



Department
of Energy &
Climate Change

Community Engagement for Onshore Wind Developments: Best Practice Guidance for England



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Community Engagement for Onshore Wind Developments

Best Practice Guidance for England

**Prepared by Regen SW
for the Department of Energy and Climate Change**

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Ministerial Foreword



Communities hosting renewable energy play a vital role in meeting our national need for secure, clean energy and so it is important to foster the development of close and meaningful engagement between developers and local communities.

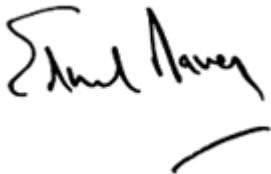
The UK is facing an unprecedented energy challenge: we need to move from finite, high-carbon fossil fuels to clean, secure energy. Onshore wind has a key role to play in this future energy mix. Not only is it the cheapest form of large-scale renewable energy, which by 2020 is expected to power between 5.9m and 7m homes, it also has the potential to deliver significant benefits to local communities across the country. Whether by creating jobs and apprentices, funding local community projects and facilities or reducing electricity bills, onshore wind can make a real difference to local communities.

The Coalition has been clear that the benefits of onshore wind projects must be shared with those communities hosting them. Seizing this opportunity requires ambition, innovation and commitment on all sides. Last year I was pleased to announce that the onshore wind industry, through its industry-wide community benefits protocol, had committed to a five-fold increase in the value of community benefit funds paid to local people. Now at a minimum level of £5,000 per MW per year, these funds are delivering millions of pounds worth of long-term investment to local communities. It is important however that we build on this commitment and assist communities and developers to work together to provide the types of benefits that local people truly want, in a way that is fair to all concerned and through a clear, transparent process.

This guidance, drawn up in partnership between Government, community organisations and the onshore wind industry, sets out a typical development process and details when and where engagement fits within that. It also provides best practice and innovative examples to assist both developers and local communities in considering the best way to engage with one another, whilst recognising that every community is unique and no single approach fits all.

Alongside this guide, I am also publishing new best practice guidance on community benefits and later this year we will launch a new Register of Community Benefits and Engagement to further help communities develop packages that are right for them. Furthermore, we have set up the Shared Ownership Taskforce to develop a framework to guide the offer of shared ownership to communities which is expected to be launched shortly.

Taken together, this package is part of a step-change in the way that communities and onshore wind industry work in partnership, ensuring a future in which everyone is part of the renewable energy revolution.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Edward Davey', with a horizontal line underneath.

The Rt Hon Edward Davey

Introduction

“Engagement is a two way process of openly sharing and exchanging information, understanding different views, listening and responding to suggestions, developing trust and dialogue to support effective working relationships to the mutual benefit of all involved.”¹

The opportunity

There is increasing recognition of the value that good community engagement can bring to developments, helping to make them locally appropriate and providing the foundations of positive long-term relationships between the host community and those involved in the development. Standards of engagement are continually evolving and this guidance aims to recognise, encourage and share this.

Effective engagement between a developer, local community, local authority and other consultees is vital to ensure that proposals for developments:

- reflect an accurate understanding and appreciation of local interests and concerns;

- provide a better and more timely consideration of the material benefits and impacts of the proposal, which is reflected in the decision-making process; and
- ensure that, if the proposal goes ahead, local people have the opportunity to shape how the development is actually realised and build an ongoing relationship with the developer².

Supporting effective engagement is not about being in favour or against a particular proposed development. It is about trying to make sure that:

- decisions made in the planning system are as well-informed, evidence-based and timely as possible; and
- any development that is permitted reflects an understanding of local interests and opportunities for positive local gain³.

The reason

The aim of this guidance is to set out best practice on engagement, help people understand the process and help the parties involved achieve their objectives through effective engagement. To that end, this guidance has been developed by Regen SW in close partnership with DECC⁴, representatives from the onshore wind

¹ Planning Aid England et al (2012). Good Practice Guide to Public Engagement in Development Schemes. Homes and Communities Agency. <http://www.homesandcommunities.co.uk/good-practice-guide-public-engagement-development-schemes>

²⁺³ Centre for Sustainable Energy, BDOR, Peter Capener (2007) for the Renewables Advisory Board. The Protocol for Public Engagement with Proposed Wind Energy Developments in England. <http://www.cse.org.uk/pdf/pub1079.pdf>

⁴ The Department of Energy and Climate Change

industry including RenewableUK, organisations representing the community sector and local authority representatives.

The Planning Act 2008⁵ introduced compulsory pre-application engagement for proposed wind developments of greater than 50 megawatts (MW), referred to as Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects (NSIPs). These require planning consent from the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change rather than the local planning authority.

For onshore wind developments less than 50 MW, the Town and Country Planning Act (TCPA), as amended by the Localism Act in 2013⁶, extended the requirement for compulsory pre-application consultation to all onshore wind developments⁷ in England of more than two turbines, or where the hub height of any turbine exceeds 15 metres, effective until 17 December 2020⁸.

The pre-application consultation requirements are set out in section 61W and 61X of the TCPA⁹ and include a statutory duty on developers to have regard to the advice given by the local planning authority about local good practice on engagement and a requirement for applicants to provide details of the pre-application consultation they have undertaken when submitting their application for planning permission. If the statutory requirements have not been met and a planning application is submitted, the local planning authority will not be able to validate it until the prospective applicant complies.

Guidance on pre-application consultation for wind farms has been published as part of the

new online, consolidated, national planning guidance¹⁰ and so we will not go into the statutory requirements of the planning system in detail here.

There are other good reasons for undertaking engagement, even when it is not formally required, such as encouraging local support for a development, and consulting the local community on appropriate community benefit packages¹¹.

A key principle of this guidance is that the extent of community engagement should be proportionate to the 'significance' of the project. Significance is not necessarily linked to size. Local planning authorities and local communities can consider even quite small wind energy projects to be 'significant' in some cases.

Both the scale of development and the sensitivity of the area in which the wind development is being proposed are key determining factors in the significance of the impact of the development and, therefore, the amount of engagement that should be undertaken from a planning perspective.

The audience

All onshore wind development proposals should involve a level of community engagement appropriate to the size and impact of the development. This includes wind developments being proposed by a local community organisation, where engagement with the rest of the community is also vital.

This guidance sets out the typical development process and gives an indication of the extent of community engagement expected for planned developments with an installed capacity of 5 to 50 MW.

⁵ Planning Act 2008, as amended.
<http://infrastructure.planningportal.gov.uk/legislation-and-advice/legislation/>

⁶ Localism Act (2011), as amended.
<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2011/20/contents>

⁷ 'onshore' in this context means any relevant development which is covered by Part 3 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990.

⁸ The Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure and Section 62A Applications) (England) (Amendment) Order 2013.
<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2013/2932/contents/made>

¹⁰ Department for Communities and Local Government (2014). Renewable and low carbon energy.
<http://planningguidance.planningportal.gov.uk/blog/guidance/renewable-and-low-carbon-energy/particular-planning-considerations-for-hydropower-active-solar-technology-solar-farms-and-wind-turbines/>

¹¹ Department of Energy and Climate Change (DECC) (2014). Community Benefits from Onshore Wind Developments: Best Practice Guidance.
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/community-benefits-and-engagement-guidance-for-onshore-wind>

For proposed projects of less than 5 MW installed capacity, the principles in this best practice guidance should be applied at a scale appropriate to the size of the development.

This guidance is not intended for proposed developments of greater than 50 MW, referred to as Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects (NSIPs) as the process of community engagement for these developments is set out in Planning Advice Note 8¹².

The term '**community**' is used throughout this document as a way of identifying people living locally to an onshore wind development i.e. communities of locality¹³. We fully recognise this term does not reflect all of the complexities and ambiguities within a community, for example, not all local residents will form a single community or group. There are also divergent forms of community belonging – communities of place and communities of interest (a shared outlook to faith, politics, social interaction, ethnicity or common interests) – both of which may be relevant in the context of community benefits around onshore wind energy projects^{14, 15}.

For communities, engagement means a chance to understand what is being proposed for the onshore wind development, to explore how a development can bring value to an area, to identify which options would work best within a local context, to help shape solutions and to have their say on a scheme¹⁶.

Developers can be individuals/community groups/businesses who are working to harness onshore wind energy under any business model.

