - Context and rationale behind the SPD
  - Links to Core Strategy
  - Scope of SPD
- General principles
  - Guidance that is applicable to all renewable energy proposals
  - Community energy proposals
  - Pre-application consultation
- Guidance for each renewable energy technology and topic<sup>(1)</sup>
  - Detailed guidance on siting and design issues for each identified technology. Further discussion on how this could be structured is presented below.
- Guidance on the planning application process

#### **Question 2**

Do you have any comments on the suggested structure of the Renewable Energy SPD?

#### **Structure of guidance by technology and topic**

**3.3** There are a number of different ways in which the guidance for each technology and for each topic could be structured. It is, however, considered that the most appropriate option is to structure the guidance by technology (e.g. onshore wind energy) with guidance on each topic (e.g. landscape), specific to that technology, organised below it.

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<sup>1</sup> Examples of topics could include landscape, ecology, transport, historic environment and water environment. Further detail is provided in Chapter 5 of this document

### 3. Renewable Energy SPD – Proposed structure

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#### **Question 3**

Do you agree that the most appropriate option is to structure the guidance by technology with guidance on each topic below it? If no, what would be a more appropriate alternative option?

## 4. Renewable energy technologies for inclusion in the SPD

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### 4. Renewable energy technologies for inclusion in the SPD

**4.1** This section sets out the renewable energy technologies that it is proposed to include detailed guidance for in the SPD.

#### Technologies to be included in the SPD

**4.2** It is proposed that the SPD includes detailed guidance for the following renewable energy technologies:

- Onshore wind;
- Solar photovoltaic;
- Hydro power;
- Biomass; and
- Anaerobic digestion.

**4.3** These resources are recognised in the Northumberland Renewable Energy and Low Carbon Generation and Energy Efficiency Study<sup>(2)</sup> as those resources that have the most technical potential in Northumberland.

**4.4** The SPD will not include offshore developments, such as offshore wind farms, as these will not be within the Local Planning Authority area of Northumberland County Council. Nonetheless the principles in the SPD would help to guide responses that Northumberland County Council may make if consulted on offshore proposals.

#### Background

**4.5** It was initially proposed to prepare an SPD to provide detailed planning guidance for onshore wind energy development in order support the emerging policy in the Core Strategy. This was as a result of the significant development pressure for this type of development in Northumberland and it was considered that there was a need for additional detail to help guide and determine planning applications.

**4.6** As a result of an increasing development pressure for solar photovoltaic farms the emerging Core Strategy also contains a separate policy for solar photovoltaic farms. This reflects that renewable energy is an area where the technology is changing as a result of innovation and proposals for other forms of renewable energy may come forward for planning consent.

**4.7** In light of this, it is considered that the SPD could usefully provide additional guidance on solar photovoltaic farms to help applicants on the matters that should be addressed in order to make planning applications successful and to also assist in the decision making process.

**4.8** In addition, the SPD could also usefully provide additional guidance on other renewable energy technologies that are likely to come forward as planning applications in Northumberland, such as anaerobic digestion, biomass and hydro power.

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2 Entec (2011). Northumberland Renewable Energy and Low Carbon Generation and Energy Efficiency Study. Report for Northumberland County Council. February 2011. Available at: <http://www.northumberland.gov.uk/Default.aspx?page=3458>



## 4. Renewable energy technologies for inclusion in the SPD

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**4.9** It will be possible to update the SPD in the future should there be other emerging technologies that come forward for development and for which it would be beneficial to have detailed guidance to assist in guiding and making decisions on planning applications.

### **Question 4**

Do you have any comments on the list of renewable energy technologies that have been identified to be included in the SPD?

## 5. Suggested content

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### 5. Suggested content

**5.1** The section sets out the topics that the Council considers should be included for each renewable energy technology and the key points that the proposed SPD should address.

