

## REPORT OF DIRECTOR OF PARK DIRECTION AND PLANNING

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### **SUBJECT: MINISTERIAL LETTER REGARDING COMMUNITY RENEWABLE ENERGY PROJECTS**

#### Purpose of Report

To bring to the attention of members the above letter and to explain what actions Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authority (PCNPA) planners will be taking.

#### Introduction

Carl Sargeant - The Minister for Housing and Regeneration wrote to all Local Authority Cabinet Members with responsibility for planning on 18<sup>th</sup> December 2013 (see appendix one).

#### Background

The Minister's letter sets out the Welsh Government's objective of seeking to promote community renewable energy projects. He is of the view that community groups and organisations may be unfamiliar with the planning system and may need help and support in navigating their way through the processes and requirements.

He suggests that there are a few practical ways in which local planning authorities can help and that early engagement is essential. He is keen for a pre-application service to be available. He also reminds planning authorities that in assessing planning applications for renewable energy projects, the economic and job creation benefits associated with any development should be fully factored in the decision making.

#### PCNPA Service

We currently offer a free pre-application service with guidance notes. We recommend that any developer, agent, landowner and potential planning applicant uses this service prior to their submission of a formal planning application. This service is advertised on the PCNPA website at:  
<http://www.pembrokeshirecoast.org.uk/default.asp?PID=286>

We aim to respond to these consultations within 30 days. This is so that we can ask other consultees for their response in an attempt to provide a comprehensive answer to the query covering all aspects which would be taken into account when considering a formal planning application.

Depending on the advice given, the applicant can amend their initial scheme and design or reconsider the principle of the proposal prior to the submission of a planning application.

With regard to community renewal proposals we could give these a priority and aim to respond within the shortest possible timescale and include a site visit for the scheme to be discussed with the planning officer who would ultimately be allocated the proposal should it come in as a formal planning application. Clearly this is only possible if staffing levels remain constant and workload capacity is available. Planning staff would be able to assist with explaining the development management process, the timescales involved and also what planning options are available to the community to pursue. They would also be able to point out that planning applications submitted by community councils attract a reduced planning application fee.

It is also proposed that the Community Councils are advised of the Minister's letter on community renewal energy and the PCNPA proactive approach to matter. This will then put the Community Council in a position to sign post any community renewal project groups and organisations to the PCNPA approach.

#### Financial considerations

No further financial implications over and above current budgets.

#### Risk considerations

On the assumption that there will not be an influx of these proposals, this proactive approach should not affect the quality of service offered to other planning applications. This will be kept under review.

#### Conclusion

With regard to the Minister's promotion of community renewable energy projects the PCNPA can provide a proactive service to support the community applicants through the planning process by:

- Advising the applicant to use the free pre-application service
- Dealing promptly and as a priority with such pre-application requests
- Offering a site visit and explanation of the planning service and process to the applicant
- Writing to all community councils within the National Park outlining the above

## **RECOMMENDATION:**

**That Members note the content of the Minister's letter and that they endorse the proactive approach of Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authority planners interacting with community groups with community renewal proposals as set out in the conclusion above.**

### Background Documents

Ministerial letter to all local planning authorities

*(For further information, please contact Jane Gibson, Director of Park Direction and Planning, 0845 345 7275)*

*Author: Jane Gibson Director of Park Direction and Planning*

*Consultees: Tegryn Jones, Vicki Hirst, Martina Dunne*

Carl Sargeant AC / AM  
Y Gweinidog Tai ac Adfywio  
Minister for Housing and Regeneration



Llywodraeth Cymru  
Welsh Government

Ein cyf/Our ref: SF/CS/4145/13

To All Local Authority Cabinet Members with  
Responsibility for Planning

18 December 2013

Dear Colleagues

In “Energy Wales” the Welsh Government has set in place an ambitious programme to facilitate the transition to a low carbon economy in a way that harnesses our natural assets and creates long term skilled employment in Wales. The work needed to deliver our ambitions cuts across many Government portfolios and involves a wide range of stakeholders. A key priority of “Energy Wales” is making sure that communities benefit from energy infrastructure developments. This objective underpins the Ynni'r Fro initiative, which supports local communities to develop renewable energy opportunities, and to reinvest the benefits of such developments locally.

In seeking to promote community renewable energy projects, I recognise that the planning system plays a crucial role and is fundamental to the deployment of community energy projects in Wales. I want a planning system that is transparent and consistent across Wales, and I have issued a draft Planning (Wales) Bill this month which sets out in more detail my vision for the future of the planning system in Wales. However, in addition, the local authorities should recognise that community groups and organisations who seek to promote renewable energy projects may require particular assistance in navigating their way through the planning system. Such groups or organisations may be unfamiliar with the technical processes and requirements of the planning system, and I expect local planning authorities to be as accommodating as possible when dealing with community projects.

There are a few practical ways in which local planning authorities can help and early engagement is often essential. In this context I would remind both local planning authorities and organisations promoting community led renewable energy projects of the guidance issued by the Welsh Government in 2012 to encourage pre-application discussions in order to help improve the quality of planning applications and the speed of decision making.

Our national planning policy, Planning Policy Wales, recognises the potential for communities and small businesses to invest in ownership of renewable energy projects or to develop their own projects for local benefit. The Welsh Government's policy is to support community driven renewable energy projects where benefits from the projects are returned to the host community.

In making their decisions on any renewable energy application I expect local planning authorities to conform to the legal requirement to take decisions in line with their development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. Furthermore, in assessing planning applications for renewable energy projects, the economic and job creation benefits associated with any development should be fully factored into, and given weight in, the decision making process as set out in Chapter 7 of Planning Policy Wales.

Planning decisions should be based on an assessment of the impacts of any proposed development irrespective of who the applicant is. However, by recognising the particular needs of community groups and organisations, and offering the opportunity for early engagement in the planning process, I hope that we will be able to realise our ambitions to see community owned renewable energy projects flourishing across Wales.

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Carl', written in a cursive style.

**Carl Sargeant AC / AM**  
Y Gweinidog Tai ac Adfywio  
Minister for Housing and Regeneration