For developers, engaging with the local community can provide vital local knowledge, reduce the risk of challenges and delays, identify how a scheme can bring value to a local area and enhance reputations of all involved¹⁷.

It is hoped this guidance will be a tool for **Local authorities** to spread best practice and assist everyone in understanding the process of community engagement and what it involves.

For local authorities, good pre-application engagement will have identified those issues of importance to the local community and show how the proposal has responded to these. It will be for the decision maker to balance these alongside planning policy and other considerations¹⁸.

The local planning authority has a specific role in consulting on the planning application itself (**Planning phase**). They also have an important role in facilitating community engagement around any community benefit offered by the developer¹⁹.

In addition to the local planning authority, which in England may be a district or unitary council, other local authorities may play a significant and supporting role in the process. These could include the local parish councils or county councils where they exist, who will be consulted on any local planning applications and who could support wider engagement

¹² National Infrastructure Planning Advice Notes.

<http://infrastructure.planningportal.gov.uk/legislation-and-advice/advice-notes/>

¹⁰ Centre for Sustainable Energy et al (2007, updated 2009), for the Renewables Advisory Board. Delivering Community Benefits from Wind Energy Developments: A Toolkit.

<http://www.cse.org.uk/downloads/file/Delivering%20community%20benefits%20from%20wind%20energy%20-%20a%20toolkit.pdf>

¹⁴ Walker, G., Hunter, S., Devine-Wright, P., Evans, B. and Hunter, S., Fay, H. (2007) Harnessing community energies: explaining and evaluating community-based localism in renewable energy policy in the UK. *Global Environmental Politics*, 7(2), 64-82.

¹⁵ Walker, G. and Devine-Wright P. (2008) Community Renewable Energy: What does it mean? *Energy Policy*, 36, 497-500.

^{16, 17, 18} Planning Aid England et al (2012). Good Practice Guide to Public Engagement in Development Schemes. Homes and

Communities Agency. <http://www.homesandcommunities.co.uk/good-practice-guide-public-engagement-development-schemes>

¹⁹ Department of Energy and Climate Change (DECC) (2014). Community Benefits from Onshore Wind Developments: Best Practice Guidance.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/community-benefits-and-engagement-guidance-for-onshore-wind>

Using this guidance

This guidance sets out best practice based on key principles of effective engagement for developers, communities and local authorities in England and builds on guidance produced for the Renewables Advisory Board²⁰. This guidance has been developed alongside, and should be read in conjunction with, guidance on community benefits²¹.

It is designed to sit alongside the English Community Benefits Register, once it becomes available, which developers and communities will be able to use to record information about engagement practices they have used and experienced.

This guidance can be read as a whole or as individual guidance notes, which provide advice and support at each phase of the development process. It follows a typical development process of an onshore wind development, with four broad chronological phases during which public engagement takes place ([Figure 1](#)) which form the sections of this guidance (see footnote²²). The guidance then details the scope of engagement during each of these phases with examples of the types of engagement techniques which could be applied in order to achieve the various purposes of engagement, as set out in the engagement journey in [Figure 2](#). A

* refers to exemplary practice, although engagement techniques should be appropriate for the local community in the locality of the proposed onshore wind development.

²⁰ Centre for Sustainable Energy, BDOR, Peter Capener (2007) for the Renewables Advisory Board. The Protocol for Public Engagement with Proposed Wind Energy Developments in England.

<http://www.cse.org.uk/pdf/pub1079.pdf>

²¹ Department of Energy and Climate Change (DECC) (2014). Community Benefits from Onshore Wind Developments: Best Practice Guidance.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/community-benefits-and-engagement-guidance-for-onshore-wind>

²² This is modelled on a typical wind energy development process, but is not meant to imply that tasks must be undertaken in the order documented.

Figure 1: Phases in developing a wind project

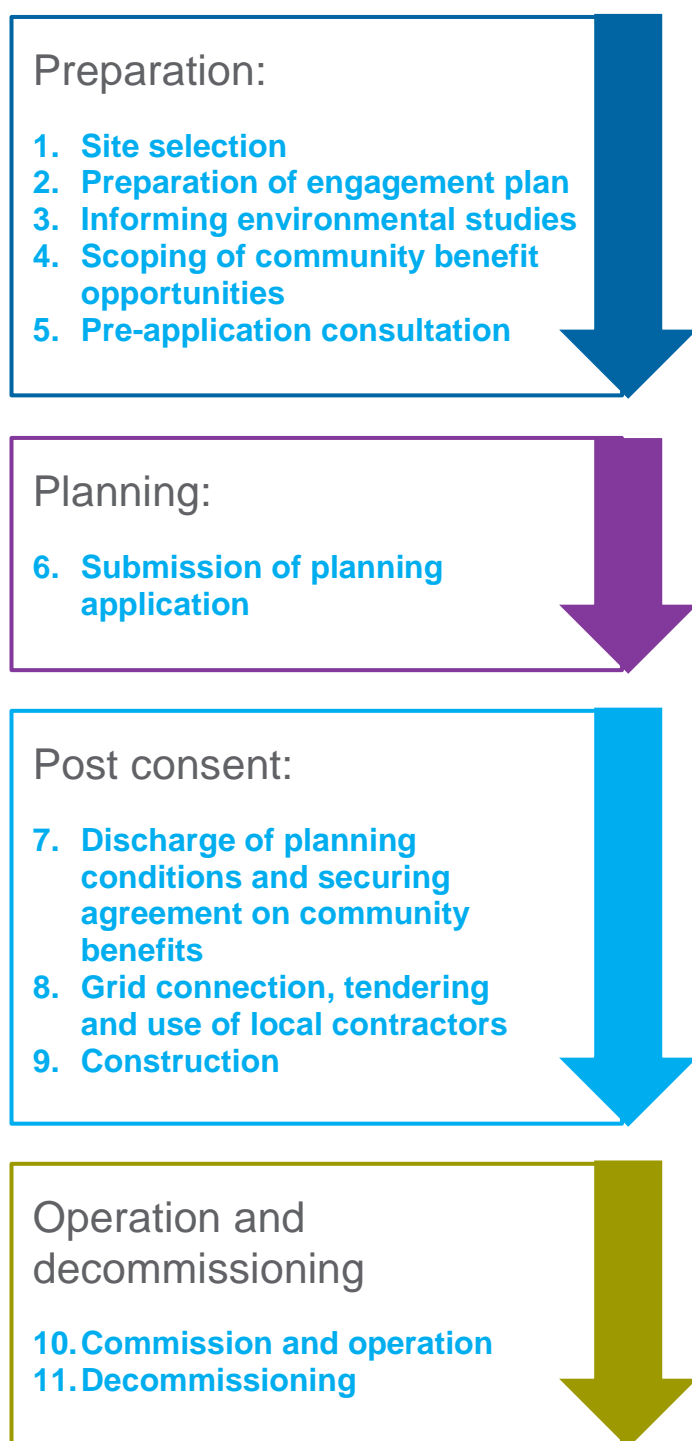


Figure 2 demonstrates the engagement journey for a proposed development. Firstly, communities need to be informed about a potential development and how they will have the opportunity to input and shape it. Some members of the community may be content not to engage further at this stage and others will want to gain an understanding of the development.

The next step is to build understanding about the project. This will ensure that people are developing informed opinions about the project. This activity might need to incorporate some myth-busting documents to overcome preconceptions about wind developments, as well as information about the development itself.

The third stage on the engagement journey is participatory engagement, the process of getting people's input to the development plans. Listening and providing feedback is essential to demonstrating proper engagement. People want to know that their opinions have been heard and taken into account before they are willing to accept any change in their local area.

Participatory engagement needs to be extended to incorporate a wider section of the local population, through wider engagement, the fourth step on the engagement journey.

Focussed techniques should be used to try and engage people who are not easy to reach, for example those who are busy, or who find traditional approaches daunting, or who find it less easy to participate for cultural, health or literacy reasons. It is important to engage these people and capture their views. Accessing these groups and getting their views can significantly alter the balance of opinion recorded about a project to better reflect opinion within the community.

It is also important not to forget that some form of engagement should continue for many years if the project construction goes ahead.

Figure 2: The engagement journey

Principles of best practice

Community engagement should have a clear purpose and be of value to all involved in the process. Every development, no matter what size, can benefit from effective engagement.