#### Onshore wind energy

**5.2** Wind turbines use large blades to catch the wind, which turns the blades that in turn drive a turbine. Onshore wind energy is now an established and common technology for generating renewable energy in the UK. The availability of this technology for deployment, the availability of financial incentives and the presence of a wind resource in Northumberland has resulted in considerable development pressure for onshore wind farms in recent years.

**5.3** During the preparation of the Northumberland Local Plan significant concerns have been expressed through the consultation process regarding the negative impact of wind turbines on Northumberland's landscape, natural and historic environment and residential amenity. Concerns about the effects of renewable energy developments on local communities and the environment have been reflected in the Planning Practice Guidance which states that the need for renewable energy should not automatically override environmental protections and the planning concerns of local communities.

**5.4** This is also reflected in the Written Ministerial Statement issued by the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government on 18 June 2015 and the subsequent updates to the Planning Policy Guidance states that local planning authorities should only grant planning permission for wind energy developments if the development site is in an area identified as suitable for wind energy development in a local or neighbourhood plan and it can be demonstrated that the planning impacts identified by affected local communities have been fully addressed and therefore the proposal has their backing.

**5.5** In light of development pressure and the context for onshore wind energy in Northumberland, the emerging Core Strategy proposes a criteria-based policy to help guide and assess any future proposals. The Core Strategy is a strategic planning document and therefore further guidance is needed on the detail of the criteria in the policy. The supporting text in the emerging Core Strategy specifically references that further guidance is needed in relation to landscape sensitivities, important viewpoints and cumulative impact to assist both decision-makers and applicants.

**5.6** Taking into consideration the Written Ministerial Statement and the amendments to the Planning Practice Guidance, work has commenced to understand whether there are any potentially suitable areas for wind turbine development of different scales in Northumberland. If any potentially suitable areas are identified, these would be progressed and consulted upon through the preparation of a separate Development Plan Document to the Core Strategy.

**5.7** The main planning issues in respect to onshore wind are:

- Effects on landscape character, capacity and sensitivity;
- Visual impacts;
- Effects on heritage assets;

- Operational noise;
- Shadow flicker;
- Aviation safety;
- Interference with electromagnetic transmissions;
- Ecology;
- Suitability of site access and access routes;
- Decommissioning and site restoration; and
- Cumulative effects.

### 5.8 Overview of proposed content for SPD below:

- Background to technology
  - A brief overview of what the technology involves and the characteristics of the development, including different turbine and wind farm sizes.
- Landscape and visual impact
  - Siting and design considerations in response to landscape character and sensitivity
  - Effects on long and medium range views from sensitive landscapes
  - Effects on well-used viewpoints
  - Mitigation measures
- Ecology
  - Siting considerations in relation to designated sites and protected species and habitats
  - Opportunities for net gains for biodiversity
  - Mitigation measures
- Historic environment
  - Siting considerations in relation to designated sites and features, including Hadrian's Wall World Heritage Site, and their settings
  - Siting considerations in relation to iconic heritage sites and features
  - Siting considerations in relation to outlooks from heritage sites and features
- Water environment
  - Flood risk
  - Measures to reduce run-off from sites, including the consideration of sustainable drainage systems
- Green Belt
  - Considerations regarding the protection of Green Belt land
- Traffic, highways and Public Rights of Way

## 5. Suggested content

- Suitability of site access and access routes for the construction phase, the operational phase and decommissioning
- Siting consideration in relation to Public Rights of Way where these cross the site
- Amenity
  - Mitigation measures in relation to operational noise and shadow flicker
- Aviation
  - Considerations in relation to aviation safety and operation of navigation systems
- Decommissioning
  - Requirements for decommissioning and restoration of the site, including requirements for the removal of turbines and ancillary infrastructure

### Question 5

Do you have any comments on the suggested content of the guidance for onshore wind turbine developments?

