



Planning for Renewable Energy

Summary of a Research Study conducted for the
New Horizons programme of the
Office of the Deputy Prime Minister^{i,ii}

November 2003

Introduction

Against a policy background set principally by the Energy White Paper 2003ⁱⁱⁱ and the *Sustainable Communities Plan 2003*, Brook Lyndhurst's research work on "Planning for Renewable Energy" approached the issue of renewable energy from three perspectives:

- land use planning
- urban regeneration
- local and regional governance

The particular objectives of the research were:

- to explore and identify how the planning system could move from being perceived as a barrier to the implementation of renewable energy technologies, to a situation in which it is playing a positive and enabling role^{iv};
- to explore the role that renewable energy solutions might play as catalysts for urban and community regeneration;
- to explore the linkages and interdependencies between the domains of planning and regeneration through the processes and structures of regional and local governance.

Key Conclusions

Our research suggests that the issue(s) of renewable energy is, in general, restricted to a small but enthusiastic minority of players in regional and local government. For the mainstream practitioner in land-use planning and urban regeneration, energy issues generally, and renewable energy issues in particular, have a low priority.

Those practitioners with responsibility for renewables, while making some headway in forging links with *regional* planners, appear to operate discretely from regeneration practitioners at all levels and planners at the *local* level. As a result, no

“critical mass” of concern has come about, so there has been no significant impetus for the development of a “community of interest” encompassing planning, regeneration and renewable energy personnel, at both regional and local levels.

The absence of such linkages, in our view, is not an issue that will significantly undermine the achievement of the 2010 national target to supply 10% of electricity from renewables. Whilst we have not investigated the operation of the principal tool for achieving this target, the Renewables Obligation, in any depth for the purposes of this report, it would seem that this fiscal instrument is operating effectively upon its intended major foci, that is, the large suppliers and producers of electricity.

In the longer term, however, it would seem that if the UK is to achieve truly dramatic reductions in its emissions of carbon dioxide (as envisaged, most obviously, by the Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution), then a more radical and far-reaching programme of change will be required.

In particular, as stressed in the Energy White Paper, alongside potentially profound improvements in energy efficiency, the production of energy from renewable sources will need to be taking place on both a large scale and in a highly distributed fashion.

For this scenario to come about, the linkages referred to above would need to be not merely in place, but well-developed. Planning mechanisms at regional, local and neighbourhood level would need to be able to take routine and well-informed account of renewable energy issues; regeneration projects, indeed economic development strategies generally, would need to be similarly well-informed; and governance procedures, again at key spatial levels, would need to be able to treat energy issues directly and also to ensure the effective interaction between economic development and land-use planning.

Our research suggests that such a scenario is achievable, but that bringing it about will require a clear central government policy commitment and careful attention to implementation mechanisms. Indeed, we would argue that the time is right for a period of “sustained nurture” in order to develop the capacity of the various institutions involved.

What policies will be necessary to achieve the cross-cutting delivery of renewable energy development will require further detailed investigation. However, as a general principle, action is required which results in a steadily increasing number of renewable energy schemes now, but which is principally intended to develop the capacity of regional authorities, local authorities, communities and others to be able to deliver much larger and more numerous schemes in the medium to longer-term.

In particular, the opportunity to embed renewables into the massive building programme proposed by the *Communities Plan* should be seized upon if the long-term legacy of that programme is to be sustainable.

The Research Methodology

The focus of the research was primarily upon the interaction of players involved in planning for and governance of renewables. In-depth qualitative research was carried out, focussing on key personnel and processes. Brook Lyndhurst's research was conducted over a twelve month period from October 2002, in close consultation with a Departmental Steering Group, in four phases:

- a literature review;
- in-depth interviews with experts in the fields of planning, renewables and regeneration;
- a case study of the South West Region's governance and planning policy towards renewables;
- follow-up interviews with experts.

Summary of Detailed Findings

Planning for renewable energy

- The 'planning barrier' has been largely experienced by the wind industry. However, thanks to the Renewables Obligation, the magnitude of the barrier has decreased, and thanks to the DTI's planning facilitation work and the revision of PPG22, it looks set to decrease further.
- Developers of biomass technologies have been too preoccupied with the financial viability of their projects to have been particularly concerned with a 'planning barrier'.
- Developers of PV and solar installations and other micro renewables, claim not to have experienced a 'planning barrier'. However, in particular, the pv/solar industry feels that it would benefit greatly from more positive planning policies or building regulations, which contain requirements to use embedded renewables.
- A general barrier within the planning system is that not all local authorities treat planning for renewables in a uniform way. To help overcome that barrier, the new PPS22, should be positive and unambiguous in its guidance on renewable energy developments.
- Regional renewable electricity targets are a useful tool for encouraging areas to take ownership of the national target. Sub-regional targets may help to channel this ownership further. However, local targets are generally considered to relate to too small a geographical area to be technically and administratively feasible.

Renewables in urban regeneration

- Renewable energy technologies can, in theory, be incorporated into regeneration in an urban context:

- through being embedded in the built environment as part of a physical regeneration scheme promoted by a regeneration body or social landlord;
 - through being developed as a 'community asset' by a community group or not-for-profit organisation.
- A significant barrier to developing community renewables in urban areas, is that when energy issues are being considered at all, energy efficiency may be given priority, as it is likely to be more desirable from an environmental and financial perspective. Renewables may, at best, be an afterthought to be considered only if a funding opportunity presents itself.
 - The current funding regime does little to help put renewables within the reach of interested community groups.
 - Another barrier is the low (or non-existent) priority given to energy issues. Only in 'fuel poor' areas of poor housing stock is energy likely to be seen as a priority issue.
 - Urban communities are also at a disadvantage, relative to their rural counterparts, in that they have no support network such as the Community Renewables Initiative.
 - The final barrier encountered concerns the ownership of assets. Most of the cases of community schemes to date come from rural areas. In these instances local landowners/asset owners have been part of the community group interested in developing renewables. However, in many urban areas undergoing regeneration, the community owns none of their local land or built-environment assets, and the achievement of a community renewables initiative would depend on the willing participation of the land/asset owner – which may be difficult to secure.
 - There are no positive policies on energy issues that might guide a local community to consider how energy might affect its well being. Guidance on drawing up Community Strategies fails to mention energy, and it is rarely brought up in other ODPM policies relating to urban regeneration and neighbourhood renewal.
 - Although some local authorities have prioritised energy issues, many have not. This is in part due to a failure to 'join up' sustainability concerns with regeneration policy and practice.

