



Belfast City Council

Report to:	Development Committee
Subject:	Consultation - Barriers to Renewable Energy
Date:	11 August 2010
Reporting Officer:	John McGrillen, Director of Development, ext 3470
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Relevant Background Information

The Northern Ireland Assembly Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment has announced that renewable energy will be the subject of an enquiry. In particular the NIACETI wishes to examine the barriers to renewable energy production and its associated potential contribution to the Northern Ireland economy.

Specific issues the enquiry will consider include:

- the current mechanisms at national, regional and local level to support and assist renewable energy production.
- comparisons between the mechanisms for support and assistance in NI and those in other EU member states that are considered to be at the forefront of renewable energy.
- the support and assistance available to SMEs in the renewable energy sector to develop renewable energy technologies.
- the support and assistance available to SMEs in the renewable energy sector to grow and develop their business.
- the appropriateness of current mechanism to develop and grow both local renewable energy markets and export markets.
- assessing which EU member states are considered to be in the forefront of renewable energy development both overall and for each type of renewable energy.

- Unfortunately, the Department was only asked to respond to the consultation on the 29 June 2010 and the closing date for replies was Sunday 8 August 2010. Therefore a provisional response was sent with a note that the response had not been ratified by our Committee due to the short timescales.

Key Issues

The provisional response sent is shown below:

Barriers to Renewable Energy Production – NI Assembly Task Force Consultation

Please find below our comments in response to your invitation to discuss barriers to renewable energy production. Most of the information in this response has come from our North Foreshore Project Manager (who is responsible for the Council's existing renewable electricity facilities) and our Planning team. Reference has also been made to an early consultation response to the Department of Environment Consultation on Permitted Development Rights, which included a section on Microgeneration (e.g. wind turbines, solar panels). That response was informed by our Environmental Services Department and was approved by the Council's Town Planning Committee on 3rd December 2009. It is available online if required.

Please also note that the views expressed in this response are pending ratification by the Development Committee on the 11th August 2010. Unfortunately, the timescales and the timing of this consultation have made it impossible to submit a ratified response.

Provisional Response

Belfast City Council is making a significant contribution to non-wind renewable energy production. The Council developed the Landfill Gas Electricity Power Plant to utilise the methane gas at the North Foreshore Giant's Park, the former Dargan Road Waste Landfill site. Our landfill gas powered generating facility produces 5 megawatts of green electricity per hour sufficient to power 6,000 homes. However landfill gas is not sustainable, as the methane gas supply will progressively decline over a 15 – 20 year period. Alternative sources of renewable energy must be found.

Anaerobic digestion (AD) is the solution but this is new to NI and as yet there are no commercial facilities in operation. The AD process produces methane gas which can be used for the production of renewable energy and heat. Questor and others have carried out extensive research into A.D. technology and this is an opportune time to develop AD facilities in NI.

A major difficulty for potential operators is the identification of suitable sites and obtaining satisfactory planning consent for AD and other forms of renewable energy production, such as Energy from Waste. As shown at the end of this paper, the Council's own planning unit and committee have concerns about the potential noise, vibration and visual impact of renewable technologies when they are sited near domestic areas.

The B9 a private sector company has spent 2/3 years in the planning process to secure planning consent for a proposed AD facility in Dungannon. If the Assembly Committee is to encourage renewable energy generation, planning consent must be made easier to obtain and the planning process speeded up. Delays of 2/3 years are not acceptable

or economically attractive to commercial operators or their funders.

Therefore there is a need to change the perception of renewable energy production facilities and educate those involved in the decision making and development process, not least the Planning Service and NIEA. Also there is a need to educate the public about modern renewable energy facilities, and the importance of guaranteeing energy security for NI. We encourage visitors to our North Foreshore facilities to help this education process.

The North Foreshore Giant's Park site is unique as the only site in Draft Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan with a statutory waste management zoning. This should help to make it easier to secure planning consent for AD and EfW Facilities. Currently we are investigating the potential of promoting a site for a commercially operated AD facility at the North Foreshore Giant's Park. The project would have synergies for the Council's Landfill Gas Electricity Generation Power Plant as we have the generation capacity and the electrical infrastructure to export renewable energy from the site.

It is suggested that future statutory local area development plans should designate suitable sites for renewable energy generation. This would help to speed up the development of renewable energy facilities in NI, assisting commercial decision making and investment.

ROCs and LECs are available for AD biogas powered electricity generation and are currently at 2 ROCs per MWhr of electricity generated. The Committee will need to determine if this level of support is sufficient to encourage biogas production for electricity generation.

Connection to the local electricity grid is another major barrier due to the significant set up costs involved. Electrical infrastructure to export the renewable energy at the North Foreshore Giant's Park cost the Council circa £2.5 million. Are there ways in which this could be reduced e.g. capping the NIE connection fee?

It is suggested that clustering renewable energy facilities would maximise the use and efficiency of electrical infrastructure. In particular the new non wind renewable energy facilities such as AD and EfW are clean processes that could be located within settlement areas on brownfield industrial sites.

Electricity generation facilities also usually produce large quantities of heat, which can be captured and used in production processes or for a district heating facility. The Committee should consider the introduction of Renewable Heat Incentives to NI to encourage operators to install heat exchangers and pipe network to make productive use of the waste heat. Again consideration needs to be given to clustering businesses / houses close to renewable energy facilities to minimise the cost of the pipe network.

Summary of our previous Comments regarding planning permission

In terms of planning permission for non-domestic microgeneration facilities they need to be considered in terms of the impacts they may have on adjacent properties, particularly residential properties. The Council views issues around noise, vibration and visual impacts as key considerations.

The Council is concerned that the risk of adverse impacts from renewable energy technologies such as wind turbines is too great, in some instances, to allow for no consideration in the form of a planning application. The Council would encourage increased usage of such technology but a full assessment of impacts is necessary. The baseline taken is that non-domestic microgeneration PD will be at least on a par with

the provisions for dwelling houses.

The proposed changes will bring Northern Ireland permitted development rights closer in line with those in other UK jurisdictions.

Resource Implications

There are no resource costs associated with this consultation response.

Recommendations

The Committee is asked to :

- Approve the basic content and structure of the provisional consultation response and;
- To suggest additional comments or changes to include in the ratified response to the NIACETI.

Decision Tracking

Subject to approval, a ratified response, including any requested amendments will be returned to the NIACETI by the 16 August 2010.

Timeframe: 16 August 2010

Reporting Officer: Barbary Cook