

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

LOCAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN (2006-2021)

Renewable Energy Topic Paper

April 2008

Contents

	Page
Introduction	1
National Policy Context	1
Local Policy Context	3
Key Issues in Rhondda Cynon Taf	5
Preferred Strategy	5
Draft Local Development Plan Policy	8
Further Advice	13

BACKGROUND

In January 2007 the Council issued for public consultation the Local Development Plan: Preferred Strategy. The Strategy was the first stage of the new statutory local development plan (LDP).

The next stage in the plan making process is the production of a deposit draft LDP. In order to ensure the soundness of the emerging LDP and transparency in the plan making process, the Council has produced a series of topic papers.

The topic papers address the main area of policy to be considered in the LDP. **It should be stressed that these papers are a starting point for policy development, through the sustainability appraisal process and as the Council's evidence base develops, emerging LDP policy will evolve and be refined.**

1. INTRODUCTION

The development of clean, sustainable forms of energy is one of the most challenging issues facing modern Britain. The harnessing of energy from waste, the sun, water and wind represent real opportunities to meet the energy needs of the UK in a way which respects the environment.

The LDP will establish a robust and meaningful policy context for energy efficiency and the generation of energy from a range of renewable sources.

In order to do this the topic paper will outline:

- **The policy context** for renewable energy, including a explanation of national, regional and local policy;
- **Key Issues in Rhondda Cynon Taf**, which relate specifically to renewable energy;
- **Preferred Strategy**, policy in respect of renewable energy, representations to the Strategy and proposed policy response, and
- **Draft LDP Policy**, which provides a policy context for renewable energy.

The policy context for energy efficiency is contained in the Design Topic Paper.

2. NATIONAL POLICY CONTEXT

People, Places, Futures – The Wales Spatial Plan (adopted 2004)

The Wales Spatial Plan provides a framework for the future spatial development of Wales. Rhondda Cynon Taf along with the neighbouring authorities of Cardiff, Bridgend, Merthyr Tydfil, Caerphilly and the Vale of Glamorgan has been identified as part of the South East – Capital Network Zone. The vision for the Capital Network is:

“An innovative skilled area offering a high quality of life – international yet distinctively Welsh. It will compete internationally by increasing its global viability through stronger links between the Valleys and the coast and the UK and Europe, helping spread prosperity within the area and benefiting other parts of Wales”.

Whilst the Spatial Plan does not provide a specific framework for the development of renewable energy in South East Wales, it does set out a vision for how each part of Wales should develop economically, socially and environmentally over the next 20 years. The document further develops the concept of a Capital Network and provides a more detailed context for the development of the Rhondda Cynon Taf LDP. The Wales Spatial Plan proposes that distinct approaches for the three areas that make up the Capital Network Region. The three areas are:

- City / Coast
- Heads of the Valleys Plus, and
- Connections Corridor

Rhondda Cynon Taf is within the Heads of the Valleys Plus and Connections Corridor.

An important element of the Assembly Governments approach to the development of the Network City is a low carbon city region, that is a city region that reduces its resource use, energy and travel footprint.

Turning Heads – A Strategy for the Heads of the Valleys 2020 (June 2006)

Turning Heads – A Strategy for the Heads of the Valleys 2020 as the name suggests, outlines a strategy for regenerating the northern Valley areas of South East Wales. In Rhondda Cynon Taf the strategy area includes Treorchy, Treherbert, Ferndale, Mountain Ash and Aberdare. The objectives of the

programme reflect those of the Wales Spatial Plan in seeking to ensure:

- An attractive and well used natural, historic and built environment;
- A vibrant economic landscape offering new opportunities;
- A well educated, skilled and healthier population;
- An appealing and coherent tourism and leisure experience, and
- Public confidence in a shared bright future

With regards to renewable energy, a strategic goal of the programme is for the area to be a model of good practice in sustainability, with particular emphasis on developing capabilities in recycling, use of renewables, microgeneration, and resource and energy efficiency.

