

## **MALVERN HILLS AONB JOINT ADVISORY COMMITTEE 10 NOVEMBER 2023**

### **POSITION STATEMENTS: POSITION STATEMENT: RENEWABLE ENERGY IN THE MALVERN HILLS AONB AND ITS SETTING**

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#### **Recommendation**

##### **1. The Committee is recommended to:**

- a) **Discuss, amend (if necessary) and endorse the ‘Renewable Energy in the Malvern Hills AONB and its Setting’ Position Statement, as a consultation draft;**
- b) **Agree that if future amendments are required, as necessary, that these can be made by Malvern Hills AONB Unit Staff, unless materially significant in which case they would be brought back to the Committee for further consideration; and**
- c) **Agree a formal review date of the position statement to take place every five years unless otherwise agreed.**

#### **Background**

2. Position Statements intend to establish the position of the Malvern Hills AONB Partnership on key issues affecting the area, helping guide the Partnership and relevant planning bodies and decision-makers to articulate how the AONB designation can be conserved and enhanced. They also seek to help to deliver and uphold the objectives and policies contained within the Malvern Hills AONB Management Plan, itself a statutory document and a material consideration in planning decision-making.
3. Position statements are stand-alone documents which set out the position (framed in terms of recommendations) and provide some brief context explaining why the Partnership is taking this position. The adoption of Position Statements has become increasingly commonplace across several Nationally Protected Landscapes.
4. The position statement provides further context, guidance and recommendations in relation to specific Management Plan policies and associated issues. They do not create new policies and will sit alongside the already widely published Guidance by the Partnership.

## Renewable Energy Position Statement

5. Climate change has been described as the biggest threat to humanity and is one of the greatest threats to biodiversity. We need to urgently take steps to mitigate and adapt to the impacts of climate change. Renewable energy sources will play an important role in mitigating the impacts of climate change and progressing towards Net Zero within the Malvern Hills AONB and its setting.
6. This draft Renewable Energy Position Statement seeks to expand on the AONB Management Plan by providing guidance and recommendations on how we can plan positively for renewable energy provision within the Malvern Hills AONB and its setting.
7. The position statement identifies six main types of renewable energy:
  - heat pumps;
  - biomass;
  - hydropower;
  - solar energy;
  - wind energy; and
  - battery storage.
8. In summary and in principle, the recommendations advise that the Partnership would be supportive of all of these forms of renewable energy at a micro-scale (i.e. less than 0.5ha), provided relevant considerations have been adequately addressed. Small-scale forms of renewable energy (between 0.5ha-5ha), should be considered on a case-by-case basis with relevant landscape and visual considerations particularly relevant. Large-scale forms of renewable energy are, as a whole, unlikely to be compatible with the statutory purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs), such as the Malvern Hills.
9. With regards to biomass, we would be particularly supportive of small-scale wood fuel schemes that use timber from sustainably managed woodlands within the AONB.
10. With regards to solar energy, we would be particularly supportive of rooftop solar panels, especially on contemporary, industrial, business park and agricultural buildings that can provide relatively large-scale, rooftop schemes.
11. For renewable energy proposals within the AONB that are classed as major development (as per Paragraph 177 of the National Planning Policy Framework), consideration should be given to whether exceptional circumstances apply that would justify permission being granted for such schemes, particularly in the context of the climate emergency. This again would need to be assessed on a case-by-case basis.

12. It is important to note that this Renewable Energy Position Statement is a 'live' document, which will be updated to reflect changes in national policy and renewable energy technology.
13. The Position Statement is aimed at a wide range of stakeholders who are involved in renewable energy provision in the AONB and its setting, recognising that in recent months, there have been a number of EIA Screening applications which have been submitted for renewable energy development particularly in the setting of the Malvern Hills AONB.

## **Consultation**

14. It is intended that the draft Position Statement be published for wider consultation with relevant stakeholders and interested parties. This primarily includes the local planning authorities which overlap with the Malvern Hills AONB, and particularly the forward/strategic planning, neighbourhood planning and development management teams of these three local authorities. It is also intended that the position statements are sent/published to the National Association for AONBs for further technical guidance and constructive input, as well as elected members, town and parish councils and relevant agencies and partners of the AONB Partnership.
15. The consultation is expected to be an eight-week period to commence as soon as reasonably possible following the meeting, should the draft position statement be endorsed.

## **On-going Review**

16. If amendments to Position Statements are needed to be made, primarily as a result of a change in legislation, such as updates to Planning Policy i.e. a revised National Planning Policy Framework that may necessitate updates to paragraph numbers, it is hoped that the committee are happy that these aspects e.g. nonmaterial amendments can be made by the AONB Unit, to ensure that the Position Statements do not become 'out-of-date' in terms of the planning framework that the documents fall within.
17. An intended formal review date of five years is currently envisaged for the position statement although this may be shortened or lengthened, as appropriate, with formally reviewed position statements presented to this committee for endorsement when the time comes.
18. The position statement will be beneficial as part of training sessions/presentations with elected members as well as Strategic, Neighbourhood Planning and Development Management Officers in local authorities. The position statements will also be referred to by the AONB Unit

as part of representations to development management and strategic planning consultations.

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