

## MID SUFFOLK DISTRICT COUNCIL

<b>TO:</b> Council	<b>REPORT NUMBER:</b> <b>MC/23/20</b>
<b>FROM:</b> Cabinet Member for Heritage, Planning and Infrastructure	<b>DATE OF MEETING:</b> 26 October 2023
<b>OFFICER:</b> Tom Barker, Director Planning & Building Control	<b>KEY DECISION REF NO.</b> N/A

### SOLAR AND LOW CARBON ENERGY POSITION STATEMENT

#### 1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To set out the Council's position on renewable and low carbon energy developments that are considered through planning applications determined by the Councils, and those applications where the Councils are a consultee, for example in the case of Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects (NSIPs).

#### 2. OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 2.1 To set out what the Council would like to see achieved relating to some aspects of renewable and low carbon energy development in our Districts, alongside the requirements of policy LP25, through a position statement.
- 2.2 To allow the Councils planning policies to 'speak for themselves'.
- 2.3 To produce a solar and low carbon energy Supplementary Planning Document (SPD).
- 2.4 It is considered that for purposes of speed and expediency that a position statement will set out the Councils position and expectations. An SPD is proposed in the Local Development Scheme but cannot be delivered as quickly as this position statement. It should be remembered that this will not be able to 'go beyond' policy requirements.

#### 3. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 That the Solar and Low Carbon Energy Position Statement set out at Appendix A be adopted and published on the Councils website.
- 3.2 That the Director of Planning and Building Control, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Planning, be authorised to make any minor amendments as necessary.

#### REASON FOR DECISION

The Position Statement will provide clarity to those looking to make applications and those looking to respond to applications by setting out clearly what the Councils would like to see happen.

## **4. KEY INFORMATION**

- 4.1 Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils are part of the Suffolk Climate Change Partnership (SCCP) and both Councils have acknowledged and declared climate emergencies and developed Carbon Reduction Management Plans with a commitment to achieve net zero in their operations by 2030.
- 4.2 National policy clearly sets out measures to reduce greenhouse gas emissions with policies that seek to encourage renewable energy developments where they are acceptable.
- 4.3 Applications for low carbon energy generation have been a planning matter for many years. The nature and scale of development has, however, been increasing.
- 4.4 In July 2023, the leader of Mid Suffolk District Council called on the Government to provide a clear national framework for the development of solar farms.
- 4.5 Speaking at the Local Government Association Conference in Bournemouth, he spoke of the difficulties councils and communities faced - particularly around large-scale solar farm applications.
- 4.6 Addressing climate change is vital. Protecting agricultural land is important. Safeguarding landscape value is essential. Working with our communities is a key strategic priority. Balancing all of these things is difficult.
- 4.7 Development plan policy will be set out in Policy LP25 of the Babergh and Mid Suffolk Joint Local Plan Part 1 on Energy Sources, Storage and Distribution. The Policy sets out the Councils' position for the determination of planning applications for these types of development. At the time of writing, the Joint Local Plan Part 1 is anticipated to be adopted in November 2023.
- 4.8 Whilst there are other material planning considerations, the position statement focuses on the following issues:

The loss of best and most versatile agricultural land;

The potential harm to the diverse character of the landscape; and

Concerns and fears being expressed by some of our communities about harmful impacts.

## **5. LINKS TO CORPORATE PLAN**

- 5.1 The Position Statement links mostly closely to strategic priorities related to the environment, communities, wellbeing and the economy.

## **6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

There are no immediate financial implications related directly to this report or the position statement itself.

## **7. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

7.1 The position statement does not form part of the development plan but having been adopted by the Council it would be one (of many) material considerations. It will be important that any decisions taken on planning applications go through the proper balancing exercise as part of their consideration.

## **8. RISK MANAGEMENT**

8.1 There are no key risks associated with the publication of the Solar and Low Carbon Energy Position Statement.

## **9. CONSULTATIONS**

9.1 The position statement has been discussed with elected members through Cabinet Member Briefings and Joint Cabinet Briefing.

## **10. EQUALITY ANALYSIS**

10.1 If Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) not required. There are no equality and diversity implications arising directly from Solar and Low Carbon Energy Position Statement.

## **11. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS**

11.1 There are no direct environmental implications arising from this report.

## **12. APPENDICES**

Title	Location
(a) Solar and Low Carbon Energy Position statement	Attached

## **13. BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS**

13.1 None.

## **14. REPORT AUTHORS**

14.1 Tom Barker - Director Planning & Building Control

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