Inverclyde council

AGENDA ITEM NO. 14

Report To:	**Safe, Sustainable Communities Committee**	**Date**:	**8 March 2011**
Report By:	**Corporate Director Regeneration and Environment**	**Report No:**	**R&E/R&P/03/11/ FJM/MP001**
Contact Officer:	**Stuart Jamieson**	**Contact No**:	**01475 712401**
Subject:	**Small Scale Wind Energy Developments: Interim Planning Policy Position Statement**		

1.0 PURPOSE

1.1 To inform the Committee of changes in Scottish Government targets for the generation of electricity from renewable sources, the potential planning implications of the Government's financial incentives to take up renewable energy and an interim Planning Policy Position Statement produced to provide additional guidance for addressing these new small scale wind energy developments.

2.0 SUMMARY

2.1 On 1 April 2010 the feed-in tariff (FIT) for the micro generation of electricity came into effect. This is a cash back incentive to encourage the production of low carbon electricity up to a capacity of 5MW. It is envisaged that this tariff, along with the new government targets for electricity from renewable sources of 80% by 2020, could lead to an increase in applications for individual or small groups of wind turbines in Inverclyde.

2.2 The adopted Local Plan includes Policy UT6 'Renewable Energy Infrastructure' as the basis for assessing such development proposals. This policy was augmented by the Interim Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG) for Wind Farms, approved in March 2010 specifically to address the siting of strategic wind farms over 20MW and includes Policy UT6A against which to assess proposed developments. The criteria of Policy UT6A can also be applied to developments under 20MW incorporating those qualifying for the FIT up to 5MW, and those with outputs between 5MW and 20MW.

2.3 However, with the expected increase in applications for wind energy developments within the range qualifying for FIT, more specific requirements will need to be met and additional advice offered to take account of the particular aspects of such site-specific developments.

2.4 An interim Planning Policy Position Statement (refer to Annex Two) introducing additional criteria in a draft proposed Policy UT6B has been prepared. These will be used as material considerations in the assessment of these development proposals and used in conjunction with Policy UT6 and Policy UT6A, having particular regard to Note 1 of the latter policy.

3.0 RECOMMENDATION

3.1 That the Committee:

a) notes the requirement for additional planning policy guidance to address the evolving situation regarding renewable energy; and
b) approves the Planning Policy Position Statement as interim guidance to be used in conjunction with Policy UT6 and Policy UT6A when assessing planning applications for wind energy developments up to 5MW.

Aubrey Fawcett
Corporate Director Regeneration and Environment

4.0 BACKGROUND

4.1 On 1 April 2010 the feed-in tariff (FIT) for the micro generation of electricity came into effect. Also known as Clean Energy Cashback, this is a government incentive scheme to encourage the production of low carbon electricity up to a capacity of 5MW and supports the following technologies - wind turbines, solar photovoltaic panels, micro hydro schemes and anaerobic digestion.

4.2 The FIT operates by paying a fixed minimum amount for all the energy produced by the micro generation system as well as a separate payment for electricity exported to the grid. Tariffs are designed to ensure that the average monthly income from the installation is significantly greater than the loan repayments for the installation of the system.

4.3 It is the wind turbines that are of interest here as there is likely to be the most scope and pressure for this type of micro generation in Inverclyde. It is envisaged that this tariff, along with the new Scottish Government targets released in September 2010 of 80% of electricity to come from renewable sources by 2020, could lead to an increase in applications for individual or small groups of wind turbines in Inverclyde.

POLICY

National Policy

4.4 Scottish Planning Policy 2010 supports the increase in electricity generated from renewable sources and notes the potential for communities and small businesses to invest in the ownership of renewable energy projects. Planning authorities are advised that they should support the development of a diverse range of renewable energy technologies and Development Plans should support the wider application of medium and smaller scale renewable technologies.