Strategic Programme 6: *Linked Opportunities for Businesses and Individuals*, has regard to renewable energy and comments as follows:

“We will ensure that active programmes of business birth and incubation, supplier-chain and enterprise development, knowledge transfer and clustering are in place across the Heads of the Valleys. These will be linked to the major investment activities in housing renewal, roads and infrastructure, construction, environmental technologies/energy efficiency, and leisure and tourism.”

Ministerial Interim Planning Policy Statement 01/2005: Renewable Energy (2005)

Assembly Government Renewable Energy policy is embodied in the Ministerial Interim Planning Policy Statement (MIPPS) 01/2005. The MIPPS revises Sections 12.8 and 12.10 of Planning Policy Wales (March 2002). Supplementary guidance in relation to renewable energy is contained in Technical Advice Notes 8. The Planning Policy Wales Companion Guide (2006) relates the MIPPS to the LDP system, identifying clear statements of national policy that should only be repeated in where local circumstance require.

The Assembly Government's objectives for Renewable energy are to provide:

- Specific targets for renewable energy (electricity) production;
- Opportunities for renewable energy (heat); and
- Where possible, the combining of the two (heat and electricity) in combined heat and power systems.

Technical Advice Note (TAN) 8: Planning for Renewable Energy (July 2005)

TAN 8 provides advice on the land use planning considerations of renewable energy. It also advises that Local Development Plans should promote high standards of energy efficiency, energy conservation and the use of renewable energy as a part of the national and international response to climate change, which should be reflected in the strategy of development plans.

The TAN places particular emphasis on the harnessing of energy from large-scale wind farm developments. The guidance indicates that there are only a few relatively unconstrained areas in Wales that are capable of accommodating large wind power developments. These areas make up 7 Strategic Search Areas (SSA) capable of accommodating large (>25MW+) wind power developments. One of these, Area F "Coed Morgannwg" which the TAN suggests has an indicative generating capacity of 290MW, is located within the administrative boundaries of Neath Port Talbot, Bridgend and Rhondda Cynon Taf.

3. LOCAL POLICY CONTEXT

A Better Life – Our Community Plan 2001 – 20014

A Better Life - Our Community Plan sets out a framework for creating a brighter future for everyone who lives and works in Rhondda Cynon Taff. The plan was developed through the Better Life Consortium, during 2003/2004. The Community Plan identifies 5 key themes under which are a series of local level aims. The key themes are:

- Safer Communities
- Our Living Space
- Our Health and Well Being
- Boosting Our Local Economy
- Learning for Growth

The key themes identified in the Community Plan has been developed into strategies for improving the quality of life in Rhondda Cynon Taf. Renewable energy and energy efficiency is

considered as part of the Environmental Improvement Strategy (Our Living Space).

The Environmental Improvement Strategy sets the following themes:

- Biodiversity and Rivers
- Waste
- A Cleaner, Safer Environment
- Local Environment
- The Built Environment
- Transport
- Energy, Resource Use and Climate Change

Of particular relevance to the topic area is one of the five priorities set out under the Energy, Resource Use and Climate Change theme.

The priority seeks to promote:

- Greater co-ordination of activities locally to reduce energy consumption, increase energy efficiency and investigate new sources of renewable energy.

Rhondda Cynon Taf Local Development Plan 2006 –2021: Renewable Energy Study (2005)

The Renewable Energy Study examined the opportunities and constraints to the development of renewable energy and energy efficiency within Rhondda Cynon Taf. The technologies considered include solar photovoltaics, solar thermal, small hydro, biomass combustion, anaerobic

digestion, small wind clusters, passive solar design and energy efficiency in buildings.

The study provides an overview of the technologies, considers existing and proposed projects in the County Borough and identifies opportunities for harnessing renewable energy.

The study did not consider the potential of energy generation from large-scale wind projects or landfill gas.

TAN 8 Annex D Study of Strategic Search Areas E and F: South Wales Valleys (2006)

The TAN 8 study was commissioned by a consortium of 5 local authorities – Neath Port Talbot CBC, Bridgend BCB, City and County of Swansea, Carmarthen CC and Rhondda Cynon Taf CBC- all of which were affected by the designation of SSA.