**5.9** In order to inform the guidance on landscape it is considered that further work is needed to understand the landscape sensitivities that are relevant to the policy criteria in the Core Strategy and the implications of this for the capacity of the landscape to accommodate wind turbine developments. It is proposed that the scope of this work includes:

- Analysis of the landscape character areas and the capacity and sensitivity of these areas in relation to the development of wind turbines of different sizes and numbers;
- Identification of iconic landscape and heritage sites and features;
- Identification and analysis of views to and from sensitive landscapes;
- Identification of important viewpoints, including those from iconic heritage sites or important landscape features, where visual sensitivity to onshore wind turbine development is particularly high; and
- How proposals should have regard to the special qualities of the Northumberland National Park, North Pennines Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and Northumberland Coast Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty;

### Question 6

Do you have any comments on the scope of the further work on landscape sensitivities and onshore wind turbine developments?

### Solar photovoltaic farms

**5.10** Photovoltaic cells use light to generate electricity. When light shines on a photovoltaic cell it creates an electric field across the layers. Solar farms are large-scale arrays of photovoltaic cells that convert sunlight into electricity. They are differentiated from micro-generation, the small-scale generation of energy by individuals or businesses to meet their own needs. Solar farms can cover large areas of land, typically between one hectare and 100 hectares, and are usually developed in rural locations or on large brownfield sites. They can also be mounted on the roofs or walls of buildings and electricity can be supplied directly to the building.

**5.11** In light of the increasing development pressure for solar photovoltaic development in Northumberland, the emerging Core Strategy proposes a criteria-based policy to help guide and assess any future proposals. It is considered that further detail is needed in respect to this policy to assist with its implementation by providing further guidance detail on the criteria in the policy.

**5.12** The main planning issues in respect to solar photovoltaic farms are:

- Effects on landscape and visual amenity, including those from glint and glare;
- Impacts on the fabric of a host building, particularly in conservation areas, Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and listed buildings; and
- Impacts on agricultural land.

**5.13** Overview of proposed content for SPD below:

- Background to technology
  - A brief overview of what the technology involves and the characteristics of the development, including stand-alone developments and those attached to a building.
- Landscape and visual impact
  - Siting and design considerations in response to landscape character and sensitivity and sensitive receptors
  - Effects on long and medium range views from sensitive landscapes
  - Effects on well-used viewpoints
  - Consideration of glint and glare
  - Security fencing and lighting
  - Mitigation measures
- Ecology
  - Siting considerations in relation to designated sites and protected species and habitats
  - Opportunities for net gains for biodiversity
  - Mitigation measures
- Historic environment

## 5. Suggested content

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- Siting considerations in relation to designated sites and features, including Hadrian's Wall World Heritage Site, and their setting
- Siting considerations in relation to iconic heritage sites and features
- Water environment
  - Measures to reduce run-off from sites, including the consideration of sustainable drainage systems
  - Flood risk
- Traffic, highways and Public Rights of Way
  - Site access
  - Suitability of access routes
  - Siting consideration in relation to Public Rights of Way where these cross the site
- Agricultural land
  - Considerations in relation to agricultural land quality
- Green Belt
  - Considerations regarding the protection of Green Belt land
- Amenity
  - Mitigation measures in relation to noise
- Aviation
  - Considerations in relation to aviation safety and operation of navigation systems
- Decommissioning
  - Requirements for decommissioning and restoration of the site, including requirements for the removal of infrastructure

### Question 7

Do you have any comments on the suggested content of the guidance for solar photovoltaic farms?

### Hydro power

**5.14** Hydro power uses flowing water to drive a turbine that is connected to an electrical generator. There are three main types of hydro power:

- Storage schemes, which involve water being impounded in a reservoir that is then used to feed a turbine;
- Run of river schemes, water is taken from a watercourse and directed through a turbine before being returned to the same watercourse downstream; and
- Pump storage schemes, which involve a high level and a low level storage reservoir. At times of low electricity demand energy is used to pump water from the lower level to the higher level storage reservoir. This water is released through turbines to generate electricity when demand is high.

