

COUNCIL PROCEDURE RULE 14

QUESTIONS BY MEMBERS

Councillor Crookes asked:

The NPPF contains the following paragraph.

151. To help increase the use and supply of renewable and low carbon energy and heat, plans should:

a) provide a positive strategy for energy from these sources, that maximises the potential for suitable development, while ensuring that adverse impacts are addressed satisfactorily (including cumulative landscape and visual impacts);

b) consider identifying suitable areas for renewable and low carbon energy sources, and supporting infrastructure, where this would help secure their development; and

c) identify opportunities for development to draw its energy supply from decentralised, renewable, or low carbon energy supply systems and for co-locating potential heat customers and suppliers.

Will the Executive Member take immediate steps to update Hart's Local Plan to incorporate these policies in order to enable appropriate renewable energy projects but at the same time protect valuable landscapes and quality agricultural land?

Councillor Cockarill responded:

The Hart Local Plan contains an up-to-date policy on Renewable and Low Carbon Energy - Policy NBE10. This was found sound at examination against the old NPPF but is also consistent with the new NPPF. The Policy ensures that when proposals come in, the relevant planning considerations are taken into account. Impacts on landscape and high-grade agricultural land are explicitly referred to within the Policy.

The Local Plan cross refers to an Energy Opportunities Plan which identifies the opportunities in Hart for renewable energy generation - solar, wind, biomass etc. (paras. 307 and 308 of the Local Plan).

The supporting text (Para 310 of the Local Plan) encourages decentralised energy networks with major new developments. In practice this is only practical on large, strategic developments such as new settlements so it's more relevant to the next Local Plan.

The NPPF does indeed suggest that councils should consider identifying sites for renewable energy installations. When Hart either revises its current Local Plan, or begins work on a new one, that would be the most appropriate time to look at this issue, but it would be for a future Council to decide whether any sites should be identified in a revised or new Local Plan.

Councillor Crookes asked a supplementary question:

Is he therefore confident, given the policies that we have for the plan, that we have appropriate policies in order to be able to protect 2 key aspects against valuable landscapes and good quality agricultural land and the key thing which I can't see out of the plan is the cumulative impact of nearly adjacent solar farm applications which is going to become a very important issue in the very near future?

Councillor Cockarill responded:

The answer is yes, I think this policy does give us the opportunity to balance planning applications properly between their environmental benefits and any potential harms they might have, in terms of the cumulative aspect although each planning application is always judged on its merits, you will be aware that in several situations, the cumulative impact of developments of any kind can be taken into account when judging that planning balance and ultimately it is up to the council to judge that planning balance as it sees fit. So yes, I do believe the current policy is fit for purpose as it currently stands.