The objective of the study was to refine the SSA boundaries for SSA E and F and to identify the best areas for wind farm development within the search area, having regard to landscape, environmental and technical factors.

In order to ensure a rigorous and consistent assessment of SSA F, the area and a surrounding 5 km buffer zone was sub divided into a number of small individual zones. In total SSA F was divided into 46 individual zones, of which 15 zones were in Rhondda Cynon Taf. Each zone was subjected to a rigorous and detailed assessment.

The study identifies 20 zones within SSA F which are in principle suitable for the development of large-scale wind proposals and would deliver the indicative generating capacity of 290 MW. Of the 20 zones, 5 are within Rhondda Cynon Taf. The combination of the zones identified in Rhondda Cynon Taf could provide an indicative generating capacity of 131 MW, 45% of the indicative generation target for SSA F.

4. KEY ISSUES IN RHONDDA CYNON TAF

The key issues to be addressed by the Rhondda Cynon Taf LDP have been identified by making an assessment of the following:

- The results of pre deposit consultation with key stakeholder;
- The results of the Sustainability Appraisal / Strategic Environmental Assessment Scoping Exercise; and
- A review of baseline social, economic and environmental information.

The issues identified through this process will inform directly the development of the spatial strategy for the LDP.

Pre Deposit Consultation

Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency issues identified are as follows:

- Wind farms need careful location if not to make the area undesirable for tourism, homebuyers, or businesses.

Sustainability Appraisal / Strategic Environmental Assessment

The Sustainability Appraisal / Strategic Environmental Assessment identified the following Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency issues:

- There are 20 wind turbines in the Plan area. Part of the County Borough is encompassed by one of the proposed TAN 8 (Wales) Strategic Search Areas.

Baseline information

No renewable energy or energy efficiency issues were identified.

5. PREFERRED STRATEGY

The preferred strategy provides the following policy framework for the development of new housing in Rhondda Cynon Taf.

Objectives of the Local Development Plan

Paragraph 4.2 of the Preferred Strategy (January 2007) lists 16 objectives for the LDP. The following objectives are the most relevant to the topic area:

- Increase the supply of renewable energy and reduce energy consumption.

Development Strategy

Paragraphs 6.1 – 6.11 of the Preferred Strategy sets out a development strategy for Rhondda Cynon Taf. The strategy area is divided into two distinct parts: -

- Northern Strategy Area, and
- Southern Strategy Area

The Northern Strategy area comprises the key settlements of Tonypany, Porth, Treorchy, Treherbert, Ferndale, Tylorstown, Mountain Ash and Hirwaun and the principal town of Aberdare. In this area the emphasis is on building sustainable communities and halting the process of depopulation and decline.

The Southern Strategy area includes the principal towns of Pontypridd and Llantrisant and key settlements of Tonyrefail and Llanharan. In the south of the County Borough the emphasis is on sustainable growth that benefits Rhondda Cynon Taf as a whole.

The strategy recognises the important role that principal towns and key settlements play in providing services of both local and county importance. Where possible, development will be focused on the principal towns and key settlements of the County Borough in order to support and reinforce the important role of these centres play as places for social and economic activity.

Energy

The provision of electricity from renewable sources coupled with energy efficiency and conservation measures are key to elements of the UK energy policy. The strategy recognises the role Rhondda Cynon Taf can play in achieving Government targets. The strategy will therefore encourage, where appropriate, the harnessing of renewable energy from a range of sources including biomass, anaerobic digestion, wind farms and small hydro schemes. The need to harness energy from renewable sources will be carefully balanced with the impact on local communities, the landscape and ecological interest.

To compliment this approach the strategy will also provide a positive approach to energy efficiency and conservation measures in both the siting and design of new developments.

SP 14 – Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency

Development proposals which contribute to meeting national renewable energy and energy efficiency targets will be permitted where it can be demonstrated that there is no unacceptable impact upon the interests of agriculture, conservation, areas of ecological, wildlife and landscape importance and residential amenity

Development proposals should be designed to minimise resource use during construction, operation and maintenance

Representations to the Preferred Strategy

Representations made in respect of the Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency element of the Preferred Strategy fall broadly into 2 areas – representations in respect of paragraph 6.34 -35 and Strategic Policy 14.