Development Plan

4.5 Policy UT6 'Renewable Energy Infrastructure' of the adopted Inverclyde Local Plan 2005 provides criteria against which to assess renewable energy proposals. This policy is augmented by Policy UT6A in the Interim Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG) for Wind Farms (see Annex 1), approved in March 2010. **Annex One**

4.6 The SPG, approved in March 2010, addresses the siting of strategic wind farms over 20MW and includes Policy UT6A against which to assess proposed developments. However, the criteria of Policy UT6A can also be applied to developments under 20MW. With the potential increase in applications for wind energy developments within the range qualifying for FIT (50kW – 5MW) and the infinite combinations of number, height and output of turbines available, an additional Planning Policy Position Statement (PPPS) is considered necessary and has been prepared to be used in conjunction with Policy UT6 and Policy UT6A when assessing these applications. The Small Scale Wind Energy Development – Interim Planning Policy Position Statement (see Annex Two) will provide additional information specific to this type of development and additional criteria is the form of an interim policy against which to assess these wind turbine applications is proposed. **Annex Two**

4.7 By far the largest number of planning applications for small wind turbines is likely to be located in the Green Belt or Countryside and will require to be assessed against Local Plan Policy DS8 Green Belt and criteria (f) and (h) of Policy DS10 Countryside. This is due to these development proposals having a number of potential impacts, including on neighbouring properties and landscape and visual amenity. The purpose of the PPPS augmenting the adopted Local Plan is to provide additional guidance on what considerations will be taken into account in the assessment of these proposals. It is important to note that these proposals will be determined on their own merits and assessed against the full range of criteria in the renewable energy policies of the Local Plan and, if supported and granted permission, there will be no change to the designation of the site concerned if located in the Green Belt.

5.0 PROPOSALS

5.1 It is proposed to augment the existing renewable energy policy content of the adopted Local Plan by recommending the endorsement of the interim guidance in the Planning Policy Position Statement (PPPS). The purpose of this additional guidance is to provide a clear indication of the material considerations that will be used in determining small scale wind energy development proposals.

Siting and Design

5.2 The key elements of the PPPS are that such small scale wind energy developments will be sited for minimal impact on the landscape, environmental and built heritage, the amenity of neighbouring properties, and residential amenity in general. Matters relating to siting and design are important considerations, whether in relation to public roads or proximity to pylons and overhead power lines, given the likelihood that a large proportion of these proposals may come forward in the rural parts of Inverclyde where there would be ease of connection to the power grid.

Environmental and Landscape Impact

5.3 Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) regulations indicate that there may be significant environmental effects if wind energy proposals exceed 2 turbines. Taking this into consideration alongside the potential for a number of proposals coming forward in a locality giving rise to potential cumulative impacts, additional consideration will have to be given to the impact of a number of small wind turbines in close proximity upon the landscape and their effect on the natural and built environment.

5.4 Scottish Natural Heritage's 'Siting and Designing Windfarms in the Landscape' (December 2009) provides additional guidance to that in the SPP on requirements for assessing small scale wind farms. This includes advice for proposals of more than 2 wind turbines and over 15 metres in height, where an EIA is required. Where this is the case, the SNH guidance will be adopted to assess such proposals.

Cumulative Impact

5.5 Although applications are likely to be for individual or small numbers of wind turbines, the siting of a number of these structures could have a significant impact on neighbouring amenity and on road safety, and have adverse impacts on the landscape and visual amenity. If in time there are to be a large number of these wind turbines in close proximity, whether within the urban area or across the Green Belt and countryside, a cumulative impact assessment will be required to be submitted to support planning applications. These assessments will be required to allow the determination of proposals and to ensure they can be satisfactorily accommodated without significant adverse impacts.

5.6 In order to provide a comprehensive account of the factors and issues that will be material considerations in the assessment of small scale wind energy developments, two annexes are attached to this report. The first (Annex One) details existing policy, including Policy UT6 in the adopted Local Plan and reproduces 'Policy UT6A: Wind farms of 20MW and Above', which is included in the Interim Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG), approved by the Council in March 2010 to augment Policy UT6. Secondly, Annex Two outlines the proposed interim Planning Policy Position Statement on 'Small Scale Wind Energy Developments' including further additional guidance specifically for these smaller wind turbines. This additional guidance is set out in the form of a policy, as proposed by Policy UT6B. **Annex One** **Annex Two**

6.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

6.1 There are no financial, legal or personnel implications arising from this report, nor any implications for other Services of the Council.

6.2 **Finance:**

Financial implications – one-off costs

Cost Centre	Budget Heading	Budget Year	Proposed Spend this Report	Virement From	Other Comments
n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a

Financial Implications – annually recurring costs/savings

Cost Centre	Budget Heading	With Effect from	Annual Net Impact	Virement From	Other Comments
n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a

6.3 **Equalities**: the report has no impact on the Council's Equalities Policy.

