



Ein cyf/Our ref: SF/CS/2027/15

To: Planning Lead Members
cc. Chief Planning Officers

10 December 2015

Dear Colleague,

The Well-being of Future Generations Act places a duty on all of us to ensure that we move towards an innovative, productive and low carbon society which recognises the limits of the global environment and uses resources efficiently. In support of this I have recently outlined in my *Green Growth Wales: Local Energy* paper the actions which I will take to encourage the take-up of small and medium scale renewable and low carbon energy projects.

The Welsh Government's planning policies in Chapter 12 of Planning Policy Wales (PPW) concerning renewable energy developments, which were revised in 2011, explain how the planning system should support the transition to a low carbon society. PPW states that local planning authorities should facilitate the development of all forms of renewable and low carbon energy by considering the contribution that their area can make; creating development plan policies that enable this contribution to be delivered; and ensuring that development management decisions are consistent with national and international climate change obligations, including contributions to renewable energy targets and aspirations.

I am pleased that, since the publication of our 'Renewable Energy Toolkit for Planners' in 2010, many local planning authorities have undertaken Renewable Energy Assessments (REAs) as part of the Local Development Plan (LDP) evidence base. However, it is disappointing to note that no LDP in Wales has taken the results of the REA and formulated local policies (including allocations or areas of search) for local-authority scale (5MW – 25MW) renewable energy schemes or other low carbon technologies.

The designation of such areas would show leadership at the local level; give certainty to the renewable energy industry in making investment decisions; and, through the LDP consultation process, would give communities a say as to where renewable energy developments should be located. By designating these areas, developments can be guided to the most appropriate locations. This approach has been taken by the Welsh Government for large scale wind energy projects through the Strategic Search Areas (SSAs) in TAN8. I expect local planning authorities to take the same, proactive approach for all forms of renewable and low carbon energy generation.

The Welsh Government has recently published a revised version of the Renewable Energy Toolkit for Planners. This toolkit has been updated and includes a new section for local planning authorities (LPAs) to assess the potential for solar farm developments in their areas. This methodology, coupled with the extensive landscape assessments already produced as part of the LDP evidence base, can be used to identify in Development Plans policies for renewable energy developments. These areas can be informed by local priorities for renewable energy and the deliverability of schemes in consultation with landowners and the renewable energy industry whom I also expect to engage in the process to identify the most appropriate sites.

The revised toolkit provides advice on how the translation between evidence and policies should be achieved. I have asked my officials to pay particular attention to this issue when LDPs are passed to the Welsh Government for comment.

In relation to TAN8, I would remind you, in refining the boundaries of the SSAs in LDPs, of the need to ensure that the capacities for the whole of the area are met. Once refined locally in an LDP wind farms outside the boundary of an LDP SSA will not count towards the overall SSA capacities. LPAs should therefore take care to ensure that locally refined boundaries are drawn correctly and take into account known or existing wind farms.

It is imperative that the planning system identifies and protects areas with renewable energy generation potential for the long term, irrespective of any short term decisions on financial support and regulatory regimes which are being taken by the UK Government.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading 'Carl Sargeant'.

Carl Sargeant AC / AM
Y Gweinidog Cyfoeth Naturiol
Minister for Natural Resources