

Renewable Energy Proposals



A Guide to Commenting on a
Renewable Energy Planning Proposals

May 2021



Introduction

This is an introductory guide to help communities and residents who may want to comment on large scale renewable energy proposals in their area.

The guide:

- identifies the main planning policies which apply to major renewable energy proposals;
- sets out the main issues which the planning system considers - and which communities and residents may wish to comment on; and
- provides details on how to obtain further information and advice on responding to and commenting on proposals.

As an introductory guide this does not provide all the details relating to renewable proposals. If, having read it, you would like more information on any aspect or advice on responding to proposals in your area please contact us.

The guide focuses on three types of large renewable energy projects which tend to have significant impacts - wind farms, solar farms and anaerobic digestion plants.

For advice on other forms of renewable project proposals please contact us.

Planning Policies for Renewable Energy Development

The current planning policies and guidance in relation to renewable energy development include:

The guide:

- Strategic Planning Policy Statement for Northern Ireland (SPPS) 'Renewable Energy.
- Planning Policy Statement 18 'Renewable Energy. (PPS 18)
- Best Practice Guidance to Planning Policy Statement 18 'Renewable Energy.
- Supplementary Planning Guidance 'Wind Energy Development in Northern Ireland's Landscapes.
- Draft Supplementary Planning Guidance: Anaerobic Digestion.

These policies apply until each local council adopts its own Local Development Plan (LDP). The LDP will then be the primary document used by councils in determining planning applications which are within their remit. Applications which are considered to be so substantial as to have regional impact will continue to be dealt with by the Department for Infrastructure under the policies listed above (see Page 4 for hyperlinks to these policies).

Planning and Environmental Issues Considered

The planning policies permit renewable energy development proposals when it is considered that they will not result in “**unacceptable adverse impact**” on the following:

- residential amenity, public safety, or human health;
- visual amenity and landscape character;
- biodiversity, nature conservation or built heritage interests;
- local natural resources, such as air quality, water quality or quantity; and
- public access to the countryside.

Where a proposal is likely to result in unavoidable damage during installation, operation or decommissioning the application will need to indicate how this will be minimised and mitigated - including details of compensatory measures.

The wider environmental, economic and social benefits of all proposals for renewable energy projects are also taken into account.

Solar Farm Proposals

Proposals for solar farm renewable energy developments must address the planning and environmental issues listed above and the planning system will also consider: noise impacts; reflection/glare from panels; any impacts on the natural or built heritage (habitat loss, species displacement, etc) and any flood risks.

Wind Farm Proposals

In addition to the planning and environmental issues listed above, wind farm proposals must also demonstrate that they will not:

- have any turbine within a minimum of 500m from a house;
- have an unacceptable impact on roads, rail or aviation safety or telecommunications
- installations (for aircraft, emergency services, etc);
- create a significant risk of landslide or bog burst.

Wind farm development on active peatland is only considered acceptable where significant mitigation actions are undertaken.

The cumulative impact of the proposed development alongside existing wind farms is carefully considered and can be a reason for refusing planning permission.

Proposals for Anaerobic Digesters

Issues which proposals for anaerobic digestion plants (AD plants) must address (in addition to those listed on Page 3) are: odour, emissions and dust control; water environment; transport, traffic and access; and noise.

For further advice and information on how to comment on these or any form of renewable energy development proposals, please contact us.

Links to Planning Policy

Strategic Planning Policy Statement (SPPS)

<https://www.infrastructure-ni.gov.uk/publications/strategic-planning-policy-statement>

Planning Policy Statement 18: Renewable Energy

<https://www.infrastructure-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/infrastructure/PPS18%20Renewable%20Energy.pdf>

Best Practice Guidance to Planning Policy Statement 18: Renewable Energy

https://www.infrastructure-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/infrastructure/Best%20Practice%20Guidance%20to%20PPS%2018%20-%20Renewable%20Energy_0.pdf

Wind Energy Development in Northern Ireland's Landscapes (SPG)

https://www.infrastructure-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/infrastructure/Wind%20Energy%20Development%20in%20Northern%20Ireland%20Landscapes_0.pdf

Draft Supplementary Planning Guidance: Anaerobic Digestion

<https://www.infrastructure-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/infrastructure/Anaerobic%20Digestion.pdf>



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