Governance of renewable energy in planning and regeneration

- Regional government's role is to develop strategy and facilitate delivery of the strategy. It is powerless to deliver the regional renewables target by itself and must work in partnership to encourage its target to be met. On this basis, regional government is best placed to act as a strategic leader and facilitator of a regional renewables network.
- Any regional renewables network needs to have a positive role in contributing to a regional strategy and meeting the regional renewables target – it must be more than a talking shop. It should seek to involve regional and local leaders who will be fundamental in influencing change and implementing actions.

- Regional government and the regional-level renewables network need to work closely with sub-regional and, importantly, local government in the region. Local plans, and particularly local planning control officers and members, will still have the dominant influence over the success of applications for renewables developments.
- Regional regeneration personnel in the South West appeared to feel fully occupied in trying to deal with the 'Rethinking Construction' agenda: embedded renewables was a technological consideration too far – and also one that was seen as too expensive.
- The extent to which, at this stage and without additional funding, renewables will become routinely incorporated in the built environment through regional regeneration is doubtful. With so many competing pressures on regeneration funding, renewables look set to remain a minority interest.
- Local authorities have the potential to expand the use of renewables in their area. Some of the authorities we researched were making progress on developing their use of renewables, but renewables policies are not adopted routinely.

Detailed Recommendations

- We do not believe that any specific policy or research action in addition to what is currently being embarked upon, is necessary at this stage to improve planning for **wind energy**. In the case of **bio-mass** technologies, planning has not yet emerged as an important barrier, though the situation will require monitoring in the future.
- While the commitment to large-scale generation should not waiver, there needs to be a parallel commitment to **micro and small-scale technologies** now, if they are to fulfil their future contribution to the low carbon economy. A bigger role for the planning system in determining energy use is a potential way forward, and detailed research needs to explore the precise training, funding and staffing requirements needed if planners and planning are to contribute to a process of "**sustained nurture**".
- Action taken now to incorporate **embedded renewables technologies** in the building programme that will take place as a result of the **Communities Plan**, will create a more sustainable long-term legacy in the proposed areas of growth.
- An **evaluation** of the governance impacts of the DTI facilitation programme should be conducted and made publicly available as soon as possible, with models for good practice highlighted. Follow-on funding should be forthcoming to continue the work identified in the evaluation as making a positive contribution to planning for renewables. We see the evaluation as an opportunity to progress the joint-working on renewables between the DTI and ODPM.
- Separate **renewable electricity targets** should remain in place in the medium to long term. However, the targets, and/or other policies aimed at promoting **sustainable energy** in the round, particularly at the regional and local level, should be developed and implemented.

- We recommend that a feasibility study be conducted into the possibility of **extending the CRI** (Community Renewables Initiative) into urban areas, alongside other possible alternatives. The proposed solution should then be implemented on a trial basis in urban areas across England.
- Further research and policy development on the ways in which sustainable energy can fit into the **urban renewal agenda** is needed, in terms of helping to reduce environmental exclusion, promote environmental justice, and bring the national energy strategy and climate change policy to bear on neighbourhood renewal.
- In anticipation of an increasing policy impetus to see renewables embedded in developments, we recommend that the **regional sustainable construction agendas** incorporate embedded renewables as a standard sustainability issue. Guidance from either ODPM and/or the DTI should be developed to help regional government understand how they can promote embedded renewables. However, any serious commitment to renewables in physical regeneration or sustainable communities will require specific additional funding due to the many competing demands being made on existing funds.
- Those within a local authority who have knowledge and expertise on renewables (such as sustainability or LA21 officers) should create local-level renewables **networks**, linked into regional renewables networks. The regional network should seek to offer support to local authorities wishing to build their expertise on renewables. Guidance on regional-to-local renewables networks should be produced on the basis of the findings from the evaluation of the DTI's planning facilitation programme.
- The ODPM's forthcoming **evaluation of Community Strategies** needs to examine the role and potential role of local energy issues. We propose that, in light of national climate change and energy policies and the power to promote well-being, energy is made a 'first tier priority'. As such, we recommend that additional guidance on including energy in Community Strategies is issued.
- Finally, the ODPM needs to recognise that, given its **responsibilities** across the areas of planning, regeneration and governance, the Department could reasonably be considered to be the most important in helping the country to become a low carbon economy. Beyond PPS22, the challenge will be how to deal with small-scale, community and embedded technologies. Accordingly, we recommend that the ODPM conducts a formal analysis of what internal and inter-departmental mechanisms need to be in place to ensure that the programme of **"sustained nurture"** proposed by this report can be delivered in a coherent and effective way.

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ⁱⁱ Copies of the full report are available on request from Brook Lyndhurst – e-mail contact@brooklyndhurst.co.uk for details.

ⁱⁱⁱ "Our Energy Future, Creating a Low Carbon Economy", 2003, CSO

^{iv} As set out in *The Energy Review*, of the Performance and Innovation Unit of the Cabinet Office (February 2002)