**5.15** There is widespread potential for hydro power in Northumberland but these will be mostly small-scale run of the river schemes with low output.

**5.16** Proposals for hydro power development would be considered against the policy criteria in the renewable energy in the Core Strategy. Given the resource in Northumberland and the potential for run of the river schemes it is considered that further guidance on how the Core Strategy policy would apply to hydro power would assist in the implementation of this policy.

**5.17** The main planning issues in relation to hydro power include:

- Visual impact of weirs, dams, channels, pipelines, turbine housing and power lines;
- Ecological impacts from altering flow of watercourse;
- Impact on fishery and migratory fish where a weir or dam is constructed;
- Compatibility with other river uses/needs; and
- Construction impact, including potential for clouding of the river with silt or mud.

**5.18** Overview of proposed content for SPD below:

- Background to technology
  - A brief overview of what the technology involves and the characteristics of the development
- Landscape and visual impact
  - Siting and design considerations in response to landscape character and sensitivity and sensitive receptors
  - Mitigation measures
- Ecology
  - Siting considerations in relation to designated sites and protected species and habitats
  - Opportunities for net gains for biodiversity
  - Consideration of effects both on the watercourse and adjacent to the watercourse
  - Issues with the fish population and the safe passage of fish
  - Mitigation measures
- Historic environment
  - Siting considerations in relation to designated sites and features and their setting

## 5. Suggested content

- Water environment
  - Issues associated with flooding and flood risk
  - Measures to prevent pollution to watercourses
- Traffic, highways and Public Rights of Way
  - Site access
  - Suitability of access routes for construction traffic
- Amenity
  - Mitigation measures in relation to noise
- Decommissioning
  - Requirements for decommissioning and restoration of the site, including requirements for the removal of infrastructure, where a planning permission is time limited.

### Question 8

Do you have any comments on the suggested content of the guidance for hydro power?

### Biomass

**5.19** Biomass refers to solid organic material derived from plants and includes wood and other plant materials. These materials can be burned in order to generate heat, electricity or a combination of the two. Typical fuels include wood by-products from: commercial forestry operations, waste wood from sawmills and wood processing, and energy crops.

**5.20** Biomass installations range in size from small-scale installations suitable for heating domestic properties, to larger schemes for larger buildings to very large scale biomass plants to supply electricity to meet wider needs.

**5.21** Proposals for biomass development would be considered against the criteria in the renewable energy policy in the Core Strategy. Given the potential and the wide range in the nature of potential proposals it is considered that further guidance on how the Core Strategy policy would apply to biomass would assist in the implementation of the Core Strategy policy.

**5.22** The main planning issues in relation to biomass include:

- Visual impact of biomass plant and fuel storage infrastructure;
- Impacts arising from construction;



- Transport movements required to bring feedstock to site; and
- Effects of airborne emissions.

### 5.23 Overview of proposed content for SPD below:

- Background to technology
  - A brief overview of what the technology involves and the characteristics of the development, particularly in relation to the different scales of development.
- Landscape and visual impact
  - Siting and design considerations in response to landscape character and sensitivity, and sensitive receptors, recognising the different scales of development
  - Mitigation measures
- Ecology
  - Siting considerations in relation to designated sites and protected species and habitats
  - Opportunities for net gains for biodiversity
  - Mitigation measures
- Historic environment
  - Siting considerations in relation to designated sites and features
- Water environment
  - Issues associated flood risk and mitigation
- Traffic, highways and Public Rights of Way
  - Site access
  - Suitability of access routes for construction traffic
  - Vehicle movements
- Amenity
  - Mitigation measures in relation to noise, odour and air quality.

### Question 9

Do you have any comments on the suggested content of the guidance for biomass?