Outlined below is a summary of the main representation submitted in respect of these 3 areas. Responses to each of the main representations are included:

1. Representations to Paragraph 6.34 –6.35 – Renewable Energy

General: The view is expressed that wind farms are inefficient, uneconomic and a blight on the landscape

Proposed Response: Noted. However, Welsh Assembly Government policy contained in MIPPS 01/2005 and TAN 8 is to promote the development of wind farms.

General: The Preferred Strategy should provide support for onsite micro-renewable energy.

Proposed Response: The emerging LDP will provide a context for small-scale wind generation.

General: All the new development to be constructed in Rhondda Cynon Taf over the plan period must be built to the highest energy standard possible.

Proposed Response: Noted. The emerging LDP will contain design guidance that promoted low carbon development.

General: Concern is expressed that the wording of paragraph 6.34 should be amended to avoid negative connotations.

Proposed Response: Paragraph 6.34 provides a rightly seeks to provide a balance between the importance of harnessing renewable energy and the issues that need to be considered.

2. Representation to Strategic Policy SP 14 – Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency

Policy SP14: Objection is expressed to this policy on the basis that it takes to positive approach renewable energy.

Proposed Response: Welsh Assembly Government policy contained in MIPPS 01/2005 and TAN 8 is to promote the development of wind farms

Policy SP14: Support policy SP14 although would recommend that the wording “no unacceptable impact” is changed to read “no unacceptable effect

Proposed Response: Support Welcomed.

Policy SP14: SP14 Renewable Energy should be amended to include reference to natural heritage’. The need to harness energy from renewable sources should also be carefully balanced with historic landscapes, rights of way and access facilities, built heritage features and hydrological.

Proposed Response: The emerging LDP will provide a context for harnessing renewable energy which carefully balanced with the need to protect historic landscapes, rights of way and access facilities, built heritage features and hydrological.

Policy SP14: Further consideration should be given to the implications of SSA F (Coed Morgannwg) at the local level, with any proposed detail being contained in SPG.

Proposed Response: The emerging LDP will provide a context for the development of wind farms in SSA F (Coed Morgannwg).

Policy SP14: Consideration should be given to the encouragement of all forms of renewable energy and the contribution that they can make towards carbon emission reduction etc.

Proposed Response: The emerging LDP will provide a context for harnessing renewable energy from a range of appropriate sources.

6. DRAFT LDP POLICY

Revised Strategic Policies

SP 14 – Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency

Development proposals which contribute to meeting national renewable energy and energy efficiency targets

will be permitted where it can be demonstrated that there is no unacceptable effect impact—upon the interests of agriculture, conservation, areas of ecological, wildlife natural heritage and landscape importance and residential amenity

Development proposals should be designed to minimise resource use during construction, operation and maintenance

The provision of electricity from renewable sources coupled with energy efficiency and conservation measures are key to elements of the UK energy policy. The strategy recognises the role Rhondda Cynon Taf can play in achieving Government targets. The strategy will therefore encourage, where appropriate, the harnessing of renewable energy from a range sources including biomass, anaerobic digestion, wind farms and small hydro schemes. The need to harness energy from renewable sources will be carefully balance with the impact on local communities, the landscape and ecological interest.

To compliment this approach the strategy will also provide a positive approach to energy efficiency and conservation measures in both the siting and design of new developments.

Area Wide Policies

Climate change has been referred to as the ‘single most important issue facing mankind’ and has rightly resulted in an increased emphasis upon the energy issues at national and international level. Local authorities have an important role to play and have been encouraged to proactively engage in promoting energy conservation and renewable energy at local level.

Assembly Government Renewable Energy policy is embodied in the Ministerial Interim Planning Policy Statement (MIPPS) 01/2005.