Engagement processes for onshore wind developments should aim to deliver the following outcomes:

For the developer:

- explain and make the case for their project to the Local Planning Authority and local communities,
- ascertain from the Local Planning Authority if an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) is required and, if so, to receive guidance from them and other consultees, on the scope of the Environmental Statement (ES),
- involve local people in developing the proposal, and obtain information from them which may be used to help to make the development more locally appropriate,
- establish a long term relationship with local communities.

For local communities:

- gather information from the developer and others about the likely impacts and benefits of a project,
- raise any concerns or questions they may have about the project,
- find out how they can participate in the project and any community benefits package which might be offered.

For the local authority:

- meet statutory requirements on publicising planning applications,
- gather sufficient information to make a timely decision on whether or not to grant planning permission for a project,
- work with developers, communities and other stakeholders to discharge planning conditions²³.

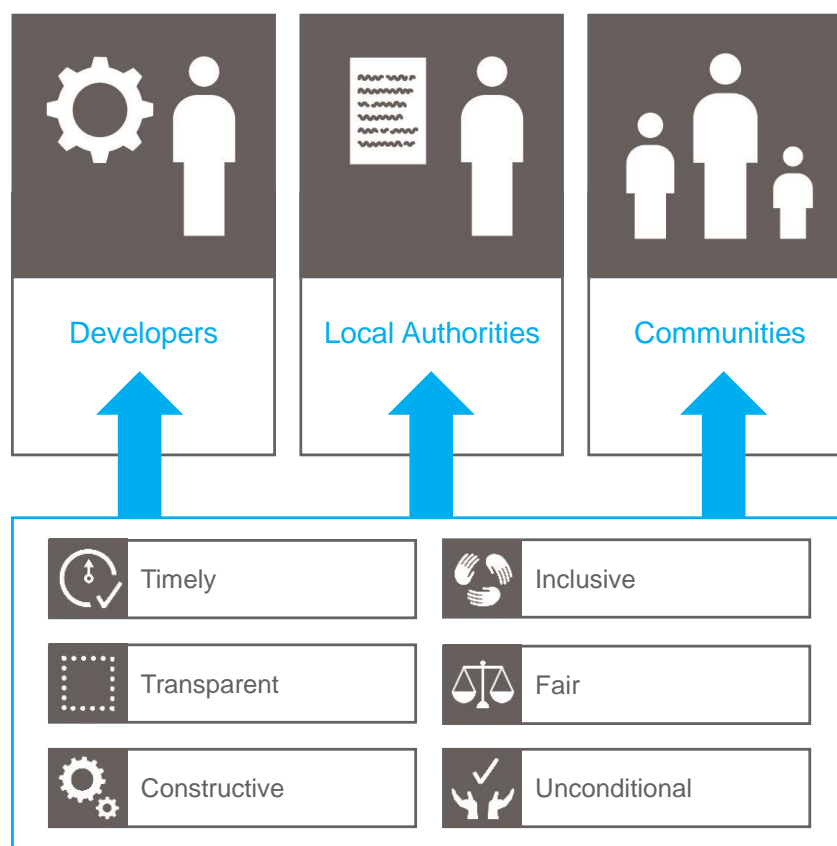
For all parties, engagement processes should include the ability to discuss if and how community benefits may be delivered. Where possible, these discussions should be separated from those related to the planning process²⁴.

²³ Centre for Sustainable Energy, BDOR, Peter Capener (2007) for the Renewables Advisory Board. The Protocol for Public Engagement with Proposed Wind Energy Developments in England. <http://www.cse.org.uk/pdf/pub1079.pdf>

²⁴ Department of Energy and Climate Change (DECC) (2014). Community Benefits from Onshore Wind Developments: Best Practice Guidance. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/community-benefits-and-engagement-guidance-for-onshore-wind>

The following principles are best practice for all parties involved in the development of wind energy projects.

Figure 3: Principles of best practice community engagement



Timely

All parties should have access to a clear timetable for the wind development process which identifies engagement opportunities. Where this timetable changes, every effort should be made to communicate this to all parties. Engagement should begin early so that it takes place when plans can be changed, and when it is cost-effective to make changes. All parties should allow sufficient time for considered and informed responses. Feedback should be provided to enable understanding of how information gathered in the engagement process is used.



Transparent

All parties should be clear about the interests and people they are representing. All information should be provided in a clear, accessible and appropriate form to communicate what people want and need to know and enable them to decide whether to engage in the process. It should be clear what aspects of the development and community benefits are fixed and why, and what is 'up for debate'. Mechanisms should be in place to allow information to flow in all directions.



Constructive

All parties involved in community engagement should do so in a positive manner and aim to create and strengthen relationships based on mutual trust. Dialogue should be a two-way process - those involved should listen as well as contribute. Action should be taken to foster links with parties who can advise and support on the use of appropriate engagement techniques in the area, and routes to achieving mutually beneficial outcomes.



Inclusive

All parties should seek to understand the full range of local opinion about the proposed onshore wind development and assist in identifying and engaging people in the wider community. Action should be taken to understand the barriers that may exist to people actively participating, particularly under-represented individuals and groups, to ensure they have an equal opportunity to be heard. A variety of engagement opportunities should be used to ensure people have a chance to get involved in a way that suits their needs and understand whether creative steps could be taken to help build local people's capacity to engage. Engagement practices should be reviewed and the results of engagement used to identify gaps and inform actions to widen the process and ensure the views of people from across the broad spectrum of the community are heard.



Fair and evidence-based

All parties should acknowledge and respect the rights of all stakeholders to express their views. Robust factual information and evidence should be sought as the foundation of engagement and a positive way to address differences of opinion. Participants should be provided with the opportunity to take an active part in developing proposals and should understand how their views have been responded to through the development. Changes made to the development as a result of engagement should be done on the basis of the wider community view and not a vociferous minority.



Unconditional

It should be made clear throughout the process that engagement by any party, at any stage, does not imply support for the development, or that approval by the local planning authority is more likely to be achieved.



What is best practice?

Developers

Best practice engagement for developers of onshore wind developments in England of 5-50 MW installed capacity is:



Publishing at an early stage the scope of the consultation; the outline plans for the development including the technical specification; the anticipated impacts of the proposed development and how these could be mitigated; company policy on local benefits; and opportunities for community participation. Engagement should be front-loaded and ensure statutory pre-application consultation requirements are met.



Communicating clearly progress and any changes in plans and timescales, giving reasons for changes as necessary.



Preparing a community engagement plan outlining methods of involvement which are relevant to the communities concerned. It should include:



- relevant stakeholders
- basic milestones and key target dates
- contact person for the project
- engagement methods
- information about the Environmental Impact Assessment process where applicable
- review mechanisms
- clarification of the nature and scale of potential community benefits and how these will be consulted upon
- approach to any shared ownership being offered



Participating openly in the process of establishing and verifying information about the proposed development.



Addressing barriers to participation to ensure people are able to access information about the development and contribute where they wish to. Ensure that feedback is made available on the results of engagement and how it is being used within the development of the project.



Consulting on locally relevant benefits likely to arise from the project, taking care to distinguish between those which are material to planning decisions and those, such as specific community benefits, which are not.

Communities

Best practice engagement for communities located close to proposed onshore wind developments in England of 5-50 MW installed capacity is:



Proactively setting out the energy aspirations for their community, using community, local or neighbourhood plans as appropriate, in advance of participating in negotiations with wind developers



Establishing a community contact group for the project, either a new group or by modifying the purpose of an existing community energy group, neighbourhood planning group, town or parish council.



Participating in open and honest conversations with the developer and local authority at the earliest possible opportunity, to foster constructive dialogue throughout the project, and negotiate the most appropriate outcomes on behalf of the wider community.



Actively participating in the formation of the developer's community engagement plan where possible to:

- identify a community contact group for the project
- help to identify relevant stakeholders
- agree milestones, key target dates, feedback mechanisms and timescales with consideration to community events already taking place
- recommend appropriate engagement methods given the nature of the local community



Supporting the developer with inclusive engagement and feedback to the wider community.



Evidence based, using objective independent information (which conforms to appropriate national standards and/or guidelines) for disputed areas of debate.



Being willing to participate in engagement processes to inform their views on the development.

Local authorities

Best practice engagement for Local authorities dealing with applications for onshore wind developments of 5-50 MW installed capacity is:



Planning positively for renewable energy, in accordance with the National Planning Policy Framework and guidance, and preparing and applying clear planning policy, and guidance on wind energy developments.