## 5. Suggested content

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### Anaerobic digestion

**5.24** Anaerobic digestion is a process that breaks down organic material in the absence of oxygen to produce a biogas (a mixture of methane and carbon dioxide) and digestate. This biogas can be used to generate electricity or heat. Anaerobic digestion is typically supplied with biodegradable waste from farms (for example animal and crop waste) and feed waste, crops specially grown to supply them and food waste. Anaerobic digestion is principally a waste management operation but has the potential benefit to produce renewable energy.

**5.25** Northumberland is a largely rural County and its agricultural sector produces significant quantities of materials, such as animal manure and slurry, which are well suited to use in anaerobic digestion.

**5.26** Proposals for anaerobic digestion would be considered against the policy criteria in the renewable energy in the Core Strategy. The policies for waste are also normally applicable to proposals for anaerobic digestion due to the feedstock used. Given the rural nature of much of Northumberland, the presence of operational facilities and the potential for more facilities it is considered that further guidance on how the Core Strategy policy would apply to anaerobic digestion would assist in the implementation of this policy and deliver schemes in appropriate locations.

**5.27** The main planning issues in relation to biomass include:

- Visual impact of the buildings, structures and associated infrastructure;
- Increased transport movements required to bring feedstock to site and to remove any by-products;
- Odour;
- Emissions to ground or surface water; and
- Effects of airborne emissions.

**5.28** Overview of proposed content for SPD below:

- Background to technology
  - A brief overview of what the technology involves and the characteristics of the development, particularly in relation to the different scales of development.
- Landscape and visual impact
  - Siting and design considerations in response to landscape character and sensitivity and sensitive receptors, recognising the different scales of development
  - Mitigation measures
- Ecology
  - Siting considerations in relation to designated sites and protected species and habitats
  - Opportunities for net gains for biodiversity
  - Mitigation measures
- Historic environment

- Siting considerations in relation to designated sites and features and their setting
- Water environment
  - Issues associated flood risk and mitigation
- Traffic, highways and Public Rights of Way
  - Site access
  - Suitability of access routes for construction traffic and vehicle movements during operation
- Amenity
  - Mitigation measures in relation to noise, odour and air quality.

### Question 10

Do you have any comments on the suggested content of the guidance for anaerobic digestion?

### General guidance applicable to all technologies

**5.29** There are a number of topics that will be applicable to all renewable energy technologies. It is proposed that this guidance is deals with:

- Community based renewable energy proposals
- Grid connection

**5.30** The following section provides more detail on the Council's initial thoughts on the guidance that could be included on the planning application process.

## 6. The planning application process

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### 6. The planning application process

**6.1** Proposals for renewable developments can raise a number of complex issues. It is important that the information submitted with planning applications is sufficient to enable the local planning authority and others involved in the process such as parish councils and members of the public to be fully aware of what is being proposed and what the impacts may be.

**6.2** It is proposed to have a section in the SPD that provides more guidance on the planning application process, including information to be submitted with planning applications for renewable development.

#### Pre-application consultation requirements

**6.3** Section 61W of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 requires that applications for planning permission for development that involves the installation of more than 2 turbines or where the hub height of the turbine exceeds 15 metres must be subject to consultation before the application is submitted.

**6.4** Section 61W and the Town and Country Planning (Development Procedure) (England) Order 2015 sets out the requirements that must be followed. It is proposed that the SPD provides additional guidance on complying with these requirements.

#### Landscape and visual impact

**6.5** One of the key issues raised by renewable energy developments are their impacts on landscape character and the visual amenity of key receptors. It is therefore important that all applications are supported by a landscape and visual impact assessment that is proportionate to the scale of the proposal.

**6.6** There are a number of good practice documents for the landscape and visual impact assessment process. It is proposed that the SPD will sign post these and set out expectations about good practice that should be followed.