The MIPPS requires that local planning authorities should facilitate the development of all forms of renewable energy and energy efficiency and conservation measures which fit within a sustainable development framework. Specifically, they should make positive provision for such development to meet society's needs now and in the future by:

- considering the contribution that their authority area can make towards developing and facilitating renewable energy and energy efficiency and conservation, and ensuring that development plan policies enable this contribution to be delivered;
- recognising the environmental, economic and social opportunities that the use of renewable energy resources can make to wider planning goals and objectives and the delivery of renewable energy target;
- ensuring that international and national statutory obligations to protect designated areas, species and habitats and the historic environment are protected from inappropriate development; and
- ensuring that any potential detrimental effects on local communities are minimised.

The policy framework contained in the LDP will ensure the provision of the development of all forms of renewable energy and energy efficiency and conservation measures that meet

the needs of existing and future residents of Rhondda Cynon Taf.

Policy RENEW 1 Energy from Biomass

Developments which proposes the harnessing of energy from biomass will be permitted where it can be demonstrated that the proposal:

- i) Will not have an unacceptable effect on habitats or species of international, national or local importance;**
- ii) Would not have an unacceptable effect on areas of built or natural heritage or sites of archaeological importance;**
- iii) Will not because of its sitting, scale or design have an unacceptable effect on the character of the site or surrounding area;**
- i) Would not have an unacceptable effect on adjoining land uses by virtue of noise, dust, odour or emissions,**
- ii) Will be fuelled by material sourced from within a 40km radius of the site; and**
- iv) Has safe access to the highway network, and will not cause traffic congestion or exacerbate existing traffic congestion.**

Where Development Proposals are acceptable applicants will be required to enter into and implement appropriate land management agreements.

Reasoned Justification

In addition to the environmental linked to carbon neutrality, biomass⁵ installations can have a positive impact upon the local economy by providing secure for farmers, forestry owners contractors and transport workers.

One of the most important factors governing the development of biomass projects is the proximity to fuel supply. For large biomass projects the viable distance is generally under 40km for smaller schemes this can be significantly less. There is little scope in Rhondda Cynon Taf for the cultivation of energy crops on any scale; the prime source of biomass fuel within the County Borough will therefore be forestry co – products. The resource is predominantly located within the central belt of the County Borough, and is relatively extensive in nature. It is likely that only small biomass projects will be located close to this resource, larger generation projects may be located anywhere in the County Borough where appropriate land, grid and transportation infrastructure exist.

Policy RENEW 2 Small Hydro Electricity Schemes

Development proposals for Small Hydro Electricity⁶ Schemes will be permitted where it can be demonstrated that the proposal:

- i) Will not have an unacceptable effect on habitats or species of international, national or local importance or fish migratory routes or breeding areas;**
-

- ii) Would not exacerbate flooding or the risk of flooding in the vicinity;**
- iii) Will not because of its sitting, scale or design have an unacceptable effect on the character of the site or surrounding area;**
- iv) Would not have an unacceptable effect on areas of built or natural heritage or sites of archaeological importance; and**
- v) Will not result in a loss of public accessibility to the countryside**

Where Development Proposals are acceptable applicants will be required to enter into and implement appropriate land management agreements.

Reasoned Justification

Of all the renewable energy technologies, small hydro is perhaps the most site specific. A project must be sited where the specific geographical, topographical and climatological features are present. For small hydro, conditions are optimum where streams or rivers with an abundant year round flow fall rapidly in a relatively short distance. To be viable proposals must be within close proximity to LV (240 volts) or MV (11,000 volts) electricity network.

Within Rhondda Cynon Taf appropriate conditions are most likely to occur in the Northern Strategy Area. Within the Northern Strategy Area there are numerous small watercourses which fall steeply into the Rhondda and Taff Rivers. The urban nature of the area means that sufficient grid capacity is likely to be available. Whilst most projects are likely to be small in nature –

under 100kw, there is nevertheless potential for larger schemes particularly associated with reservoirs, in the uplands above Treherbert and Maerdy.

Although hydro electricity schemes are most likely to occur in the North, development may take place in the Southern Strategy Area on larger, less fast falling rivers. Opportunities may exist on those rivers that are particularly associated with old industrial uses of waterpower. These opportunities may be limited as the proximity to newer development may give rise to concerns about flooding.

