

Policy Guidance Note

Energy

CPRE's position

1. Climate change is the most urgent and complex environmental issue we face today. The impact of both energy generation and use on the countryside and the climate is growing. CPRE believes the Government should prioritise measures to reduce energy demand, encourage energy efficiency and promote a wider range of renewable technologies. Because a large proportion of the UK's carbon dioxide emissions arise from the energy supply industry, ensuring that new energy generation is lower carbon is essential.

Key energy issues

2. To help avert the worst effects of climate change (in the UK - more extreme weather events, higher temperatures, heavier rainfall and greater flooding), the Government has established a target under the Climate Change Act 2008 to reduce greenhouse gas emissions (mainly CO₂) by 80% before 2050. We support this target, and recognise that measures to reduce emissions will need to take a variety of forms. This will include reducing our overall demand for energy, generating more power from renewables, and - if the technology is proven - restricting emissions from conventional power stations through carbon capture and storage. A new international agreement on climate change, due to be agreed at the UN climate summit in Paris before the end of 2015, is likely to increase pressure for action to tackle carbon emissions.

3. We also support Government aims to generate 15% of our energy from renewable sources by 2020, a measure designed to increase energy security and reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Renewable energy accounted for just under a fifth of electricity generation and seven per cent of overall energy demand in the UK in 2014. While energy security is an important consideration, it's wrong to focus the debate primarily on the supply side.

4. Much stronger measures are needed to curb the growth in energy demand, encourage energy efficiency and promote a wider range of renewable technologies, including through effective use of the planning system. Demand-side measures will help reduce the pressure for both new nuclear or fossil fuel plant, as well as for renewable energy infrastructure.

Key energy issues for the countryside

5. Rural communities face higher than average energy costs and lower than average energy efficiency of homes and other buildings. It is therefore vital that there is much greater action to improve the energy efficiency of buildings in these communities.

6. Energy production affects the countryside through its impacts on landscape, tranquillity, character and capacity to deliver other environmental goods such as food, clean water and functional habitats.

7. Open-cast coal mining, large power stations and overhead power lines spoil the beauty of landscapes and the tranquillity of the countryside. Inappropriately sited energy infrastructure, including for renewable or non-renewable generation, can also damage the landscape. We are concerned that Government policy needs to take sufficient account of the negative effects which energy infrastructure can have on the countryside. Climate change will also alter the character of the countryside as we know it, although we don't know precisely how.

8. Energy production affects the ability of the countryside to deliver other environmental goods. For example, an increase in the use of agricultural land for energy crops may impact on food production. Fertiliser and pesticide use for bioenergy crops may also affect water quality and habitats.

What CPRE wants

9. The following are the key changes CPRE would like to see:

- Low-carbon development should be a planning objective: all new housing and commercial development should be low carbon, highly energy efficient and reduce the need to travel.
- The Government to encourage broad local conversations about what communities want from their energy system and allow them to lead on developing solutions appropriate for their areas.
- To underpin a more-productive approach and help secure the resulting wide range of benefits, the Government should: 1) set an aim to improve energy system productivity year-on-year in line with competitor countries like Germany; 2) make home energy efficiency a national infrastructure priority and developing an overarching strategy with ambitious targets; and 3) establish clear policy and regulatory framework to secure high energy productivity for key sectors such as electricity generators, networks and businesses.
- Small scale, affordable technologies, such as solar water heating, wood fuel boilers, heat pumps, anaerobic digestion and micro-hydro to be encouraged, including through community energy approaches, which we hope will become more commonplace.
- Local transmission of heat and electricity to reduce energy loss and the landscape impacts of overhead transmission lines.
- Better policies to encourage a wider range of appropriately scaled and sited renewable technologies, including rooftop and building-integrated solar photovoltaics, and offshore wind.
- More power lines buried underground or routed offshore to avoid damaging impacts on the landscape.
- Shale gas and oil should not damage the tranquillity and character of the countryside; should use natural resources sustainably, including water, and avoid pollution; and should not undermine the UK's climate change commitments and ambitions.
- Reform of taxes and road charges for vehicles to promote energy efficient transport and secure more funding for smarter travel.
- Acceptable, long-term solutions to the safe storage and disposal of nuclear waste before new power stations – which should be restricted to existing developed sites – are built.

What people can do

10. To help us move towards a more-sustainable approach to our energy system you can:

- Examine your own energy consumption. Make energy savings at home, at work and in your choice of travel wherever possible.
- Press for local planning policies to require low-carbon development, existing buildings that are more energy efficient and support small-scale renewable technologies.
- Explore community energy approaches.

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For further information about CPRE's campaigns and copies of other policy papers, visit: www.cpre.org.uk, email: info@cpre.org.uk or call: 020 7981 2800.