**6.7** Part of the landscape and visual impact assessment, in particular when the proposal is EIA development, involves establishing the significance of the effects on the landscape and visual receptors. A number of approaches have been adopted by applicants to achieve this. It is considered important that the SPD sets out good practice for establishing the significance of effects. This will involve the preparation of local matrices of receptor sensitivity, magnitude of change/effect and significance of landscape and visual effects. Whilst this type of assessment is particularly relevant for EIA developments, it is considered that the same principles and processes should be followed in more 'informal' landscape and visual appraisals of smaller scale proposals.

**6.8** It is also proposed that the SPD would expand on the local validation checklist by providing additional information on the level of information required to be submitted to assess the landscape and visual impact of proposals. Specific guidance that will be provided includes:

- Guidance on the extent of Zones of Theoretical Visibility;
- Discussion of viewpoint selections prior to the submission of planning applications;

## 6. The planning application process

- Good practice on the choice of viewpoint selection and how they are presented in the assessments;
- The use of photomontages versus wireframes;
- Best practice for visual representations; and
- Expectations on cumulative impact assessments, including sequential impacts especially along key routes and public rights of way.

### Heritage assets

**6.9** Northumberland is rich in heritage assets. This is reflected in the Core Strategy policy which seeks to protect heritage assets and their setting. Section 66 of the Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas Act 1990 places a particular duty to have special regard to the desirability of preserving listed buildings, their settings or any features of special architectural or historic interest which they possess. It is therefore particularly important that impacts on listed buildings and their settings are properly assessed.

**6.10** It is unlikely that renewable energy proposals will directly affect heritage assets. Most effects will be indirect, i.e. on their setting.

**6.11** It is proposed that the SPD will provide guidance on the requirements for heritage assessments to accompany planning applications, recognising the different scale and impacts of renewable energy developments.

**6.12** Of particular importance will be the need to carry out an assessment of the impact on important views from and to the County's most important heritage sites. The SPD will provide guidance on this.

### Ecology

**6.13** Renewable energy proposals have the potential to impact on ecology. The SPD will provide details of good practice and also on the types of surveys and other information that will be required to support a planning application.

### Green Belt

**6.14** Renewable energy proposals are generally classed as inappropriate development in the Green Belt. The National Planning Policy Framework requires that proposals for inappropriate development in the Green Belt need to be justified by very special circumstances.

**6.15** The SPD will set out expectations on the assessment that should be carried out for sites in the Green Belt.

### Noise

**6.16** It is proposed that the SPD will provide further guidance on the information that needs to be submitted to demonstrate that the proposals satisfactorily address noise impacts. This will include more information on properties that have a financial interest in the proposal as well as when detailed noise assessments will be required.

## 6. The planning application process

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### Agricultural land

**6.17** This is particularly relevant for solar farms. The SPD will provide more guidance on the information needed to support planning applications to meet the requirements set out in the Planning Practice Guidance about the use of agricultural land.

**6.18** The subjects highlighted above are considered to be the main areas where it is considered helpful to provide additional guidance. Views are sought on whether there are other areas where it would be helpful to provide

#### **Question 11**

Do you have any comments on the topic areas that have been identified for the planning application process to be included in the SPD?

### Appendix A: Emerging policies for renewable energy in the Core Strategy

The text that is underlined and scored through in the policies below indicates the amendments proposed in the major modifications to the Core Strategy Pre-Submission Draft Plan consultation. The proposed additions to the text being underlined thus: Addition; and proposed deletions being scored through thus: ~~Deletion~~.

#### Policy 65

##### Renewable and low carbon energy

In plan-making and assessing development proposals, the strategy for the development of renewable energy and low carbon energy development is to support and encourage proposals in appropriate locations in order to contribute to energy generation and a reduction in emissions of greenhouse gases. This includes where decentralised, renewable or low carbon energy supply systems are to be used to supply energy to a development. Support will also be given to renewable and low carbon energy developments where there is clear evidence that proposals are community-led ~~and supported~~.