Policy RENEW 3 Anaerobic Digestion

Developments which proposes the harnessing of energy through anaerobic digestion will be permitted where it can be demonstrated that the proposal:

- i) Will not because of its sitting, scale or design have an unacceptable effect on the character of the site or surrounding area;**
- ii) Would not have an unacceptable effect on adjoining land uses by virtue of noise, dust, odour or emissions, and**
- iii) Has safe access to the highway network, and will not cause traffic congestion or exacerbate existing traffic congestion.**

Reasoned Justification

As with dry biomass, transport and supply material is a critical issue affecting the economic viability of Anaerobic Digestion

projects. The two main sources of supply material are from farm waste, food and domestic waste. Of the two, the latter is probably the dominant source in the County Borough. It follows therefore, that the most likely location of anaerobic digestion projects will be close to populated areas, food producing industries and large food retailing outlets.

In order to protect the residential amenity proposals for anaerobic digestion will only be permitted on industrial estates where the predominant use falls into class B2 of the Town and County planning Use Classes Order (1990) or on existing Waste disposal sites.

Policy RENEW 4 Small / Medium Wind Farm Development

Development for small and medium sized wind farms will be permitted where it can be demonstrated that the proposal:

- i) Is for a scheme of less than 25MW;**
- ii) Does not constrain the generating capacity of the refined strategic search area;**
- iii) Will not have an unacceptable effect on habitats or species of international, national or local importance;**
- iv) Will not because of its sitting, scale or design have an unacceptable effect on the visual amenities of the area;**
- v) Would not have an unacceptable effect on areas of built or natural heritage or sites of archaeological importance;**
- vi) Will not result in a loss of public accessibility to the countryside, and**

- vii) **Has safe access to the highway network, and will not cause traffic congestion or exacerbate existing traffic congestion.**

Where Development Proposals are acceptable applicants will be required to enter into and implement appropriate land management agreements.

Policy RENEW 5 Large Wind Farm Development

Proposals for wind farm developments of 25MW and over will be permitted where it can be demonstrated that the proposal:

- i) **Is within the boundary of the refined strategic search area and required to meet the indicative generating capacity;**
- ii) **Is sited on a predominantly flat, extensive area of upland land;**
- iii) **Will benefit from a good wind resource;**
- iv) **Is located a minimum of 500 metres away from residential properties;**
- v) **Will not have an unacceptable effect on habitats or species of international, national or local importance;**
- vi) **Will not because of its sitting, scale or design have an unacceptable effect on the visual quality of the wider landscape;**
- vii) **Would not have an unacceptable effect on areas of built or natural heritage or sites of archaeological importance;**

- viii) **Will not result in a loss of public accessibility to the countryside, and**
- ix) **Has safe access to the highway network, and will not cause traffic congestion or exacerbate existing traffic congestion.**

Where Development Proposals are acceptable applicants will be required to enter into and implement appropriate land management agreements.

Reasoned Justification

Technical Advice Note (TAN) 8: Renewable Energy (2005) identifies 7 Strategic Search Areas (SSA) in Wales, capable of accommodating large (>25MW+) wind power developments. SSA F “Coed Morgannwg” is located within the administrative boundaries of Neath Port Talbot, Bridgend and Rhondda Cynon Taf. TAN 8 identifies an indicative generating capacity for this area of 290MW.

The area of SSA F within Rhondda Cynon Taf is located predominantly in the Northern Strategy Area. SSA F includes large areas of the Rhondda Fawr, Rhondda Fach and Cynon Valley.

In accordance with the requirements of TAN 8 the Council, in partnership with adjoining authorities, undertook a strategic study intended refine the SSA and to identify the best areas for wind farm development area, having regard to landscape, environmental and technical factors.

The refined SSA F boundaries and further guidance on wind farm developments is contained in the Supplementary Planning Guidance on Renewable Energy.

7. FURTHER ADVICE

If you require any further advice or assistance in respect this or other LDP documents or wish to be placed on the Council's consultation database please contact a member of the Local Development Plan Team at:

Development & Regeneration Unit,
Floor 5,
Ty Pennant,
Catherine Street,
Pontypridd
CF37 2TB

Email: LDP@rhondda-cynon-taf.gov.uk

Telephone: 01443 495193