

Landscape Sensitivity Assessment Supplementary Planning Document Scoping Report

1 Introduction

- 1.1 Mid Devon District Council's Planning and Regeneration service is responsible for the development of planning policy and the determination of planning applications for renewable energy proposals up to 49.9MW. Following the introduction of the feed-in tariff in April 2010, there has been substantial interest in large scale solar PV in Mid Devon, despite a reduction in tariff rates. This has led to a number of medium and large scale renewable energy planning applications including both large scale solar PV and larger scale wind turbines.
- 1.2 In response to members concerns at the number of renewable energy planning applications being submitted and lack of consistent advice against which to assess landscape impacts, the Council commissioned Land Use Consultants (LUC) to prepare an 'Assessment of Landscape Sensitivity to on-shore wind energy and large scale photovoltaic development in Mid Devon District' (LSA), October 2013. Previously the Council had commissioned consultants on a case-by-case basis to advise on landscape sensitivity in the location of a particular scheme.
- 1.3 LUC were contracted to prepare the evidence and for it to be based on Mid Devon's own published Landscape Character Assessment. The methodology used by LUC drew on their extensive experience of preparing such studies, including one for Torridge District Council, and the study builds on the Devon Landscape Policy Group's Advice Note 2 on accommodating wind and solar PV developments in Devon's landscape.
- 1.4 The study forms part of the evidence base for the emerging Local Plan and supports existing planning policies on environmental quality (COR2), renewable energy (DM5) and protected landscapes (DM30). Policies DM5 and DM30 require impact to landscape character to be taken into account, and this study enables the Council to implement the Local Plan policies in a reliable, robust way.
- 1.5 Used correctly, the LSA is a valuable tool in justifying the Council's decisions on renewable energy proposals. Applicants may also find the study useful in deciding where to site proposed development and the likely limitations in terms of scale and grouping of development. It should be noted that the results of the study are but one consideration amongst a range of other considerations to be taken into account for each application, such as impacts to residential amenity, rural economy or heritage assets.
- 1.6 The Planning Committee considered reports about the Mid Devon LSA on 17th July, 9th October and 6th November 2013. During the public presentation to Planning Committee on 6th November LUC referred to a number of Councils having adopted guidance on accommodating renewable energy developments in the landscape as a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD). Following a consideration of an information report during the Planning Committee on

6th November the Committee subsequently resolved to request that the Cabinet consider adopting the LSA as a SPD.

- 1.7 As set out in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) SPDs are “documents which add further detail to the policies in the Local Plan”. The content of an SPD therefore gains increased weight in planning decisions but it does not form part of the development plan. As the LSA was not written in the form of a SPD it will require a degree of adaptation before it can be put forward for public consultation.
- 1.8 This report forms the first stage in this process, presenting the subject, scope and potential content in relation to an assessment of Landscape Sensitivity to on-shore wind energy and large scale photovoltaic development and seeks to gather the views of developers, the local community and other interested parties. Further consultation will take place on the draft SPD, which will take account of the responses received to this report.
- 1.9 Consideration will be given to Part 5 of the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012 and the Council’s own Statement of Community Involvement in the preparation of the SPD.

2 The Project Scope

- 2.1 This project will use the ‘**Assessment of Landscape Sensitivity to on-shore wind energy and large scale photovoltaic development in Mid Devon District**’ (LSA), October 2013 as the primary baseline study and template for the SPD.
- 2.2 The study can be viewed at: <http://www.middevon.gov.uk/spd>
- 2.3 Given the specific concerns of Members and the practicality that the Landscape Sensitivity study has already been commissioned and completed the project scope is already well defined and can be summarised as:
 - An assessment of the sensitivity of the landscape to wind turbines and large scale solar PV and the capacity of the landscape to accommodate such installations;
 - Guidance on the assessment of cumulative landscape and visual impact of multiple on-shore wind turbine and PV developments and references to generic design guidance;
 - Information on the type and amount of consented development already in place in a Landscape Character Area/Type, the sensitivity of that landscape and some guidance on where and how any additional renewable energy development could be accommodated (including heights/sizes of development, and siting guidance);
- 2.4 The main outputs from the study were:
 - Confirmation of the assessment criteria established in the Devon Landscape Policy Group Advice Note No. 2,
 - A methodology for the assessment of relevant applications,
 - Generic and landscape specific guidance and;
 - A summary table and plan setting out the sensitivity of each of Mid Devon’s Landscape Character Types (LCTs).
- 2.5 The study enables planning reports to be prepared on a consistent basis with clear evidence based recommendations. Decisions based on those recommendations will then be more resilient if subject to appeal and may lead to a reduction in the number of appeals.
- 2.6 It is acknowledged that the baseline study has not been written in the form of an SPD and therefore requires some adjustment and re-order, for public consultation. To assist this scoping report consultation an indicative contents page has been prepared in ‘**Annex 1: Layout of Landscape Sensitivity SPD**’ to provide some guidance on what the final SPD may look like.

3 Getting Involved / Next Steps

3.1 This is an informal stage of consultation, primarily aimed at gathering evidence and information before the Draft SPD is produced. To steer feedback to this consultation an open ended question is proposed:

Question 1: Are there any other issues not already covered by the LSA that should be considered within the scope of the SPD and why?

3.2 Responses can be emailed to planningconsultations@middevon.gov.uk or posted / delivered to Forward Planning, Mid Devon District Council, Phoenix House, Phoenix Lane, Tiverton, Devon, EX16 6PP.

3.3 The deadline for written responses to this consultation is the **8 September 2014** (midnight).

3.4 In preparing the SPD the Council will take account of any representations made in response to this consultation. A formal draft stage consultation is anticipated in late autumn 2014 before formal adoption of the SPD in winter 2014.

Annex 1: Layout of Landscape Sensitivity SPD

1) Executive Summary

2) Introduction –

- a. Include international, national and local policy background and outlining the purpose and structure of the SPD
- b. Review of latest national guidance on renewable energy and incorporate relevant landscape impact provisions within the SPD.
- c. General background to onshore wind energy and large scale photovoltaic development.

3) Mid Devon Context – Understanding the baseline landscape (Chapter 2 of LSA).

4) Method for understanding the landscape sensitivity assessment (Chapter 3 of LSA).

5) Planning Issues – Practical overarching guidance in relation to the landscape impact criteria to be considered when determining planning applications such as, magnitude, nature of effects, significance and mitigation measures. (Part of Chapter 4 of LSA)

- a. Wind Energy
- b. Solar PV

6) The application and implementation process – Helpful information on the application and EIA requirements and stages of process, consultation, role of planning conditions/legal agreements, decommissioning and reinstating land i.e. how to use this guidance (including Appendix 2 of LSA)

7) Consultation Arrangements – Dates and time of the consultation, contact and address details, next steps

8) Appendices

- a. Detailed assessments and guidance by Landscape Character type (Chapter 5 of LSA)
- b. Character summaries (Appendix 1 of LSA)
- c. Map of sites (updated Appendix 3 of LSA)