

Briefing Paper: Environment Policy Development Group

Date of Meeting: 23 January 2024

Subject: Renewable Energy in Mid Devon

Contributions by Officers: Jason Ball, Climate and Sustainability Specialist. Tristan Peat, Forward Planning Team Leader. Isabel Cordwell, Forward Planning Officer.

What is the current situation in Mid Devon for renewable energy?

Up-to-date evidence required for the Local Plan is being drawn up. Tables 1 and 2 below show key Department for Energy Security and Net Zero (DESNZ) [statistics](#) on renewable energy installed in Mid Devon.

Table 1. Renewable Energy – Number of Installations in Mid Devon.

Photovoltaics	Onshore Wind	Hydro	Anaerobic Digestion	Sewage Gas	Landfill Gas	Plant Biomass	Total
4,963	37	2	10	1	1	1	5,015

Table 2. Renewable Energy Installed Capacity (MegaWatts) in Mid Devon.

Photovoltaics	Onshore Wind	Hydro	Anaerobic Digestion	Sewage Gas	Landfill Gas	Plant Biomass	Total
63.3	1.2	0.1	5.3	0.0	4.9	0.3	75.1

Source: [Regional Renewable Statistics \(www.gov.uk\)](http://www.gov.uk).

Previously there has been some independent assessment of potential and the local needs that could be met by sustainable energy. Evidence on current and potential renewables (with policy recommendations addressed to some extent) was researched and published as part of the Greater Exeter Strategic Plan (GESP) - its [evidence base](#) included a 2018 Low Carbon and Climate Change Evidence Base, [redrafted in 2020](#), which may provide a useful snapshot, and included assessments of potential for solar photovoltaics (PV) and onshore wind energy.

The Council is the local planning authority for Mid Devon District and has a statutory duty to prepare and keep up to date a Local Plan for the area. The Local Plan can include a vision and objectives for the future planning of the area, and policies and site development allocations to guide the development and use of land and buildings in relation to planning applications submitted for determination and the decisions made on these. There is scope within a local plan to include policies in relation to renewable energy in so much as where this is consistent with national planning policy ([National Planning Policy Framework](#)), planning guidance and legislation, and where necessary underpinned by relevant and up-to-date evidence that is adequate and proportionate to support and support and justify the policies concerned.

The Local Plan forms part of the development plan for the district, alongside the Devon Minerals and Waste Plans (prepared by Devon County Council and the minerals and waste local planning authority) and neighbourhood development plans prepared by Town and Parish Councils for their local areas.

There is scope for these other development plan documents to include policies relating to renewable energy. Members will note the Council is not responsible for their preparation, but can help to shape their content as a consultee.

The Mid Devon Local Plan 2013 - 2033 adopted on 29 July 2020 is published here: [Adopted Local Plan and Policies Maps](#). This includes the following policies which include provisions for renewable energy development in the district:

Policy S1 j) "...increasing the use and supply of renewable and low carbon energy..."

Policy DM2 Renewable energy and low carbon energy

Policies CU5 and CU11 include provision for sources of on-site renewable or low-carbon energy to provide a proportion of the site's energy use for strategic urban extensions planned at North West Cullompton and East Cullompton.

The preparation of a new Local Plan for Mid Devon (known as '[Plan Mid Devon](#)') is under way and once adopted will replace the current local plan and cover the period to 2043. The new local plan will provide an opportunity to review policies for renewable energy in Mid Devon, including the potential identification of suitable sites or locations for renewable energy development such as solar arrays and wind

turbines, in relation to current national planning policy, planning guidance and relevant legislation and Written Ministerial Statements.

An Issues Paper was consulted on in early 2022. The Issues Paper is the first stage in plan making - it placed responding to the climate emergency and moving to a net-zero carbon future as the overarching top priority for the new Local Plan. Technical work is currently being progressed, which will help to inform a Draft Policies and Site Options consultation report, to be published in late 2024. The current timetable for preparing the new local plan is published on the Council's website here: [Local Development Scheme](#). The timetable and preparation of the new Local Plan will be kept under review in light of anticipated forthcoming reforms to the plan making process which follow the Levelling-up and Regeneration Act 2023.

