

Introduction |

The UK has the best wind resource in Europe. Studies show that with careful choice of location and appropriate scale, wind energy has good potential in the south west for both generating energy and creating local skills and employment. With increasing interest amongst local authorities in using renewable energy, wind energy can provide a solution for local authorities to generate all of their electricity from local renewable energy sources. A number of wind energy developers offer to work in partnership with local authorities to develop wind energy projects on their land. This can provide local authorities with a zero capital cost option to meet most or all of their electricity demand using local renewable energy. Surveys have shown overall community support for wind power and the publication of the South West Public Engagement Protocol for wind energy steers local authorities through to the process of engaging with local communities over locally generated wind power.

This case study shows how Somerset County council is working to develop wind power on its farm holdings. It describes its approach and the process it is following to deliver the project, including the critical issue of working with a private sector partner.

Local Authority role |

The Somerset Wind Energy Initiative proposed the development of wind turbines on the County Council's farm estate. The proposal was adopted by the Executive Board of Somerset County Council in April 2004.

Context |

Somerset County Council through its Renewable Energy Strategy has set sub-regional targets for the generation of renewable electricity of between 11 and 15% by 2010. In this context, the County Council has considered its farm estate, and the potential for increasing their community value by including wind generation as a part of their operation. The council has also considered opportunities for developing community wind energy, local and rural, whereby part ownership in a local wind turbine would generate electricity for purchase by the community.

Process/partners |

The Somerset Wind Energy Initiative put forward proposals for appropriately locating wind turbines on the County Council's land holding. This was adopted by the Executive Board. Following this, the County Council's Legal Services, Property Services and the Corporate Procurement Team, with legal consultants have been employed to develop the legal documentation needed in order to take the process forward. Commercial advice has also been sought on the terms for development on County Council owned land.

Given the scale and nature of the County farm land holdings it has been decided to limit the size of individual turbines to 1.3MW - 1.8MW output and that the total capacity on the entire landholding shall not exceed 12MW, subject to suitability.



Regen SW has developed public consultation procedures for wind energy developments (laid out in the South West Public Engagement Protocol for wind energy). Somerset County Council has signed up to the protocol and will use these procedures for a wide-ranging public consultation exercise, the cost of which will be met from existing budgets. This will be carried out before key decisions are taken.

Tenants already on County Council farms have been informed of the next phase of the Somerset Wind Initiative, and have been sent a document to advise them about wind energy and the effects of turbine installation.

The next phase of the initiative has been a four-month process, selecting a wind energy developer, whose role it will be to provide information to the council on which sites would be best suited for turbines. This selection is scheduled for early in 2007.

The Council has provided a list of potential sites and the successful bidder will identify viable sites, taking into consideration key factors including wind speed, distances from homes, highways access and connection to the National Grid. The Council will choose a maximum of six short-listed sites. It is expected that this process will eliminate much of the County Council's farm estate, and that only a small number will have potential for turbines.

The County Council will lead a consultation exercise with the communities immediately surrounding the sites identified with potential for commercial wind development. These consultations will include discussion of the potential local impacts and the potential for community ownership. The developer will carry out further feasibility studies and provide information to assist the consultation process. The County Council will then recommend to the developer which of its sites are most suitable for wind development. The developer will then submit a planning application to the local planning authority.

Once permission is granted and all other matters agreed, the developer would install and operate the wind turbine(s).

Project/spin-offs |

The Carbon Trust has established a programme to encourage this form of private sector partnership approach to renewable energy called the "Partnership for Renewables Programme". Further details are available from the Carbon Trust website (see contacts section).

Change to working patterns/partnerships |

The Council is taking a proactive approach to the appropriate development of wind energy by considering wind energy on its own land. Through this project Somerset County Council will establish a new private sector partnership to deliver wind energy, giving them access to the expertise and finance that can make the project happen. This kind of approach can help local authorities to steer the appropriate development of local renewable energy in a much more direct way than simply setting the planning framework for private developers.



Contact, sources of advice |

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South West Public Engagement Protocol and Guidance for Wind Energy www.regensw.co.uk/press/docs-info.asp

Partnership for Renewables Programme, the Carbon Trust
www.carbontrust.co.uk/commercial/enterprises/pfr.htm

Environmental information:

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