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Draft National Policy Statement for Renewable Energy Infrastructure (EN-3)

This draft National Policy Statement (NPS), together with the Overarching National Policy Statement for Energy EN-1, is the primary decision-making guidance document for the Infrastructure Planning Commission (IPC) when considering development consent applications for the construction of renewable energy infrastructure in England and Wales. It is part of a suite of NPS issued in draft by the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change on 2nd November 2009. Consultation on the documents will run until 22 February 2010.

The NPS, together with EN-1, covers nationally significant onshore renewable energy infrastructure projects in England and Wales and nationally significant offshore projects in waters in or adjacent to England or Wales up to the seaward limits of the territorial sea or in the UK Renewable Energy Zone, including :

- Energy from biomass and/or waste (>50 megawatts (MW))
- Offshore wind (>100MW)
- Onshore wind (>50MW)

It does not cover other types of renewable energy generation, such as schemes that generate electricity from tidal or wave power.

Ambitious renewable energy targets mean that a significant increase in generation from large-scale renewable energy infrastructure is necessary. The Government does not seek to direct applicants to particular sites for renewable energy infrastructure other than in the specific circumstances relating to offshore wind.

The NPS advises that proposals should take account of policies on renewables in regional spatial strategies or planning advice notes but conformity with such

guidance will not in itself be a reason for approving or rejecting an application.

As climate change is likely to increase risks to some renewable energy infrastructure, from flooding or rising sea levels for example, applicants should in particular set out how the proposal would be resilient to:

- effects of rising sea levels and increased risk from storm surge;
- increased risk of flooding;
- impact of higher temperatures; and
- increased risk of drought affecting river flows.

Part 2 of the NPS sets out the basis for assessing proposals. It advises for a variety of topic areas (including many of those normally covered in an Environmental Impact Assessment) : what the applicant's own assessment should address and what key principles the IPC should adopt in its decision making. It also advises on the weight to be given to certain issues and on the treatment of mitigation measures, particularly how these may be enforced through conditions or obligations. Any assessment will also need to cover those issues raised in the Overarching NPS for Energy (EN-1). Specific advice is given for the different types of renewables as set out below.

Biomass and Waste Combustion

The recovery of energy from the combustion of waste, where in accordance with the waste hierarchy, will play an increasingly important role in meeting the UK's energy needs. For development proposals involving co-firing of biomass/waste alongside fossil fuel within a conventional fossil fuelled power station, reference should be made to the Fossil Fuel NPS (EN-2).

Given that operators will need to provide information to Ofgem on the sustainability of the biomass used and will also need to comply with any other requirements or restrictions, the IPC does not need to consider the source or sustainability of the proposed biomass fuel to be used within the proposed plant. The combustion technology and throughput should

only be of concern to the IPC in so far as they impact upon traffic volumes, air quality or other environmental issues.

While the NPS does not identify sites for new generation, it discusses site selection issues :

- grid connection - any application to the IPC must include information on how the combustion plant is to be connected and whether there are any particular environmental issues likely to arise with that connection;
- links to transport network - considerable transport movements may be generated and proposals should incorporate suitable access leading off from the main highway network. The use of rail and water transport is encouraged;
- combined heat and power - options for incorporating CHP must be fully explored;
- carbon capture readiness - must be demonstrated for plants with a generating capacity at or over 300MW

Specific assessment advice is provided in relation to:

- air quality and emissions;
- landscape and visual;
- local and regional waste management strategies and targets;
- residue management.

Offshore Wind

The Government has assessed the environmental implications and spatial interactions of a plan/programme for some 25GW of new offshore wind capacity, on top of existing plans for 8GW of offshore wind. It concluded that there are no overriding environmental considerations to prevent the achievement of this plan/programme. It also considers that there is potential for capacity extensions to existing wind farm leases within UK waters.

Applicants should set out how they have drawn on the Government's Offshore Energy SEA in making their site selection. The key role of the Crown Estate in leasing offshore areas for windfarm development is noted. Taking these factors into account, the NPS does not identify sites for new generation, however it does discuss site selection issues :

- water depth and foundation conditions - while the applicant must ensure that the foundation design is technically suitable for the seabed and geological conditions, the IPC will need to be satisfied that the foundations will not have an unacceptable adverse effect on marine biodiversity, physical environment and marine cultural heritage;

- grid connection - the IPC will want to be satisfied that there is no obvious reason why a grid connection would not be possible. However the NPS recognises that the details of such connections may not be finalised and it allows for the assessment to consider broad corridors for connections to the transmission network.

Consent that is granted by the IPC should be flexible to allow for necessary micro-siting of elements of the proposed wind farm during its construction.

In determining an application for the repowering of a site, the new proposed replacement scheme should be determined by the IPC on its individual merits.

The NPS calls on the IPC to require applicants to monitor the effects of schemes during both construction and operation and to make provision for the decommissioning of the site.

Specific assessment advice is provided in relation to:

- biodiversity
- fish
- intertidal zone
- marine mammals
- ornithology
- subtidal zone
- commercial fisheries and fishing
- historic environment
- navigation and shipping
- oil, gas and other offshore infrastructure and activities
- physical environment including changes in water movement and sediment transport
- seascape and visual effects

Onshore Wind

Onshore wind farms will continue to play an important role in meeting renewable energy targets. As technology develops, it is accepted that the generating capacity of such proposals could increase.

Factors influencing siting include :

- predicted wind speed - an issue for the applicant to address;
- proximity to dwellings - appropriate distances should be maintained between wind turbines and residential properties to protect residential amenity, the main issues to consider being visual amenity and noise;
- site capacity - efficient turbine spacing is a matter for the applicant;

- grid connection - the capacity of the local grid network to accept the likely output from a proposed wind farm is critical to the technical feasibility of a development. The IPC will want to be satisfied that there is no obvious reason why a grid connection would not be possible.;
- access - the suitability of the access routes to the proposed site, especially for construction.
- The NPs advises the IPC that :
- applications should include the full extent of the access tracks necessary and an assessment of their effects;
- applications for onshore wind farms should set out details of what will be decommissioned and removed from the site at the end of the operational life of the plant;
- consent for onshore wind farms should be time-limited by a condition from the date the wind farms start to generate electricity, typically 25 years;
- consent that is granted by the IPC should be flexible to allow for necessary micro-siting of elements of the proposed wind farm during its construction. Applicants may seek a micro-siting tolerance, typically 30-50m

In determining an application for the repowering of a site, the new proposed replacement scheme should be determined by the IPC on its individual merits

Specific assessment advice is provided in relation to:

- biodiversity and geological conservation
- historic environment
- landscape and visual
- noise
- shadow flicker
- traffic and transport.

For all types of renewable generation, the NPS notes that the precise details of all elements of proposed developments may not be finalised until some time after any consent has been granted. Where this applies, any assessment should consider the maximum-adverse case scenario.

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