Supporting the production and implementation of a community engagement plan by the developer, by:

- establishing a clear point of contact that will enable a two way flow of information regarding the project
- agreeing basic milestones and any specific key target dates, as well as broad agreement on turn-around times for dealing with reasonable requests
- supporting the identification of key stakeholders and of local communities most affected by the development and helping identify the methods appropriate for engaging them at specific stages
- contributing to discussions on the approach to establishing community benefits and involving officers and/or members outside the planning process where appropriate to deal with issues of probity.



Providing support to people to engage with the process and helping with identifying the full range of community views.



Ensuring the sourcing and use of objective information on disputed areas of debate that is reliable and independent.



Ensuring elected Members are fully up to date on general information relating to wind energy in terms of the technology, and local, regional and national policy and the implications for planning.



Providing a high quality flow of information within the Authority on proposed developments, including regular briefings for members and relevant local authority officers, and encouraging members to access objective information sources to inform their engagement with members of the public.



Participating willingly and openly with the process of establishing and verifying information about the proposed development.



Providing support if open dialogue breaks down between parties.



Helping all parties to be clear that their engagement with these processes is in no way an indication of support for any application.

Preparation phase guidance:

Background



Community engagement is best undertaken early on. It is a good idea to focus initial discussions on the preparation and agreement of an engagement plan.

A simplified diagram of the development process is shown in [Figure 1](#) which details some of the activities that are undertaken at each stage of the process.

Developer's engagement with Local Authorities

For onshore²⁵ wind developments of less than 50 MW the Town and Country Planning Act as amended by the Localism Act²⁶ extended the requirement for compulsory pre-application consultation, set out in section 61W and 61X of the TCPA, to all onshore wind developments in England of more than two turbines, or where the hub height of any turbine exceeds 15 metres, effective until 17 December 2020²⁷. Guidance on pre-application consultation for wind farms has been published as part of the new online, consolidated, national planning guidance²⁸.

Developers have a statutory duty to have regard to the advice given by the local planning authority about local good practice and applicants are required to provide details of the pre-application consultation they have undertaken when submitting their application for planning permission, including details of how the applicant complied with the duty to carry out pre-application consultation, any responses to the consultation that were received by the developer, and the account taken of those responses. If these requirements have not been met and a planning application is submitted, the local planning authority will not be able to validate it until the prospective applicant complies.

With the introduction of these requirements it is even more important that good communication lines are established and maintained between the developer and the local planning authority.

Dialogue between developers and local planning authorities can be enhanced by agreeing the agenda of any meeting in advance and ensuring a note of the meeting covers the outcomes which may have been agreed. Focusing initial discussions on the preparation and agreement of an engagement plan provides a useful framework.

Discussions regarding the planning application will involve a designated Planning Officer. It is also important to involve council members to ensure the process proposed is one to which they feel confident they can give appropriate

²⁵ 'onshore' in this context means any relevant development which is covered by Part 3 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990.

²⁶ Localism Act (2011).
<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2011/20/contents>

²⁷ The Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure and Section 62A Applications) (England) (Amendment) Order 2013.
<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2013/2932/contents/made>

²⁸ Department for Communities and Local Government (2014).
Renewable and low carbon energy.
<http://planningguidance.planningportal.gov.uk/blog/guidance/renewabl>

[e-and-low-carbon-energy/particular-planning-considerations-for-hydropower-active-solar-technology-solar-farms-and-wind-turbines/](http://planningguidance.planningportal.gov.uk/blog/guidance/renewabl)

weight to when assessing any planning application. How appropriate council member involvement can be achieved should be discussed early on.

Local authorities can also play a very important role in facilitating and discussing community benefits, provided they ensure that officers and councillors directly involved in these discussions are not in a position to unduly influence the planning decision. These discussions should also involve other local authorities' representatives, such as the relevant parish or county councils.

Constructive dialogue relies on the 'unconditional' principle that discussion with the developer does not in any way prejudice the outcome of any forthcoming planning application, nor constitute support for the development.

Developer's engagement with the community

A requirement of the planning process is for the developer to consult defined key stakeholders on a planning application. This engagement is quite different to obtaining the

input of the local community on the proposed development and negotiating community benefit packages.

The developers engagement plan should cover both community and stakeholder engagement and establish which elements can be achieved effectively through the same activity (such as holding an exhibition to build people's understanding of a project), and which elements require bespoke approaches (such as attending local events to access harder to reach people within the community and holding meetings or forums on specific environmental issues).

At all engagement events it is important to make it clear that discussions about the community benefits on offer are separate from the planning process and that involvement in community benefit discussions does not affect an individual or group's right to comment on the development through the planning process. Separating community benefit discussions from those about the merits of the project may help to avoid claims that offers of community benefits are 'bribes'.

Preparation:

- 1. Site selection**
- 2. Preparation of engagement plan**
- 3. Informing environmental studies**
- 4. Scoping of community benefit opportunities**
- 5. Pre-application consultation**



Preparation phase guidance:

1. Site selection



Site selection will have usually taken place prior to the engagement process commencing.

In some exceptional cases, where there is an active community energy group, developers may approach the local community with more than one option for potential sites, or work with the community to identify sites. This approach is more generally undertaken by community-based development companies, such as Communities for Renewables CIC and similar community development companies²⁹. It may also occur where local businesses or communities are engaged in identifying their own projects.

Best practice includes:

- Public exhibitions including information on how and why the site was selected.

Innovative practice might involve:

- Workshops hosted by the community and supported by the developer to examine site selection opportunities,
- 'Walkabouts' - walking tours with site finding experts,
- * ³⁰Finding community groups who have already identified sites for sustainable energy projects, for example in their

neighbourhood plan (see example below).



Exemplar in site selection

An example of inspirational practice regarding site selection is emerging in the south west of England. South West Water (SWW) are looking to develop renewable energy on or near their land holdings to provide energy supplies to support their business activities and protect against future price rises.

With a strong community engagement ethic driving their approach, they have worked with Regen SW to formulate a renewable energy investment plan, which not only identifies where the best resources and fewest constraints are, but also considers how the local host communities might participate in their plans.

The local community in the south west region are also SWW's customers, and they feel that the benefits of renewable projects on their own sites will also benefit the end customer in terms of reducing operational costs as a water and sewerage utility company.

They have begun to approach communities about how they could potentially work together for mutual benefit.

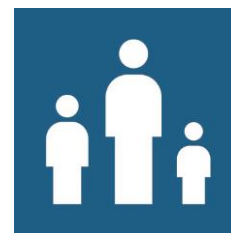
²⁹ Communities for Renewables Community Interest Company

www.cfric.co.uk

³⁰ *Refers to exemplar practices

Preparation phase guidance:

2. Preparing the engagement plan



The development of an engagement plan or strategy is the best way of preparing for effective engagement³¹. It will help the developer to demonstrate to the local planning authority that they have complied with pre-application consultation requirements and prevent delays caused by the refusal of the local authority to validate the planning application. It will ensure that all parties agree with the approach being taken and should reduce the potential for disputes at a later stage.

The engagement plan will be led by the developer and will be based on what the developer wants to achieve, which in turn will be informed by what is, and is not, up for negotiation. It can be helpful to involve a local third party, who can give insights into the local context, demographics, and sensitivities in the area, in the preparation of the engagement plan.

Where it isn't a legal requirement, it is best practice for the developer to engage both the local planning authority and local community in designing the engagement plan, as they will have the best insights into locally appropriate approaches.

The plan should include:

- context and vision, explaining why the plan has been produced,
- purpose of the engagement and approach,

- who might be involved - different demographic groups, landowners, businesses,
- the purpose of each element of engagement,
- where the engagement is proposed to take place (with room for flexibility to take into account local needs),
- how the developer will engage including an outline of what methods will be employed,
- when engagement will take place, including a broad timetable that takes into account key local events and meetings.

Early planning of the programme of engagement will enable the developer, local planning authority and local community to:

- manage resources effectively,
- communicate the scope of discussions to other stakeholders at each stage,
- demonstrate purpose and direction of the engagement process,
- increase the credibility of the engagement process as viewed by other stakeholders, as properly planned engagement is more thorough than ad hoc, reactive engagement,
- enhance the quality of the discussions held with stakeholders³².

