



Open Spaces Society's position on renewable energy developments

It is a charitable objective of the society to protect the beauty of the countryside and to promote its fullest enjoyment by the public.

The society's mission is to work to protect, increase, enhance and champion the common land, village greens, public paths and open spaces in England and Wales, and the public's rights to enjoy them.

The society's strategic review 2022–27 states: 'We shall make responsible choices to minimise and mitigate adverse impacts on climate, and ensure that all policy and operational decisions are mindful of climate implications.'

- 1 The Open Spaces Society recognises the overwhelming threat posed by climate change, which is already affecting many of our landscapes, both rural and urban.
- 2 We therefore support measures to reduce harmful emissions of greenhouse gases, for instance by increasing the proportion of energy produced from a wide range of renewable sources, and to adapt to the consequences of climate change.
- 3 The society considers that the means to achieve this must recognise both the positive impacts on reducing carbon emissions, and the potential negative effects of such developments on the environment and landscape, and its enjoyment by the public, while remaining alert to the consequences of (1) above.
- 4 We believe that the government should prioritise energy efficiency and sustainable development; with energy efficiency and renewable-energy technologies required as standard on all new residential and commercial developments, and support made available to improve the energy efficiency of existing buildings. There should be a focus on energy generation ideally close to point of demand or in some other sustainable way, such as the installation of solar panels on the roofs of commercial, industrial and public buildings. and community energy schemes, designed to meet local energy needs.
- 5 Campaigning to protect and improve public access rights, we shall advocate for a planning system that delivers on its positive potential to tackle climate change.

Renewable-energy developments

- 6 Renewable-energy developments should be strategically planned so as to be sustainable in the fullest sense, both in reducing carbon emissions and in avoiding or minimising harmful impacts. They should be sensitively sited and designed, with decisions based on landscape, environmental, and heritage impact

assessments, and community consultation. All renewable-energy developments should be sustainable at every phase of their development, including siting, construction, operation, decommissioning, and restoration.

- 7 Where it is within our remit to do so, we shall support the use of existing brownfield sites in preference to greenfield sites. For large renewable-energy developments, sensitive areas and valued landscapes should be avoided. Offshore schemes should be sited to minimise all aspects of environmental damage.
- 8 Onshore wind turbines are usually located in upland areas and therefore more likely to have significant impact on commons and other land with public access. The visual impact can be immense. Any onshore wind turbines should be sited where they will have minimal short and long-term adverse impact on the environment and landscape.
- 9 Solar ‘farms’ are more likely to be sited on agricultural land in lowland areas, but can have an adverse impact on public rights of way and the view from them.
- 10 In planning renewable-energy developments, individual and cumulative impacts on landscapes and public access should carry substantial weight; every effort should be made to minimise the impact on people’s ability to enjoy access to green space, which is important for health and well-being.
- 11 Developments should have no significant impact on public access following the initial construction phase. Every opportunity should be taken to secure improvements to access—this could include access to replacement common land given in substitution for that taken.
- 12 Diversions to existing rights of way should be resisted unless there is good cause (for example, danger to horse riders from turbines near to bridleways), and any diversions should be packaged so as to enhance overall access in the area, for example by upgrading, and creating new links.

Decommissioning

- 13 Conditions must require developers or owners to: make provision for removing all infrastructure once it has come to the end of its life; commit to restoring the land to its previous or better condition; dedicate released common land once again as common land; and restore public rights of way to their historic alignments.

Notes

Legislation

In 2019 the United Kingdom became the first major economy to enact its commitment to reduce its net contribution to greenhouse gas emissions to zero by 2050.

England

Onshore wind turbines cannot receive planning permission unless an area is identified as suitable for wind energy in a local or neighbourhood plan and must demonstrate that the planning impacts identified by the affected local community has been fully addressed. The local planning authority is responsible for renewable energy developments of 50MW or less. Developments of over 50MW are considered by the Secretary of State for Energy, under the Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects process, and the local planning authority is a

statutory consultee. Microgeneration is often regarded as permitted development and may not require an application for planning permission (eg solar panels for water heating on a building). There is policy guidance in the National Planning Policy Framework 2021 (153–158). Draft National policy statements EN1 and EN3 are currently being revised.

Relevant Acts: Town and Country Planning Act 1990, Planning and Energy Act 2008, Climate Change Act 2008, Environment Act 2021.

Wales

There is a presumption in favour of large-scale wind-energy developments within 10 pre-assessed areas across the whole of Wales. Such developments are to be permitted, subject to assessment against criteria. These include their having no unacceptable landscape, visual, noise, ecology, and cultural-history impacts. The local planning authority is responsible for renewable energy developments up to 10MW. Any developments between 10MW and 350MW are determined by the Welsh government under the Development of National Significance consenting regime. There is policy guidance in Planning Policy Wales Edition11 (chapter 5) and Future Wales; The National Plan 2040.

Relevant Acts: Planning (Wales) Act 2015, Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, Climate Change and Sustainable Energy Act 2016, Environment (Wales) Act 2016, The Planning and Energy Act (2008).

Definition of sustainability

We have used the definition in the National Planning Policy Framework 2021:

- 7 The purpose of the planning system is to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development. At a very high level, the objective of sustainable development can be summarised as meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (resolution 42/187 of the United Nations General Assembly). At a similarly high level, members of the United Nations – including the United Kingdom – have agreed to pursue the 17 Global Goals for Sustainable Development in the period to 2030. These address social progress, economic well-being and environmental protection (Transforming our World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development).
- 8 Achieving sustainable development means that the planning system has three overarching objectives, which are interdependent and need to be pursued in mutually supportive ways (so that opportunities can be taken to secure net gains across each of the different objectives):
 - a) **an economic objective**—to help build a strong, responsive and competitive economy, by ensuring that sufficient land of the right types is available in the right places and at the right time to support growth, innovation and improved productivity; and by identifying and coordinating the provision of infrastructure;
 - b) **a social objective**—to support strong, vibrant and healthy communities, by ensuring that a sufficient number and range of

homes can be provided to meet the needs of present and future generations; and by fostering well-designed, beautiful and safe places, with accessible services and open spaces that reflect current and future needs and support communities' health, social and cultural well-being; and

c) an environmental objective—to protect and enhance our natural, built and historic environment; including making effective use of land, improving biodiversity, using natural resources prudently, minimising waste and pollution, and mitigating and adapting to climate change, including moving to a low carbon economy.

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