7.0 CONSULTATION

7.1 **Chief Financial Officer:** no requirement for comment

7.2 **Head of Legal and Democratic Services:** no requirement for comment

7.3 **Head of Operational Development (HR) and Performance:** no requirement for comment

8.0 CONCLUSIONS

8.1 The adoption of this Interim Planning Policy Position Statement, including additional Policy UT6B: 'Small Scale Wind Turbine Development' will provide the necessary detailed advice and information to assist applicants in their submission of development proposals, will augment the existing Policy UT6 and SPG Policy UT6A, and will assist the Council in determining small scale wind energy applications arising from the FIT scheme.

9.0 BACKGROUND PAPERS

9.1 Scottish Planning Policy 2010
Planning Advice Note 45 Annex – Planning for Micro Renewables 2006
Scottish Government News Release September 2010
Inverclyde Local Plan 2005 (adopted January 2006)
Inverclyde Local Plan 2005 - Interim Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG) for Wind Farms 2010
Scottish Planning Policy 6 – Renewable Energy Issues and Implications (SSC Committee, 25 October 2007)
Siting and Designing Windfarms in the Landscape, SNH 2009

ATTACHMENTS

Annex One: Existing Local Plan policy - Policy UT6 'Renewable Energy Infrastructure' (adopted Local Plan 2005); and
Interim SPG, Policy UT6A 'Wind Farms of 20MW and Above' (March 2010)

Annex Two: Small Scale Wind Energy Development – Interim Planning Policy Position Statement (2011), including proposed draft Policy UT6B.

ANNEX ONE : EXISTING LOCAL PLAN POLICY

(1) Policy UT6: Renewable Energy Infrastructure

In assessing proposals for renewable energy infrastructure, Inverclyde Council, as Planning Authority, will have regard to the impact on:

- ***(a) the natural environment and built heritage of the locality;***
- ***(b) the landscape, particularly when viewed from major transport corridors;***
- ***(c) residential amenity;***
- ***(d) tourism and leisure resources, particularly if within the Clyde Muirshiel Regional Park; and***
- ***(e) the operation of aircraft and telecommunications equipment.***

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(2) Policy UT6A: Wind Farms of 20MW and Above

Wind farms with an output of 20MW and over will be supported where:

a) the objectives of international natural heritage designation are not compromised or where the proposed development is likely to have an adverse effect:

- ***there is no alternative solution; and***
- ***there are imperative reasons of over-riding public interest, including those of a social or economic nature;***

b) the objectives of national natural heritage designation and the overall integrity of the area are not compromised or where any significant adverse effects on the qualities for which the area has been designated are clearly outweighed by social and economic benefits of national importance;

and where the proposed development:

c) is sited within the landform to ensure it does not have a detrimental effect on the landscape and wider environment;

d) does not have an unacceptable adverse impact on the positive strategic assets of Clyde Muirshiel Regional Park and the West Renfrew Hills Scenic Area, such as:

- ***i. landscape and visual amenity;***
- ***ii. tourism;***
- ***iii. recreation; and***
- ***iv. conservation;***

e) does not have an unacceptable adverse impact on the historic heritage of the area;

f) does not have an unacceptable adverse impact on biodiversity;

g) does not have an unacceptable impact on the water environment, including its quality, quantity and ecological status;

h) does not lead to unacceptable cumulative impacts on the landscape;

i) does not have an unacceptable adverse effect on aviation interests;

and where:

j) in consultation with the relevant bodies, the presence of notifiable installations and exclusion zones are taken into account when designing sites; and

k) in consultation with the relevant bodies, the presence of broadcasting and telecommunications infrastructure are taken into account when designing sites.

Note (1) These criteria would also apply to smaller scale wind farms (<20MW) which can often be more easily accommodated in the landscape, therefore, some of the areas that are not suitable for strategic wind farms could be acceptable. It would still be necessary to protect the environmental and built heritage resources and the local community by ensuring they were designed and sited to incur minimum impact. Given the variety of combinations and sizes of turbines that could be used to produce an output up to 20MW, it is likely that it will only be possible to determine what is acceptable when specific applications are assessed.