The Council has recently adopted a Non-Statutory Interim Planning Policy Statement: Climate Emergency ([Non-Statutory Interim Planning Policy Statement: Climate Emergency](#)). This includes guidance that clarifies how the requirements of relevant policies in the adopted Local Plan can be met in relation to climate change, which can assist the determination of planning applications, and it underlines that tackling climate change is a material consideration. The Statement includes a planning applications checklist, which has been brought into effect through an amendment to the [Council's local validation criteria for planning applications](#) that are submitted to the Council for determination. The checklist includes Objective CP.3.3 Using cleaner energy and a measure for renewable energy generation and supply. The Non-Statutory Interim Planning Policy Statement: Climate Emergency will also be used to help inform the preparation of the new local plan.

Members are recommended to refer to the Statement for information about relevant legislation and policy that has informed its content. However, this is not exhaustive in relation to the national legislation in relation to renewable energy and building standards e.g. the latest Written Ministerial Statements on Local Planning.

The Council adopted a Solar PV Developments in the Landscape Supplementary Planning Document in 2016 ([Landscape Implications of Solar PV Proposals](#)). While this may continue to be relevant to the determination of planning applications, it is intended to support policies of the Mid Devon Core Strategy (2007) and Local Plan Part 3: Development Management Policies, which are no longer in force and have been replaced with the current adopted Mid Devon Local Plan 2013 – 2033.

The Environment PDG is advised to note that the Council's Planning Policy Advisory Group will be engaged with ongoing work for the new Local Plan for Mid Devon throughout the plan making programme, and will be responsible for making recommendations to the Cabinet over the coming months at key stages in the plan's preparation. All Members are welcome to attend meetings of the Planning Policy Advisory Group and participate in the discussions about the new Local Plan.

What is the current situation in Mid Devon for community energy?

Community Energy [projects in Mid Devon](#) are rare, only a few projects were found, and we have been told (personal communication) that one community wind energy project is on hold until the strategic position changes. Although 'community energy' is usually assumed to be community-led cooperative projects with local benefits - the growth of home generation is significant, and there is important potential for new and retrofit renewables e.g. heat pumps, heat recapture and solar PV.

What role does the Council have in promoting energy systems suitable for the Net Zero transition?

As an organisation aiming for Net Zero by 2030, Council operations could benefit from more renewable energy at its sites - either for its own consumption or to sell (surplus) energy to neighbouring assets where feasible. Solar PV represents excellent potential for further investment and is already an important part of on-site energy supply. The decarbonisation project at Lords Meadow Leisure Centre demonstrates a complete shift away from fossil fuels (whilst cutting costs) with heat being provided from a combination of a biomass boiler (wood chip), direct electrical heating and heat pumps (ground and air source).

With regard to the development plan for the district, Planning Policy and the Council role as the Local Planning Authority (LPA) – please refer to the earlier section.

With regard to local energy systems and their Net Zero readiness, it is worth noting that Environment PDG March 2022 received a [briefing on local electricity networks](#). The government report [Modelling 2050 – Electricity System Analysis](#) indicates the scale of the challenge: "Electricity will be increasingly important in supporting delivery of net zero, **potentially providing around half of final energy demand** as its use for heat and in transport increases."

Other energy types in the energy supply 'system' such as hydrogen, fossil fuels, biogas and biomass also need to be considered. The Council can help promote timely and appropriate upgrades and evolution of local energy systems through e.g. participation in consultations with energy system operators and sharing of information on development planning, local needs and installations. The Council is a member of Devon's Local Energy Planning Group, coordinated by Devon County Council, which has begun to commission baseline data and seeks to develop a modelling capability for future energy system scenarios, as a way to inform appropriate and investable projects.

Risks to energy supply and infrastructure are among the major threats identified in relation to climate change, which highlights the need for investment in preparedness and resilience (climate adaptation).

Section 3 – Statutory Officer sign-off / mandatory checks

Statutory Officer: Andrew Jarrett

Agreed by or on behalf of the Section 151.

Date: 12 Jan 2024

Statutory Officer: Philip Langdon

Agreed on behalf of the Monitoring Officer.

Date: 15 Jan 2024

Chief Officer: Richard Marsh

Agreed by or on behalf of the Chief Executive/Corporate Director.

Date: 12 Jan 2024

Performance and risk: Steve Carr

Agreed on behalf of the Corporate Performance & Improvement Manager.

Date: 12 Jan 2024

Cabinet member notified: Yes.

Report: Exclusion of the press and public from this item of business on the published agenda on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information. No.

Appendix: Exclusion of the press and public from this item of business on the published agenda on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information. No.

Section 4 - Contact Details and Background Papers

Contact: Jason Ball, Climate and Sustainability Specialist: Email:

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Background papers: none.