³¹ & ³² Centre for Sustainable Energy, BDOR, Peter Capener (2007) for the Renewables Advisory Board. The Protocol for Public Engagement with Proposed Wind Energy Developments in England. <http://www.cse.org.uk/pdf/pub1079.pdf>

The extent of the engagement process will depend on the scale of the development and its local significance, and this should be reflected in the level of detail provided within the engagement plan.

Significance is not necessarily limited to size and local planning authorities and local communities can consider even quite small wind energy projects to be 'significant' in some cases. Both the scale of development and the sensitivity of the area in which the wind development is being proposed are key determining factors in the significance of the impact of the development and, therefore, the amount of engagement that should be undertaken from a planning perspective, subject to meeting the minimum statutory requirements.

The following issues should be considered during the preparation of the engagement plan.

Identifying key stakeholders

When preparing the engagement plan it is important to differentiate who needs to be formally consulted from others whose views are being sought.

The stakeholders involved in the engagement processes may include:

- Wind energy developer
- Special interest groups
- Local planning authority (including elected members)
- Local communities
- Parish/town councils
- Landowners
- Business community
- Statutory consultees

The plan should include details of groups who need extra support and bespoke opportunities to engage due to health, access, language and other factors.

Organisations that work in the local area can often:

- identify key local stakeholders, groups and initiatives, including local MPs, Local Enterprise Partnerships and opinion formers;
- provide guidance on the most effective approaches to engagement with communities;
- offer advice on the most locally appropriate, efficient and timely ways to share information with relevant stakeholders;
- offer advice on ways to encourage public support for proposed projects;
- support the negotiation and administration of appropriate community benefit funds;
- provide opportunities to engage the local supply chain, such as running 'meet the buyer' sessions.

Understanding local people and cultures

Developers should take time to find out about the area, considering:

- what networks will be most effective for disseminating information;
- which local papers are well read;
- which local notice boards are most looked at;
- the availability of parish newsletters;
- whether there are local leaders;
- whether there are groups that are particularly hard to reach and if so how best to reach them;
- the history of the area and how it has previously been used, for example for agriculture or industry;
- the geography of the area;
- the economic climate;

- the current concerns of local communities.

It is important to involve people who are prepared to discuss the engagement process rather than the development itself at this stage. Local authority contacts may be able to identify relevant people and organisations. Parish councils and community councils and other stakeholders are also likely to be able to help a developer to understand the various interests in the area and identify other local community organisations.

Matching methods of engagement to outcomes

Different elements of the engagement process will aim to achieve different outcomes, requiring different techniques and levels of engagement.

The methods employed should take into account the needs of participants in terms of practicalities, including for example, time of day, distance to travel, need for translation and level of commitment required to participate. Providing a range of opportunities for involvement will enable people to get involved in a way and at a level that suits them.

Engagement techniques should be customised to the needs of the area to ensure the opinions of the broader community are heard. Currently the most prevalent methods used are public exhibitions, meetings, informative publicity material, websites, questionnaires and feedback forms. Standardised approaches to community engagement can exclude less confident, less able or less technical people from engaging positively. Approaches which reach out to those people who do not have strong motivations to engage will provide a broader spread of opinion.

More innovative methods might include workshops instead of traditional meetings, festivals for mass public engagement and digital methods, such as crowd-sourcing, and engagement supported by the use of interactive maps.

These innovative methods can positively impact on acceptance because they allow a wider range of responses in non-confrontational and inclusive forms. They demonstrate effort by the developer to achieve greater dialogue with local people.

Defining the scope of discussions within the engagement plan

It is important that developers are clear about why they are engaging and what they are aiming to achieve. Being clear about aspirations from the start will provide the basis of the narrative necessary to generate public interest in the project.

Being clear about what can and cannot be changed is also vital. Certain aspects of a proposal may be fixed, such as the total amount available for community benefits or the site boundaries.

Engaging early with the community on the issues they can help to shape will leave more time to flexibly respond to and address concerns from the community, potentially saving costly changes as later stages.

Establishing clear contacts

Named contacts should be identified by as many of the key parties involved as possible and include the developer, the local planning authority and, where appropriate, statutory consultees.

It is always easier to engage positively with a real person. A named contact that works hard to build relationships can have a massive impact on how the community responds to a project overall³³. A single point of contact also enables interested parties to access the engagement process quickly and easily, preventing frustration building. Each named contact should know key contacts within their organisation that are able to provide more detailed technical or policy guidance, if required.

³³ SSE Keadby Newsletter.

<http://sse.com/media/92057/KeadbyNewsletterJuly2013.pdf>

Representative groups from the local area should also be asked to nominate a main contact to improve the efficiency of communication with the community.

Allocating resources and skills

Having people with the right skill sets for engagement is really important. Developers should identify and meet any skills gaps through employing external agencies or through staff training. For communities, the broader and more inclusive the local engagement, the more likely people with useful skill sets will choose to engage. It is important for local planning authorities to maintain skill standards in this area through regular training.

Agreeing Timescales

Early discussions on the engagement plan with the local planning authority can provide the opportunity to:

- Agree timescales with the local planning authority for the environmental studies and provide justification where this varies from statutory timescales;
- Agree timescales for input by statutory consultees and for responses to queries;
- Agree approximate timescales for major stages within the engagement and application processes;
- Agree timescales for responding to requests for information from other stakeholders.

These timescales should be updated if changes occur, and communicated to community stakeholders together with an explanation of the reasons for the changes.

Early agreements on the timescales will enhance confidence in the commitment to the engagement process amongst stakeholders and can lead to efficiencies, for example planning to run engagement activities at existing local events.

Best practice includes:

- The developers employing a communications expert to support the process.
- Holding a meeting with the local community and local businesses to scope the potential for collaboration.
- Site visits to other wind farms.

Innovative practice might involve:

- Using local experts to facilitate engagement³⁴ and prepare a plan in partnership with the community³⁵.
- Commissioning local research through local groups to feed into the plan - could include arts or history projects³⁶.
- * A drop-in space where people can share their views, such as an energy shop³⁷.
- * Having a stand at local exhibitions, fetes, carnivals or sponsoring local cultural events to get to know the local people.
- * Supporting public arts projects about local energy and wind power³⁸.
- * Holding a local festival at the proposed site³⁹.

³⁴ Regen SW. www.regen.co.uk/onshore-electricityworking-with-communities

³⁵ Regen SW. www.regen.co.uk/communities

³⁶ Wadebridge Energy Futures. <http://www.wren.co.uk/news/wren-news/99-energy-futures.html>

³⁷ Wadebridge Energy shop. <http://www.wren.co.uk/energy-shop.html>

³⁸ Regen SW Arts and Energy programme www.regen.co.uk/arts-and-energy/

³⁹ Airvolution. <http://www.ynnicymru.org.uk/blog/rock-n-wind/>

Preparation phase guidance:

3. Informing environmental studies

Wind monitoring

The point at which information about a prospective onshore wind development is made public is often related to the need to erect a met (meteorological) mast to collect wind speed data on the site, or to clarify the site conditions and begin the process of site optimisation (planning the optimum positioning of turbines).

Planning permission may be required for a met mast, putting the location of the potential wind turbine site into the public domain. Therefore, even though it is not a legal requirement, it is important to consider what engagement may be necessary around the met mast application. Engagement should be both with the local planning authority and the local community.

Engagement is likely to focus on methods of information provision to the local planning authority and the building of understanding around the potential for a wind energy development in the area with the local community.

Screening opinion

If a met mast is not required, the first point at which a community may be aware an onshore wind development is being considered is usually the request for a screening opinion.

In some cases the developer will apply to the local planning authority for a 'screening opinion' as to whether their proposed development will require an Environmental Impact Assessment under the Environmental

Impact Assessment (EIA) Regulations⁴⁰. In other cases, if no screening opinion is applied for, the local planning authority will screen once the planning application is received. In some cases, other parties will be consulted by the local planning authority for input.

Engagement at this stage is primarily focused on the provision of information and the building of understanding, with some participation required by the local planning authority and consultees.

Scoping opinion

Following 'screening', the developer may apply to the local planning authority for a 'scoping opinion' in which the local planning authority offer an opinion as to what the Environmental Statement required by the EIA should cover⁴¹. Regulation 2(1) of the EIA Regulations sets out the consultation requirements.

In some instances the local parish council and other community organisations may be invited to be involved in shaping the expected content of the Environmental Statement.

