

## **Energy Agency's response to Renewable Energy Section of Ayrshire Joint Structure Plan 2005 Consultation**

### Renewable Energy

#### Paragraph 3.34

Facilitating renewable energy in ways that will allow it to act as an economic and sustainable driver of local economies is laudable as a key aim of the structure plan. However, we feel that a broader and more far-sighted purpose should be adopted.

In ten or fifteen years from 2005 the energy market and the priority which our society will attach to climate change issues will have changed significantly. Electricity, gas and oil prices will be established in a rising trend. Biomass fuel, although linked to a degree by transportation fuel costs, will be increasingly cheaper. Renewable energy production will be accepted as a necessity. Scotland's position as the wind and wave powerhouse of Europe will be more widely recognised and accepted.

It is very likely that within five to ten years the national targets for renewable energy production will have been translated into local targets and an unseemly rush to achieve these could create unnecessary friction unless the foundations of a carefully thought through RE development policy have been firmly laid.

Our view is that the imposition of local targets should be anticipated now and therefore the promotion of renewable energy production should be encouraged for its own sake, in addition to focusing on its effect on the local economy. Whilst appreciating that it is a politically sensitive issue, the relative weightings of local environmental impact and the economic and wider environmental benefits should be shifted towards the latter. Otherwise, ten years from now, we will be accused of lacking foresight.

The need for a proactive approach is, mainly because of the currently low cost of fossil fuels, that the renewable energy technologies of biomass, biogas, photovoltaics, small to medium hydro and wind and, to a lesser extent, heatpumps and solar water, all appear to be uneconomic in the short to medium term and so they will not be developed at the necessary rate without financial, policy and planning support. If we wait until the economics change there will be a long lag time before an appropriate rate of investment will be achieved.

In answer to QUESTION 18 – “How can Strategic Policy facilitate renewable energy systems to ensure that they act as an economic and sustainable driver for rural communities?” - the structure plan could encourage:

1. Ensuring that planning applications for renewable energy installations receive a fair wind, in line with NPPG 6 and PAN 45, etc.
2. Supporting studies and projects which identify and help to develop renewable energy resources such as biogas, biomass, hydro, heatpumps, wind and solar schemes.
3. Only regulation or legislation will persuade house builders to overcome the inertia of past practice. As in London, parts of Australia and elsewhere, consideration should be given to making renewable energy use necessary in certain types of new development. This could be

achieved by insisting that a minimum proportion of the energy used on the site is produced by renewable means (10% under Ken Livingston's plan), or by setting maximum fossil carbon emission limits, per m<sup>2</sup>, which can only be attained by their use. This leaves the developer discretion as to which technology is appropriate under their circumstances.

4. Whilst it is a good idea to give extra encouragement to publicly- and community-owned renewable energy schemes, this should not be at the expense of private schemes. The former are relatively difficult to organise and slow to come to fruition. Private schemes will also achieve emission reductions, help develop the RE industry, provide economic benefit in the area and generally contribute to the greater good.

In answer to QUESTION 19

Whilst it is a good idea to identify particular zones as having good wind farm potential, we should avoid earmarking too strongly specific areas for wind farm development or, conversely, suggesting that the rest of the region is 'out of bounds'. To do so would bias the planning proposition in other smaller areas elsewhere which may be perfectly appropriate (the quoted major study of landscape character notwithstanding).

It would be helpful to identify other areas as similarly attractive, if possible, as this would simplify and smooth the planning process as proposals come forward in these areas.

Wind farm development is understandably driven by economics, influenced by financiers. These push designers to extract the maximum possible output from the site within the restraints of the planning guidelines. It is over enthusiasm in this regard which will be regretted in years to come. The sustainable development of wind farming may depend on moderation of the scale of individual farms, paying close attention to the cumulative effects of all the likely future developments in the vicinity. As the private developers can be relied on to plan as though their farm will exist in isolation, it is the job of the planning officers to make themselves aware of the likelihood of proposals for neighbouring sights in future and to take advice and apply control of the turbine size and location. There should be a crossover point where both the profitability and impact of the site are acceptable.

The main restraint on future wind farm development will be their acceptability to the public with regard mainly to their perceived (and eventually actual) effects on land and property values but also their aesthetic appearance in the landscape (as these affect lifestyle and tourism) and their perceived effects on flora and fauna.

These restraints can most effectively be managed by means of public education. Whilst wind development companies do carry out education and awareness campaigns these will always be regarded with more scepticism than educational work carried out by the local authority. Publicly funded campaigns covering the known effects on nature, the noise issue, the positive economic and environmental benefits of wind farm development, construction and operation and the potential for community benefit, both locally and across the region, should be encouraged.

Another restraint in certain areas will be their negative effects on public safety and security, ie. on air traffic, radar and military training operations. In some cases these will prevent development but in most they should all be superable by the application of technology, as they have been in other countries, although this could take a few years to sort out.

(The windmills of the 16<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> Centuries were probably not considered quaint and picturesque by those who lived in sight of them when they were built.)