Through the development management process, applications will be supported where it has been demonstrated that the environmental, social and economic ~~effects~~ benefits of the proposal ~~clearly outweigh any adverse effects~~, individually or cumulatively, on local communities and the environment are acceptable or can be made acceptable. In considering applications, appropriate weight will be given to the following:

- a. Landscape character and sensitivity and the sensitivity of visual receptors;
- b. The special qualities and the statutory purposes of the Northumberland National Park, North Pennines Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and the Northumberland Coast Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty;
- c. Internationally, nationally and locally designated nature conservation and geological sites and features, and protected habitats and species;
- d. Hadrian's Wall World Heritage Site and other internationally, nationally and locally designated heritage assets and their settings and non-designated heritage assets;
- e. Air, and ground and surface water quality;
- f. Hydrology, water supply and any associated flood risk;
- g. Highways and traffic flow, transport networks, Public Rights of Way and non-motorised users, including the effects upon well-used recreational routes such as the National Trails, long distance routes and the national cycle network;
- h. Amenity due to noise, odour, dust, vibration or visual impact;
- i. The openness of the Green Belt and whether very special circumstances have been demonstrated to justify otherwise inappropriate development;
- j. The impact of any new grid connection lines and any ancillary infrastructure and buildings associated with the development;
- k. That appropriate provision has been provided for decommissioning and removal of temporary operations once they have ceased;
- l. The predicted output of the proposal; and
- m. The economic benefits of the proposal.

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All proposals need to consider cumulative impact. When identifying cumulative landscape and visual impacts, considerations include: direct and indirect effects as well as temporary and permanent impacts. When assessing the ~~significance~~ scale of landscape and visual impacts a number of criteria should be considered, including: the sensitivity of the landscape and visual receptor and the magnitude or size of the predicted change.



### Policy 66

#### Onshore wind energy

In plan-making and assessing development proposals, the development of single wind turbines or groupings of turbines will be supported where: ~~the applicant can demonstrate that the social, environmental and economic benefits of the proposal clearly outweigh any adverse impacts, both individually and cumulatively:~~

- i. the applicant can demonstrate that the planning impacts of the proposal, both individually and cumulatively, are acceptable or can be made acceptable;
- ii. the development site is in area identified as suitable for wind energy development, where these are set out in the Local Plan or a Neighbourhood Plan; and
- iii. following consultation, it can be demonstrated that the planning impacts identified by affected local communities have been fully addressed and therefore the proposal has their backing.

Through the development management process, the planning impacts will be assessed against the following criteria and applicants will be required to demonstrate applications will be supported where it has been demonstrated that:

- a. There is sufficient separation from the proposed wind turbines to protect residential amenity as a result of noise, shadow flicker and visual intrusion. To protect visual amenity, there will be a presumption against development within a distance of six times the turbine blade tip height of residential properties unless it can be demonstrated that the presence of turbines would not have an unacceptable impact upon living conditions;
- b. The proposals have addressed any potential adverse effects on the safety of aviation operations and navigational systems;
- c. Potential interference to television and/or radio reception and information and telecommunications systems will be avoided and/or mitigated;
- d. The proposed site access arrangements and access routes will be suitable for the construction phase, including the delivery of turbine components and construction materials, the operational phase, and the decommissioning of the proposed wind farm;
- e. The proposed wind turbines are located appropriate distances from highways, and railway lines to provide a safe topple distance. A minimum topple distance of the turbine height plus 10% is recommended as a starting point;
- f. Provision has been made for the satisfactory decommissioning of the turbines and associated infrastructure once the operations have ceased and the site can be restored to a quality of at least its original condition;
- g. The proposal will not result in unacceptable harm to the character of the landscape and the landscape has capacity to accommodate the proposed development;
- h. There are no unacceptable adverse effects on long and medium range views to and from sensitive landscapes, such as the Cheviot Hills, Northumberland Sandstone Hills, Northumberland Coast AONB, North Pennines AONB, the Northumberland National Park and the Hadrian's Wall World Heritage Site, and lines of sight between iconic landscape and heritage sites and features, particularly

## Appendix A: Emerging policies for renewable energy in the Core Strategy

where one or more feature is within the Northumberland Coast AONB, the North Pennines AONB or the adjoining Northumberland National Park;

- i. There are no unacceptable adverse effects on sensitive or well used viewpoints; and
- j. There are no unacceptable adverse effects on important recognised outlooks and views from or to heritage assets where these are predominantly unaffected by harmful visual intrusion-, taking into account the significance of the heritage asset and its setting.