ANNEX TWO : INTERIM PLANNING POLICY POSITION STATEMENT - Small Scale Wind Energy Development

1.0 Introduction

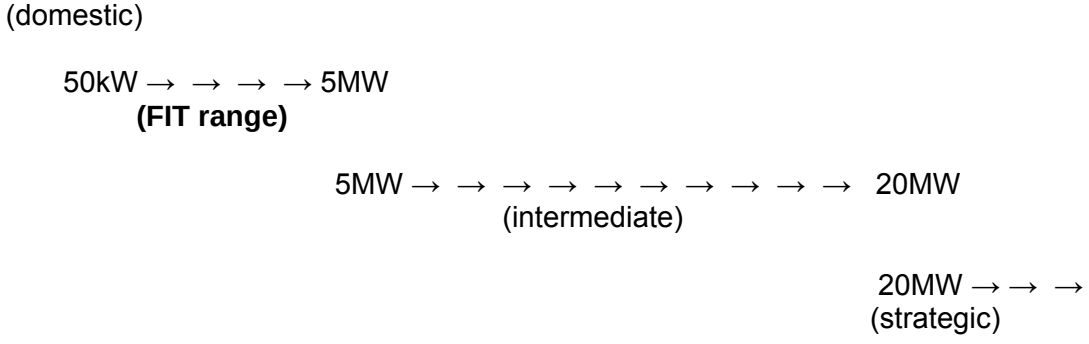
1.1 This Planning Policy Position Statement is concerned with the planning implications for Inverclyde of potential small scale wind energy developments which are likely to be encouraged through the Feed-in Tariff (FIT) scheme.

1.2 The FIT scheme, also known as Clean Energy Cashback, came into effect on 1 April 2010 and is a cashback incentive to encourage the production of low carbon electricity through the installation of wind turbines, photovoltaic solar panels, micro hydro schemes or anaerobic digestion with an output of up to 5MW. The scheme guarantees a generating tariff which is a minimum payment for all electricity generated by the system. A separate payment is paid for electricity exported to the grid, known as an export tariff, and there are also savings made on household/business energy bills.

1.3 With the income that could be generated for individuals and the contribution it would make to the new Scottish Government targets for electricity from renewable sources (80% by 2020) these schemes are likely to be popular and there is liable to be pressure for this type of small scale wind energy development. In Inverclyde, applications are already being submitted, both within the built-up area and in the countryside. It is therefore necessary to clarify the matters to be considered when dealing with applications of this type and provide additional guidance to be used in conjunction with existing Policy.

1.4 Diagram 1 below shows where these small scale developments sit in the spectrum of wind energy developments, based on output.

Diagram 1



2.0 Planning Policy

Scottish Government Policy

2.1 Scottish Planning Policy 2010 states that:

'There is the potential for communities and small businesses in urban and rural areas to invest in ownership of renewable energy projects or to develop their own projects for local benefit. Planning authorities should support communities and small businesses in developing such initiatives in an environmentally acceptable way.'

2.2 Also, in terms of such development taking place in the Green Belt, it states that:

'The cumulative erosion of a Green Belt's integrity through the granting of individual planning permissions should be avoided.'

Inverclyde Local Plan (2005) and Interim Supplementary Planning Guidance for Wind Farms (2010)

2.3 By far the largest number of planning applications for small wind turbines is likely to be located in the Green Belt or Countryside and therefore will require to be assessed against Local Plan Policy DS8 Green Belt and criteria (f) and (h) of Policy DS10 Countryside. This is due to these development proposals having a number of impacts, including on neighbouring properties, and landscape and visual amenity impacts. It is important to note that these proposals will be determined on their own merits and assessed against the full range of criteria in the renewable energy policies of the Local Plan and, if supported and granted permission, there will be no change to the designation of the site concerned if located in the Green Belt.

2.4 Developments will be assessed against the full suite of renewable energy policies in the Local Plan, including where appropriate, Policy UT6 of the adopted Inverclyde Local Plan 2005, Policy UT6A of the Interim Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG) for Wind Farms 2010 (see Annex One), and proposed Policy UT6B outlined below in this Interim PPPS. It should be noted that for clarification, criterion (e) of Policy UT6 in referring to '*the operation of aircraft and telecommunications equipment*', includes the operation of radar, both civil and MoD equipment.