Seeking local input from specialist environmental interest groups at this stage can be hugely beneficial in uncovering information early and accessing useful local sources of information and data.

Engagement methods may be expanded to include participatory techniques and may need to include consideration of how to engage those who do not always participate

⁴⁰ & ⁴⁰ Town and Country Planning Environmental Impact Assessment Regulations (2011).

<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2011/1824/contents/made>

in this type of consultation normally (wider engagement) in an attempt to seek out valuable local insights into the environment of the local area.

Environmental Statement

Once the Environmental Statement is drafted, the purpose of engagement is to share this information.

Both statutory and non-statutory consultees will be consulted on the Environmental Statement itself. Regulations 16-19 of the EIA Regulations⁴² set out the detailed consultation requirements for the Environmental Statement.

If participatory engagement has already taken place at an earlier stage, input at this stage is likely to be minimal, potentially reducing the amount of additional work which is required in re-drafting the statement.

- The use of photographic, video and three dimensional tools for illustrations;
- Reviewing any existing environmental information in local, neighbourhood or parish plans;
- * Funding local specialists to undertake primary data collection.

Best practice includes:

- Public exhibitions;
- The use of questionnaires;
- The use of visual aids, such as photomontages of the proposed development;
- Making the report available online and at local meeting places.

Innovative practice might involve:

- Organising a focus group with the local wildlife, conservation and gardening groups who will be able to provide valuable insights into local habitats, species movements and the history of the area;

⁴² Town and Country Planning Environmental Impact Assessment Regulations (2011).

<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2011/1824/contents/made>

Preparation phase guidance:

4. Scoping the community benefits package



As set out in the best practice guidance on community benefits⁴³, engaging people at an early stage on the potential for the development to provide community benefits can help to ensure the most locally appropriate package of benefit measures is established.

Community benefit liaison group

Once an appropriate group of participants has been identified, they could form a 'community benefit liaison group' to take forward discussions. This group could work to ensure the wider community remains informed and able to influence the process.

This group could include:

- local residents,
- local businesses,
- representatives from strategic bodies (county or unitary authorities) who may be aware of other financing options.
- other council officers, members, or others who will be consultees on the development e.g. parish councillors.

But generally do not include:

- members of the Planning Committee,
- Planning Officer involved in writing the recommendation on the planning application,

- any person directly influencing the determination of planning permission.

The developer should consider whether there are regional or sub-regional parties who should be involved to provide a strategic perspective with the local fund to ensure fund administrators are aware of potential ways to draw in additional funds, or where they can work with third parties to achieve their goals in the most cost-effective manner.

People should be encouraged to participate and reassured that being involved at the outset does not constitute a 25 year commitment to remain involved throughout the process. The people involved are likely to change and evolve as the project progresses, given the length of time that onshore wind developments can take to proceed through the development process (up to 6 years).

The nature of the community engagement process means discussions about the development itself and those establishing community benefits are likely to overlap at times. The distinction between engaging in discussions about the merits of a potential planning application and engaging in discussions about community benefits, not related to the planning process, is not always easy to maintain, especially at the early stage of the development process when the developer's focus will be on raising awareness and building understanding of the project and the opportunities it offers. This means that providing information about the potential onshore wind development, the process of getting to know parties interested in the development and discussions about what the development can bring to the local area in terms of community benefits, are likely to overlap.

⁴³ Department of Energy and Climate Change (DECC) (2014). Community Benefits from Onshore Wind Developments: Best Practice Guidance.
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/community-benefits-and-engagement-guidance-for-onshore-wind>

Engagement techniques

Engagement techniques have been tried and tested across a variety of disciplines to show how communities, local authorities and developers can turn a potential confrontation into a conversation about the future that can help the widest possible range of people to participate and express their views⁴⁴.

A key message from these examples is that engagement doesn't necessarily have to be expensive - in fact some of the most effective techniques cost very little. Engagement does have to be appropriate, and some thought and tailoring needs to go into making sure this is done well.

Engaging local people in discussions about community benefit can have a positive impact for all those involved and, because this is not a statutory process, there is flexibility to use innovative and creative engagement techniques that respond to the needs of the local community.

Good practice community engagement should include a range of techniques, which cover the full spectrum, from information provision to building understanding and participatory techniques. Thought should also be put into how ongoing engagement will be supported.

Best practice includes:

- Stakeholder meetings and dialogue
- Online forums for opportunities to invest in the project
- Questionnaires for local community
- Newsletters
- Websites

Innovative practice might involve:

- Drop in event, focussing on community benefits⁴⁵.
- Face to face meetings with local groups⁴⁶
- Community benefit forum or liaison group⁴⁷
- * Youth focus group to engage young people in steering a community benefit fund³³.



Exemplar of creative engagement - Youth Focus Group - Swinford⁴⁸



⁴⁴ Courtney-Bennett, J et al.(2012). Engaging Communities. St Austell: Eden Project

⁴⁵ REG Windpower. <http://www.cornwallfoundation.com/news-and-events/2014/03/03/goonhilly-wind-farm-community-fund-drop-in-event/>

⁴⁶ Burcote Wind Renewables. <http://www.burcotewind.com/sites/default/files/pdfs/v4-Burcote-Manifesto.pdf>

⁴⁷ RES Ltd. <http://www.woolleyhill.co.uk/the-project/community-liaison-group.aspx>

⁴⁸ Vattenfall. <http://swinfordwindfarm.vattenfall.co.uk/youth-focus-group-to-visit-site/>

Preparation phase guidance:

5. General pre-application consultation



In addition to the engagement activities outlined in the previous sections, developers will also need to undertake the pre-application consultation required to fulfil their [statutory duties](#) under the Town and Country Planning Act and take into account responses received to decide whether to proceed with the project as originally intended.

Engagement should involve the local planning authority, local community and other interested stakeholders. It should be a two-way process and be focused on the development plans and how to address people's concerns about their potential impacts. Developers need to make it clear that previous discussions on community benefits in no way affect individuals, organisations or a communities right to express a view on the proposed development.

Engagement should go beyond information provision and should build people's understanding of the project and its likely impacts and benefits. Participatory techniques should be used to ensure people are able to submit their views and the developer is able to respond to their concerns.

Best practice includes:

- Information mail-outs,
- Public exhibitions,
- Information on the developer's website,
- Project phone line,
- Making frequently asked questions and answers available,

Innovative practice might involve:

- Site visits to other operational wind farms
- Focus groups
- Door-knocking in the local area
- * Facilitated workshops
- * Community Liaison Groups



Exemplar practice –

The Grange Wind Farm

The Grange in Lincolnshire is a seven turbine, 14 MW wind farm developed by RES. This development demonstrates the effectiveness of good community engagement, particularly up to the commissioning of the wind farm.

Following planning consent in 2011, RES formed a Community Liaison Group (CLG) made up of elected representatives from the communities local to the wind farm. The CLG acted as a forum to exchange information as the wind farm progressed.

The CLG remained active until The Grange Wind Farm became fully operational in 2013. RES asked members to feed back on how useful the CLG had been and the vast majority of the members responded that the CLG sessions had been a useful and practical way of providing information to the local community and two thirds of members expressed a willingness to speak about their positive experience to other CLGs at RES projects across the United Kingdom.

www.the-grange-wind-farm.co.uk

Planning phase guidance:

6. Submission of a planning application



Planning:

6. Submission of planning application



The point at which a planning application and supporting Environmental Statement is submitted and verified by the local planning authority marks the project's move into this phase of the development process.

In this phase, the onus is on the local planning authority to engage the community through the planning process and this has certain statutory elements to it. Every local planning authority should prepare a Statement of Community Involvement explaining how they will involve communities in planning decisions⁴⁹. It is up to the local planning authority to decide what approach to use in their local area.

Developers can, if they choose to, also still undertake voluntary proactive engagement at this stage.

Publicising the application

Once it has been submitted, the planning application needs to be publicised to the local community by the local planning authority. Different types of planning applications require different publicity and full details of the publicity required is set out in Article 13 of the Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure)

Order 2010, as amended⁵⁰. Publicity is often through information on a website that is signposted to through site display notices and notices in the local newspaper. Certain developments will also require notices to be served directly to owners and occupiers of neighbouring properties. At the same time the local authority could draw the attention of residents to supporting materials it may have produced to help communities make representations on the planning application.

The local authority should follow the published Statement of Community Involvement.