~~Within the Northumberland Coast AONB and the North Pennines AONB there will be a presumption against proposals involving more than one turbine or proposals involving turbines with a hub height of over 25 metres.~~

All proposals need to consider cumulative impact. When identifying cumulative landscape and visual impacts, considerations include: direct and indirect effects as well as temporary and permanent impacts. When assessing the ~~significance~~ scale of impacts a number of criteria should be considered, including: the sensitivity of the landscape and visual receptor and the magnitude or size of the predicted change.

### Policy 67

#### Solar photovoltaic farms

In plan-making and assessing development proposals, the development of solar photovoltaic farms will be supported where the applicant can demonstrate that the proposals is an effective use of land and that the social, environmental and economic effects benefits of the proposal clearly outweigh any adverse impacts, both individually and cumulatively, are acceptable or can be made acceptable.

Through the development management process, the planning impacts will be assessed against the following criteria and applicants will be required to demonstrate applicants will need to provide evidence to demonstrate that:

- a. Where a proposal involves greenfield land, ~~whether:~~
  - i. The proposed use of any agricultural land has been shown to be necessary and poorer quality land has been used in preference to higher quality land; and
  - ii. The proposal allows for continued agricultural use where applicable and/or encourages biodiversity improvements around solar arrays;
- b. Where a proposal is sited on the roof of an existing building, it will have no unacceptable adverse effects on the character and appearance of the host building and the character of the surrounding area;
- ~~b. c.~~ c. The proposal, including the impact of security measures such as lights and fencing, will not result in harm to the character of the landscape and the landscape has capacity to accommodate the proposal;
- ~~c. d.~~ d. The extent to which there may be additional impacts if solar arrays follow the daily movement of the sun;
- ~~d. e.~~ e. The proposal includes measures to screen the site to mitigate any landscape and visual impacts;
- ~~e. f.~~ f. There are no unacceptable adverse effects on long and medium range views to and from sensitive landscapes, such as the Cheviot Hills, the Northumberland Sandstone Hills, Northumberland Coast AONB, North Pennines AONB, the Northumberland National Park and the Hadrian's Wall World Heritage Site, and lines of sight between iconic landscape and heritage sites and features, particularly where one or more feature is within the Northumberland Coast AONB, the North Pennines AONB or the adjoining Northumberland National Park;
- ~~f. g.~~ g. There are no unacceptable adverse effects on sensitive or well used viewpoints;
- ~~g. h.~~ h. There are no unacceptable adverse effects on important recognised outlooks and views to and from heritage assets where these are predominantly unaffected by harmful visual intrusion, taking into account the significance of the heritage asset and its setting;
- ~~h. i.~~ i. The proposed site access arrangements and access routes are suitable for both the construction, the operational phase and the decommissioning of the proposal;
- ~~i. j.~~ j. The proposals have addressed any potential adverse effects on the safety of aviation operations and navigational systems; and

j. k. Provision has been made for the decommissioning of the solar farm once the operations have ceased and the site can be restored to a quality of at least its original condition.

All proposals will need to consider cumulative impact. When identifying cumulative landscape and visual impacts, considerations include: direct and indirect effects as well as temporary and permanent impacts. When assessing the ~~significance~~ scale of impacts a number of criteria should be considered, including: the sensitivity of the landscape and visual receptor and the magnitude or size of the predicted change.



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