2.5 Each proposed development will be assessed first, having regard to the particular requirements of Note 1 of Policy UT6A, before requiring to satisfy the additional criteria in Policy UT6B (refer below). Policy UT6A, Note 1(refer Annex One) states:

'These criteria would also apply to smaller scale wind farms (<20MW) which can often be more easily accommodated in the landscape, therefore, some of the areas that are not suitable for strategic wind farms could be acceptable. It would still be necessary to protect the environmental and built heritage resources and the local community by ensuring they were designed and sited to incur minimum impact. Given the variety of combinations and sizes of turbines that could be used to produce an output up to 20MW, it is likely that it will only be possible to determine what is acceptable when specific applications are assessed.'

Proposed Draft Interim Policy

Policy UT6B : Small Scale Wind Turbine Development

In assessing proposals for small scale wind turbine developments, Inverclyde Council, as Planning Authority, will be supportive where the proposed development satisfies the criteria of Local Plan Policies UT6 and UT6A, where relevant, and will have regard to the impact on:

- ***a) neighbouring/adjoining properties and residential amenity generally;***
- ***b) road safety;***
- ***c) natural and built heritage resources in proximity to the site;***
- ***d) wildlife resources and habitats;***
- ***e) proximity to pylons and overhead power lines, and other service infrastructure; and***
- ***f) the landscape, especially when viewed from public vantage points, including local roads, neighbouring settlements, and when set against the skyline.***

3.0 Requirements for Small Scale Development of Wind Turbines

Number of turbines

3.1 There are a variety of turbine sizes and outputs which could be used within the FIT output range to produce a desired output up to 5MW. Listed below is a sample of some of those available and it should be noted there is no direct relationship between height and output.

Height	Output
15m	10 kW
23m	6.6kW
25m	50kW
61m	330kW
100m	1.5MW
140m	1.5MW
120m	5MW

3.2 To avoid a profusion of multi-turbine small scale developments, a limit of 2 turbines per development will be applied.

Siting and Design

3.3 The key elements of the Interim PPPS are that such small scale wind energy developments will be sited for minimal impact on the landscape, environmental and built heritage resources, wildlife and its habitats, the amenity of neighbouring properties, and residential amenity in general. Matters relating to siting and design are important considerations, whether in relation to public roads or proximity to pylons and overhead power lines, given the likelihood that a large proportion of these proposals may come forward in the rural parts of Inverclyde where there would be ease of connection to the power grid.

Environmental and Landscape Impact

3.4 Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) regulations indicate that there may be significant environmental effects if wind energy proposals exceed 2 turbines. Taking this into consideration alongside the potential for a number of proposals coming forward in a locality giving rise to potential cumulative impacts, additional consideration will have to be given to the impact of a number of small wind turbines in close proximity upon the landscape and their effect on the natural and built environment.

3.5 Scottish Natural Heritage's 'Siting and Designing Windfarms in the Landscape' (December 2009) provides additional guidance to that in the SPP on requirements for assessing small scale wind farms. This includes advice for proposals of more than 2 wind turbines and over 15metres in height, where an EIA is required. Where a proposal is deemed not to require an EIA, the circumstances under which a Landscape and Visual Assessment should be submitted is also outlined in the SNH guidance. This guidance will be adopted to assess the different types of proposals expected to come forward.

Cumulative Impact

3.6 Although applications are likely to be for individual or small numbers of wind turbines, the siting of a number of these structures could have a significant impact on neighbouring amenity, on road safety, and have adverse impacts on the landscape and visual amenity. If in time there were to be a large number of these wind turbines in certain localities, whether within the urban area or across the Green Belt and countryside, cumulative impact assessments will be required to be submitted to support planning applications. These assessments will be required to allow the determination of proposals and to ensure they can be satisfactorily accommodated without significant adverse impacts.

4.0 Conclusion

4.1 It is the visual impact of proposed small scale wind energy developments that is a particular planning concern rather than their output.

4.2 The key factors relating to small scale wind energy developments that will be taken into account in their assessment are, that:

- they could be accommodated in areas not acceptable for strategic wind farm development provided they do not have a negative impact on neighbouring properties and residential amenity, on the landscape and environmental and built heritage resources, and are sited so as to have minimum impact in terms of visual amenity, whether viewed from roads in the locality and from neighbouring settlements;
- they will not exceed 2 turbines;
- depending on the likely extent of their potential environmental effects, an Environmental Impact Assessment or a Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment will be required; and
- as the number of developments on the ground increases, a decision will be necessary on whether a Cumulative Impact Assessment will be required.