This is the point at which community members should express their views to the local planning authority about the development itself.

Making the decision

A Local Planning Officer will produce a report with a recommendation on whether planning permission should be granted or not, taking into consideration the information contained within:

- the planning application,

⁴⁹ Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act (2004)
<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2004/5/section/18>

⁵⁰ The Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) (England) Order (2010), as amended.
<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2010/2184/article/13/made>

- the Environmental Statement, and full Environmental Impact Assessment where one was required,
- comments and submissions of other consultees,
- letters of support or objection submitted from people in the local community,
- the relevant policies contained within the Development Plan and any other policies and guidance which are material to the application.

A decision will then be taken about whether the application can be dealt with by Planning Officers within the council under delegated powers, or if it needs to be determined by the Planning Committee. Applications that are deemed to be less significant or controversial are more likely to be decided by Planning Officers and these applications are not presented to Planning Committees.

If the application is not dealt with under delegated powers, a date will be set for the Planning Committee, which is made up of elected members, who discuss the application and make a decision ('determine') on the application.

At this stage, the focus of engagement is normally about ensuring all those involved in determining the planning application, or members of the community have a good understanding of:

- the development and its impacts on and benefits to both the local and wider area;
- when and how members of the community are able to comment on the planning application.

During this time period supplementary information may be offered by the developer, or requested by parties involved in determining the planning application, and this should be shared openly.

The developer will also be expected to respond to issues raised through the planning process, and produce evidence in support of their responses, to specific

planning issues that may require further consideration.

Engagement techniques at this stage should focus on building understanding, participatory techniques and gaining a representative picture of the views of the community. Efforts should be made to ensure that views heard are representative of the demographic makeup, and of the different interests, needs and desires within the local community, rather than solely being representative of the views of those most ready to share them.

Best practice includes:

- Developer press releases announcing the submission of the planning application
- A web page for the development that :
 - is kept up to date with changes as they occur
 - contains details of who to contact with queries
 - contains information about how to respond to the planning application for example the planning number, contact details of the local planning authority
- Stakeholder committees, liaison groups
- Private meetings
- Letters
- Site visits

Innovative practice might involve:

- Up to date Question and Answer pages on the developer's website;
- The use of social media and public relations campaigns to encourage contributions from the wider community;

- * A proactive media strategy to ensure that the facts are reported accurately in the media;
- * Independent verification of facts;
- * Campaigns to encourage participation, such as those run by Action for Renewables.



Exemplar practice –

Keadby wind farm

SSE's development of Keadby wind farm illustrates beneficial methods of community engagement. The 34 turbine wind farm is located in North Lincolnshire and once completed the 68 MW development will produce enough energy to power 57,000 homes.

During the consultation period SSE employed a Community Liaison Officer (CLO), to actively engage with communities, interest groups and individuals. The CLO has acted as a point of contact for locals and is responsible for the flow of information to and from the community.

During the construction period the CLO has helped to formulate and work closely with a Community Liaison Group (CLG). The CLO holds a dialogue between SSE, the community and stakeholders. The CLG helped to formulate a Community Engagement Plan which set out what engagement methods SSE would employ, who they would consult, and when information would be released throughout the lifecycle of the development. Minutes of the CLG meetings and the Community Engagement Plan are published on the SSE website.

SSE also encourage their staff to volunteer on local projects, allowing them to take time away from their usual jobs. This enables communities and SSE staff to interact on local projects to benefit the area.

Post-consent phase guidance:

Post consent:

- 7. Discharge of planning conditions and securing agreement on community benefits**
- 8. Tendering and use of local contractors**
- 9. Construction and grid connection**



7. Discharge of planning conditions and securing agreement on community benefits

Determination of the planning application marks the beginning of this phase. The engagement guidance set out here is only relevant if the planning application is approved by the Planning Committee.

If the planning application is refused, either the onshore wind development will not be taken forward, or the developer may appeal the decision. An appeal is made to the Secretary of State who appoints a Planning Inspector to determine the application on his behalf, unless the appeal is recovered or called-in, in which case the Inspector will produce a report with a recommendation to the Secretary of State about whether or not to grant the application or refuse it. The Planning Inspectorate administers the planning appeal. This guidance does not cover the appeal process.

Discharge of planning conditions

Where the application is granted approval by the local planning authority there is a six week period during which a legal challenge against the decision can be made. If no legal challenge is made, the developer will focus on discharging planning conditions set as part of the planning permission to mitigate specific issues concerning the development. These conditions will vary from development

to development. An example of a pre-commencement condition is to ensure archaeological surveys have been completed before construction can begin.

There is a statutory time period of eight weeks for local authorities to discharge planning conditions. However, collecting the information needed to discharge some of planning conditions can take up to a year as ecological studies are often required. There is usually a traffic management and construction management plan required under planning conditions which will guide the next steps.

Whilst the conditions are being discharged developers will usually go out to tender for some of the construction works and they will usually start to place contracts with consultants. This process can take a few months as they are often large tenders that need to be prepared, tendered and then assessed. Networking with local contractors should happen earlier on in the process, as there is little time left for this once the tender is issued.

The level of community engagement often increases again at this point, as procedures are put in place to enable the construction of the wind farm to occur smoothly.

Securing agreement on community benefits

The signing of community benefit agreements can happen during the planning phase, but may in some cases still need completing after planning consent has been granted.

As set out in the guidance on community benefits guidance⁵¹, Planning Obligations (Section 106 agreements) are used to mitigate the impact of a development that would otherwise be unacceptable in planning terms. Planning Obligations have been used for habitat enhancements (such as creation of a nature reserve), amenity improvements (such as provision of footpaths) and are commonly used for infrastructure improvements or contributions towards them, such as the provision of a new or improved access road or school.

Developers may opt to enter into a Unilateral Undertaking to settle any Planning Obligations which might otherwise be subject to negotiation and agreement with the local planning authority, and included in a Section 106 agreement⁵². A developer may offer a benefit in-kind by entering into a Unilateral Undertaking. The local planning authority would not be part of this legal agreement.

Where this is not appropriate, the developer will need to make an agreement with the community itself, if an appropriate body exists. This agreement would be similar to that agreed for a developer voluntarily offering community funds⁵³ and would detail the specifications for the works to be undertaken along with a timetable for completion.

Where the provision of community funds has been agreed, a legally binding and robust agreement should be drawn up to protect all parties involved, particularly to ensure continuity of community benefits if ownership of the development changes. Engagement with the local community will need to take place to ensure the agreement contains everything necessary, see community benefits guidance⁵⁴.

This could be done via a Community Benefits Liaison Group or forum and should involve any parties who are to be involved in the community benefit provision.

Good practice community engagement should include a range of techniques which cover the full spectrum - information provision to building understanding, encouraging the involvement of the wider community to engage new people who may not have been involved at the early stages, and participatory techniques and consideration of ongoing engagement requirements when it comes to securing long term agreements.

Best practice includes:

- Newsletters
- Website updates
- Focus groups
- Public meetings

Innovative practice might involve:

- * Facilitated negotiations
- * Establishing a community benefit forum

⁵¹ Department of Energy and Climate Change (DECC) (2014). Community Benefits from Onshore Wind Developments: Best Practice Guidance.

⁵² Centre for Sustainable Energy et al (2007, updated 2009), for the Renewables Advisory Board. Delivering Community Benefits from Wind Energy Developments: A Toolkit.
<http://www.cse.org.uk/downloads/file/Delivering%20community%20benefits%20from%20wind%20energy%20-%20a%20toolkit.pdf>



Exemplar practice –

Tolpuddle

West Coast Energy's (WCE) development of the West Dorset Wind Farm near Tolpuddle demonstrates good engagement throughout the development process. Open dialogue with communities through every stage provided them with the chance to help shape the wind farm and benefit scheme.

Before the submission of the planning application WCE held public exhibitions, launch events, meetings with stakeholders and presentations to community councils. This initial community engagement feedback was then used to create a Statement of Community Consultation which was submitted along with the planning application.

In order to establish the content and potential use of the community benefits, Community Benefit Forums were held. This allowed dialogue with local groups on the vision for the fund. During the meetings it was agreed to change the fund from 10% of the wind farm's profits, to £5000 per MW per year. If 10% of the profits exceeds the guaranteed payment, the fund will be increased.

A project website was established, providing a location for people to post their ideas for the use of funds, monitor development progress, find out about meetings and find out how they can get involved with certain aspects of the project.

