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working locally and nationally to
protect and enhance a beautiful,
thriving countryside for everyone to
value and enjoy

CPRE OXFORDSHIRE POSITION PAPER ON RENEWABLE ENERGY

1. CPRE Oxfordshire believes that renewable energy is desirable in principle, but not at unacceptable cost to the countryside, or to the economy.
2. We will support renewables done well (subject to the specifics below on wind/solar/biomass):
 - 2.1 Renewable energy projects should prioritise the use of previously developed ('brownfield') land.
 - 2.2 Where greenfield sites are proposed, projects must:
 - Benefit the rural economy.
 - Be supported and/or owned by local communities.
 - Bring net benefits to wildlife.
 - Avoid/minimise loss of productive agricultural land.
 - Avoid/minimise impact on landscape, tranquillity and cultural heritage.
 - 2.3 The full life-time carbon costs of any project, including associated transport and infrastructure, should be assessed, noting that 'renewable' does not necessarily equal 'low carbon'.

Wind turbines

3. CPRE Oxfordshire will resist **wind** turbine development in the countryside, unless the visual harm in a particular case, due for example to the lie of the land, is so minimal that it is outweighed by the benefits.
4. This is because:
 - 4.1 **Wind** turbines are tall moving structures which inevitably have an impact over very large areas. The renewables industry itself accepts that even a medium sized turbine would be 'prominent' in the landscape over 675 square kilometres, equivalent to 26% of the total land area of the county. That does not include the miles of new power lines that may need to be installed to connect remote turbines to the National Grid.
 - 4.2 Apart from its important open countryside, Oxfordshire has a high percentage of designated land, including the Oxford Green Belt (approx. 13%) and three Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (approx. 25%). Once one also factors in conservation areas, Blenheim World Heritage Site, important listed buildings,

parks and gardens, and towns and villages of character, we believe that there is unlikely to be any location where the visual harm a turbine would cause would be acceptable.

- 4.3 Oxfordshire is an inland county with low wind speeds, making the benefit in terms of renewable energy insignificant in relation to the visual harm.

Solar farms

5. CPRE Oxfordshire is opposed to solar farms in the countryside for the damage they do to the landscape, particularly in Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs) and the Green Belt.
6. CPRE Oxfordshire will support relatively small discrete developments on the roofs of existing buildings, or in other sites where they are effectively concealed by existing development or the lie of the land, and do not involve the loss of land useful for agriculture, recreation or biodiversity.
7. This is because:
 - 7.1 We do not consider that the benefit they offer in terms of renewable energy is sufficient to offset the environmental harm they create or the otherwise useful land that is lost.
 - 7.2 Oxfordshire already has a significant number of solar farms¹, including what was, at the time of building, the UK's largest - the 46MW site at East Hanney.
 - 7.3 There is a readily available alternative in the form of using the roofs of existing buildings, especially warehouses. Well-designed solar technology should also be introduced as a mandatory part of building standards for new build houses.
 - 7.4 Landscape character - The scale and 'alien' appearance of solar farms are an obtrusive impact on the landscape and represent an unwelcome and inappropriate industrialisation of the countryside.
 - 7.5 Food security - the UK imports 40% of the food it consumes and this proportion is rising². As global food prices rise and food security becomes an increasingly important issue, agricultural land in England, even of lower grades, should not be misused by giving it over to inefficient renewable energy schemes.

Biomass

8. CPRE Oxfordshire opposes the development of biomass generators on greenfield sites and in open countryside, because of the size of the buildings involved, their industrial nature, and the vehicle movements related to them.

¹ See <https://www.mygridgb.co.uk/map/>

² Food Matters: Towards a strategy for the 21st Century

http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/+http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/strategy/work_areas/food_policy.aspx

9. We are also opposed to the landscape impacts of growing industrial scale biomass crops. Any growing of biofuel crops should not dominate the landscape and should be integrated into a mixed farming landscape.

Further considerations

10. Where developments are to be considered, the following issues and mitigation measures should be taken into account:

10.1 Visual impact upon the countryside

- i) **Siting** - The most unsuitable sites are on sloping land highly visible from the surrounding landscapes, or where there are sensitive landscape features, rights of way and/or significant heritage assets, particularly where these are in Green Belts or AONBs.
- ii) **Agricultural land** - renewable energy projects should not be located on useable agricultural land, in particular not the most productive Grade 1 and 2 land. Nor should they be on typically low grade hillside land where their impact would be greatest. The grade should be stated on any application.
- iii) **Screening** - Screening (and softening) in the form of hedges or tree belts may be appropriate to help reduce visual impact, providing it is in keeping with the local landscape character.
- iv) **Zone of Visual Impact** - Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment should be employed at the pre-application stage to describe local landform and key views. This should consider the potential for sun glint and glare at any properties or key landscapes and the impact on users' rights of way. Solar panels, or other infrastructure, should not detract from the local character of a settlement but remain both discrete and discreet.
- v) **Materials & additional infrastructure**
 - a) Solar panels should be coated in a non-reflecting material to minimise glare and visual impact, and be stipulated as a planning condition.
 - b) Bases should be easy to remove to permit restoration of the land.
 - c) Security fences should be of sympathetic design and screened as necessary.
 - d) Lighting features should be of sympathetic design and installed to eliminate light spill.
 - e) Pole mounted CCTV should be carefully considered to minimise visual impact.
- vi) **Building structures** - transformer stations and inverter cabinets etc should be unobtrusively sited and suitably shielded to minimise visual impact.
- vii) **Access roads** - roads and tracks should be kept to an absolute minimum.
- viii) **Grid connection** - proposals should set out clear assessments of the visual and environmental impact of grid connections, whether

overhead or underground, confirmed by the appropriate utility company.

10.2 Assessment of Impacts

Proposals should set out suitable assessments of impacts on biodiversity, hydrology, archaeology, landscape and possible cumulative effects. Transport assessment should consider access and vehicle movements during all stages of construction and development.

10.3 Restoring the site

Developments should be regarded as temporary. A legal agreement should be sought to ensure restoration of any relevant land to agricultural usage once the consent or use has terminated and a condition imposed that all equipment associated with the development is removed.