

# Renewable Energy in the South Devon AONB: a position statement

## **Introduction**

The Partnership Committee of the South Devon Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty is committed to adopting a positive approach to the development of renewable energy technologies, while at the same time having regard for the primary statutory purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the area.

The AONB Management Plan 2009-2014 includes policy Plan/P6: "The development of sensitively sited, small scale or innovative renewable energy installations will be supported, having regard to their appropriateness in an AONB location, sites designated for their nature conservation importance and the AONB Partnership's position statement on renewable energy."

This position statement has been informed, in part, by research and analysis undertaken on behalf of the AONB Partnership Committee by the Devon Association of Renewable Energy.

Responsibility for approving energy installations rests with the statutory planning authorities at local, regional and national level. The Partnership Committee is seeking, through this position statement, to contribute constructively to the development of Planning Policy for the area.

## **Position Statement on Renewable Energy in the South Devon AONB**

The AONB Partnership Committee recognises:

- the overriding need to reduce energy use and improve energy efficiency and conservation;
- the need to reduce the nation's dependence on fossil fuels and to generate a more sustainable energy supply, based on cleaner "renewable" technologies and a reduction in the emission of carbon dioxide;
- that the South Devon Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty can play its part in this, having seas, rivers, climate and agricultural land which have the potential to provide renewable energy to meet the area's needs;
- that a wide range of rapidly developing energy opportunities is available, many operating at different scales with a huge variation in impacts on soils, air and water quality, biodiversity, historic and cultural features, and landscape;
- that some renewable energy developments can bring valuable benefits to the economy, communities, employment and land management of the area.

The AONB Partnership Committee therefore advocates:

- the adoption of high standards of energy efficiency in the design and construction of all new buildings, with the aim of securing "good" or "excellent" standard in the BREEAM environmental ratings system;

- the planting and active management of woodlands in appropriate locations, to act as a "carbon sink" and to act as a sustainable source of woodfuel;
- the development of small sensitively sited renewable energy installations where the impacts are local in scale, provide a demonstrable net environmental gain and where the energy is used close to the site of the generating installations. These will operate at an individual farm, household or community scale, have minimal transport or transmission impacts and be unobtrusive in the landscape;
- the development of community-owned renewable energy schemes;
- the fitting of small renewable energy schemes (solar hot water, photovoltaics, woodfuel, etc) to existing and new buildings, where this can be done without harm to the character of historic structures or the wider landscape;
- that particular attention is paid to the cumulative impact of schemes to avoid obtrusive impacts associated with small scale but widespread development;

In respect of large scale energy production, the AONB Partnership Committee considers:

- that renewable energy installations operating at an industrial scale, and which will have an intrusive impact on undeveloped and tranquil landscape by virtue of their size, transmission infrastructure, traffic generation, noise or other characteristic, are likely to be incompatible with the purposes of AONB designation;
- that such developments should follow a sequential test by being located outside the AONB and that a choice of site within the AONB should be rigorously justified;
- that particular care should be taken in maintaining the setting and skylines of the AONB and the views into and out of the AONB, including proposals located outside the AONB boundary but which impact on the AONB itself;
- that any planning permissions for renewable energy developments should include a requirement that infrastructure and plant should be decommissioned and removed from site when energy generation ceases.

### **Review**

The Partnership Committee will keep this statement under review and amend it in the light of experience, the development of technologies and our understanding of the subject.