Transparency was used throughout the process with planning documents, EIAs and minutes from meetings all available to download from the project website.

Post-consent phase guidance:

8. Tendering and use of local contractors

As explained in the previous section, at this stage the developer will look to procure the services of contractors to build the scheme. Some developers hold supply chain events during the planning phase to ensure that if the project is consented, they can move quickly to award contracts.

Examples of the type of contractor which the developer may be looking for include:

- security services;
- fencing contractors;
- piling and concrete contractors;
- landscape contractors;
- habitat experts;
- electrical operation and maintenance contractors.

Generally, the developer will be keen to use local contractors where possible, as this will increase the positive local economic impact the project generates. However, this is often done through a top level contractor who manages the process and sub-contracts aspects of the work.

Local authorities, communities and local businesses should be engaged to identify to what extent it will be possible to secure work for local companies through this process.

Good practice engagement should include a range of techniques which cover the full spectrum, from information provision, building understanding, participatory techniques and the involvement of the wider community. Thought should also be put into how ongoing engagement will be supported, for example through the use of local

businesses, for ongoing operations and maintenance support.

Best practice includes:

- Meet the buyer events,
- Press release,
- Website updates.

Innovative practice might involve:

- Production and publication of a procurement and construction timeline,
- Using local economic development partners to support the up-skilling of local contractors to be able to tender to work on the contract,
- The production of procurement guidance,
- Engagement in local supply chain and skills development initiatives,
- One-to-one meetings with prospective local contractors,
- Local procurement policies and open days for local suppliers,
- * Apprenticeships⁵⁵.

⁵⁵ Intelligent Land Investments (Renewable Energy). <http://ilienergy.com/2013/11/sse-launches-50-community-fund-for-highlands/> and Airvolution <http://www.airvolutionenergy.com/news-detail.aspx?newsID=273>

Post-consent phase guidance:

9. Construction and grid connection

Grid connection offers are usually accepted by the developer during this phase, deposits are paid and contracts signed. This is not always the case, however, and on large or complicated projects the developer will sometimes have accepted grid connection offers during the planning phase so that the grid connection offer is secured.

There will also be detailed design works and ground investigations at this stage. Alongside the balance of plant contract process, which covers the development of the infrastructure and facilities of a wind farm, the turbine supply process will also commence. These happen simultaneously as each turbine manufacturer has specifications which the other contractors must adhere to. Detailed plans showing access tracks, the substation and other information are also submitted to the local authority at this point.

The construction phase can mean increased activity in the local community. Careful management and consultation on the timings, approach routes and expected duration of construction activity is vital to ensure that the impact on the community is minimised. Information about potential road closures, disruption or delays should be given to the local residents in advance of construction commencing.

Some people may also be keen to watch key elements of the build take place and therefore information should be provided by the developer about when they will be able to view events like the turbines being erected.

Construction commences with the wind farm infrastructure, including access tracks, turbine bases, cable corridors and onsite substation. Cabling is generally then laid from the turbine locations to the onsite sub-

station. Once all of this is in place, the turbine manufacturer may send its own specialised crew and equipment to erect the turbines. It takes approximately one day to erect each turbine as components are fitted separately. Erection can take longer if it is windy, as the blades cannot be fitted during periods of high winds.

The full construction process will generally take between six and twelve months depending on the size of the development. Once the turbines are erected, there is then generally a period of a few weeks where all equipment is tested before full operation commences.

Good practice community engagement should include a range of techniques which cover the full spectrum, from information provision, building understanding, participatory techniques and the involvement of the wider community. At this stage, plans should also be made for how ongoing engagement will be supported post-construction.

Best practice includes:

- Road closure notices on road signs, in local newspapers / newsletters.
- Considerate construction techniques,

Innovative practice might involve:

- The use of Twitter and other social media to report on development progress,

- Regular newsletters/ updates in local media,
- * Live streams or filming of the construction process,
- * Launch party or official opening,
- * Art competitions for school children.



Exemplar practice –

Swinford Farm

Swinford wind farm, located in Leicestershire and developed by Vattenfall, consists of 11 turbines with a capacity of 22 MW. It shows an innovative approach to engaging the wider community and involving local groups in discussions.

Vattenfall overcame the initial difficulty of large numbers of local people opposing the development. They achieved this by involving the local community and local businesses. Local businesses were encouraged to come forward with their expertise and were rewarded with major contracts for surveying, security and construction of the wind farm, keeping money in the local economy.

Vattenfall also encouraged the involvement of young people by teaming up with the Rural Youth Voice Project to visit schools and by establishing a Youth Focus Group to enable young people to express their ideas for the use of community funds. Educational visits for schools and locals were held on site throughout the process and post construction.

They also provide educational visits and family fun days.

For more information go to:

<http://swinfordwindfarm.vattenfall.co.uk/>

Operational phase guidance:



Operation and decommissioning

10. Commissioning and operation

11. Decommissioning and repowering



10. Commissioning and operation

Maintaining a positive relationship with the community through a project's operational lifetime requires continued engagement. This is often done through the process of providing community benefits, but it may also be necessary to engage with people in the local community about operational issues such as maintenance.

Maintaining a consistent contact point is very important to enable anyone within the community to contact the owner or operator of the wind farm. This may be because they have noticed a problem or simply because they would like access to the site and want to know who to ask. Whatever the reason, there are a number of useful ways to ensure these lines of communication are kept open and accessible.

Engagement evaluation and the publication of news stories and case studies should also be undertaken once the project is up and running to inform future practice.

Good practice community engagement should include a range of techniques which cover the full spectrum, from information provision, building understanding, participatory techniques, and the involvement of the wider community as to how ongoing engagement will be supported.

Best practice includes:

- Website updates,
- Educational visits,
- Publicising community benefit funds,
- Competition to name a turbine,
- Site visits for local and youth groups,
- Project newsletters.

Innovative practice might involve:

- Information provision on the performance of the windfarm,
- Information display boards with contact information,
- * Family fun days,
- * Educational talks and guided walks by volunteers,
- * Energy advice centres,
- * Educational or environmental rangers.



School pupils at wind farm

<http://swinfordwindfarm.vattenfall.co.uk/school-pupils-experience-the-turbines-up-close/>



Dalry Wind Farm family fun day

<http://www.communitywindpower.co.uk/projects/information.asp?ProjectID=49>



Educational ranger with a school group

<http://www.communitywindpower.co.uk/projects/information.asp?ProjectID=49>



Energy Advice Centre, Dalry

<http://www.begreencentres.co.uk/>



Operational phase guidance:

11. Decommissioning and repowering



When the project is due to come to an end, the local people and the planning authority will be keen to know what the site owners' intentions are. For example, will the project apply to be repowered or will it be decommissioned and the site returned to its original state?

Repowering means replacing the current turbines with new turbines. This would be subject to an entirely new planning application process. Often, repowered projects can have fewer turbines with greater installed capacity, or greater output for the same number of larger turbines, as turbine technology advances.

The local community may wish to play a more active role in a repowering proposal, once they have become used to living alongside a wind development. Early discussions about the potential next steps may prove particularly helpful to gauge opinion and get people involved. A new planning application is needed for a repower and the normal development process starts again from the beginning.

Where a project is being decommissioned, planning consent will not normally be required unless enabling works are needed. It is usually a requirement of the planning condition to decommission the turbines at the end of their operational life.

lives and have been decommissioned or repowered.

Some examples of good practice can be found in Cornwall where some of the earliest wind projects were built at Delabole⁵⁶ in 1991 and Goonhilly Downs⁵⁷ in 1993 and repowered in 2010 and 2009 respectively.

It is good practice to inform the local community of what will happen through the process of decommissioning, where this is taking place, as there will inevitably be impacts on the local people similar but to a lesser extent, to the construction phase.

Best practice includes:

Due to the young nature of the wind industry there are relatively few examples of where wind projects have reached the end of their

⁵⁶ Good Energy <http://www.goodenergy.co.uk/our-wind-and-solar-farms/delabole-wind-farm-redevelopment>

⁵⁷ REG Windpower <http://goonhilly.regwindpower.co.uk/>

Related documents

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RTPI
mediation of space · making of place



Planning Aid
England
Engaging Communities in Planning

Centre for Sustainable Energy



Vento Ludens Ltd and Docherty Consulting Ltd

