



Worcestershire
County Council

Renewable Energy Strategy

Foreword

“Worcestershire County Council has a proud history of taking action to reduce our impact on the environment, and supporting our communities and businesses to do the same. One of the greatest challenges we all face is ensuring a reliable and affordable supply of energy, and making sure that the energy we do use is from the least damaging sources.

Investing in renewable energy doesn't just help the planet; it can make sound financial sense, too. The less money we spend on energy, the more we can save for crucial local services. Using the resources on our doorstep means we can avoid importing so much gas and electricity from distant power stations and take control of our own energy production.

Not every energy technology will be suitable in every part of Worcestershire, and it's important that we continue to protect what makes our county so special. But the right type of renewable energy in the right place not only contributes to carbon reduction targets, but also brings new income and new jobs, and puts Worcestershire on the map as a forward-thinking place where green investment is welcomed.

This strategy sets out, in simple terms, our broad ambitions to see more renewables in the county, and to see the county council playing a key role in making the best use of its own resources to support our green goals. ”



Anthony Blagg

Councillor Anthony Blagg, Cabinet Member for the Environment.

The opportunity

Worcestershire County Council's (WCC) leadership can help to ensure that the environmental, social and economic benefits of renewable energy are captured for Worcestershire's residents and businesses. Direct WCC investment could provide multi-million pound revenues over 20 years, helping to protect front-line services.

WCC intends to make best use of its own estate to realise these opportunities. Developing renewable energy schemes on its extensive portfolio of land and buildings would not only bring in new revenue, but could demonstrate the council's commitment to green technology and to tackling climate change.

What is renewable energy?

For the purposes of this strategy, renewable energy is energy derived from hydro-power, wind turbines, biomass¹, solar photovoltaic panels and geothermal energy. A companion document to this Strategy, the WCC Renewable Energy Research Paper, provides information on these technologies and their social, environmental and economic impacts.

What does this strategy do?

This strategy sets an overarching policy for how WCC will use its resources to promote and develop its own renewable energy schemes, and sets out the role that WCC can play in supporting appropriate renewables development more generally. It focuses primarily on those actions and influences within WCC's control, but recognises that some options will require cooperation between partners.

This strategy sits alongside a guidance document on the benefits and impacts of larger-scale renewable energy, available at www.worcestershire.gov.uk/planning.

This strategy will be reviewed as necessary to reflect regulatory or financial changes, and to ensure consistency with relevant national and WCC policy.

What will success look like?

Successful implementation of this strategy will mean more renewable energy installations within Worcestershire. This will necessarily mean changes to the natural and historic environment and to the appearance of land and buildings, as well as other changes resulting from new development.

¹ Biomass includes virgin wood from forestry, arboricultural activities or from wood processing; energy crops; agricultural residues; food waste; and industrial waste and co-products from manufacturing and industrial processes. Source: www.biomassenergycentre.org.uk.

Drivers

➤ A need for more energy from more sources

Worcestershire is dependent on centralised power generation to meet its electricity needs, but as older plant closes down, there is an increasing need to ensure there is sufficient generation to meet our needs. The National Grid's Winter Outlook 2014/15 recently stated that "*electricity margins are tighter than they have been for a number of years*", and appropriate dispersed generation can help to stabilise the balance between supply and demand.

➤ Ever-increasing heating and lighting costs

WCC's annual electricity and gas costs are almost £6 million, and continual increases threaten to stretch reduced budgets further still; WCC's Corporate Plan recognises that efficiencies in council spending can be undermined by rising utility bills, stating that "*some savings have been offset by inflationary pressures such as raw material and energy costs*". Investing in renewables could help to safeguard service delivery by insulating the council against further price rises.

➤ Investment opportunities offered by renewables

Government-set tariff payments for renewable energy can typically be expected to provide a guaranteed, index-linked income for a 20 year period. WCC is well-placed, with access to low-cost capital and a long-term view of investment, to identify profitable schemes. As an energy producer, the council could also benefit from any increases in wholesale prices, if it chose to sell the energy produced from its own generation.

➤ Greater community awareness of energy options

WCC, in partnership with others, can support its economy and communities through a pro-active approach to renewable energy. The council continues to develop in-kind support and guidance to help communities and businesses save money and realise their green goals.

➤ A need to protect our environment

As one of WCC's four corporate priorities, the council has a commitment to enhance the county's high-quality environment, including taking action to reduce carbon emissions. Renewable energy can play a valuable role in making this happen.

Aims

1. INCREASE RENEWABLE ENERGY GENERATION IN WORCESTERSHIRE
2. SECURE NEW INCOME STREAMS FOR WORCESTERSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL
3. IMPROVE WORCESTERSHIRE'S ENERGY SECURITY
4. REDUCE CARBON EMISSIONS

Objectives

The following objectives represent the main steps that will be needed to achieve this strategy's aims. A more detailed breakdown of the objectives, including targets, timescales and resource implications, will be developed in a delivery plan to accompany this strategy.

- a) Deliver WCC schemes that satisfy WCC social, environmental and economic policies and that demonstrate an acceptable balance between risk and return.
- b) Support communities to develop renewable energy schemes, through guidance and capacity building, as part of a broad approach including energy efficiency, collective purchase, and demand management.
- c) Manage sites through their life to ensure sensitive operation.
- d) Build relationships with other local authorities with expertise in renewable energy.
- e) Explore the economic opportunities for WCC arising from joined-up working between public sector organisations, including through the 'Place Partnership' joint asset management initiative.

How will the impacts be addressed?

Any major renewable energy scheme will need to gain planning permission, and as such it must satisfy the relevant local and national policy. WCC is committed to an honest and open dialogue with communities over the impacts of schemes, and will seek to engage positively with local communities before any planning applications are submitted. Where relevant, applications will be accompanied by specialist assessments of their impacts, including on landscape and ecology.

How does this fit in with planning?

This strategy is non-statutory and does not constitute part of the formal 'development plan' that is the first port of call when determining planning applications. However, once adopted, it may be a material consideration that could be drawn upon in such decision making, where relevant. It guides WCC's own approach to renewable energy and supports the aims of the Corporate Plan. Most schemes beyond the small scale (typically building-mounted) will need planning permission from either the county or district council; these applications will be judged against relevant national and local planning policy.

How does this fit with other WCC policy?

WCC has a long-established track record of environmental success, and the following policies demonstrate how - either alone or as a member of wider partnerships - a strengthened approach to renewable energy can help deliver the council's policy commitments.

WCC's [Corporate Plan Refresh 2013-17](#) sets out a clear commitment to maximise environmental assets to deliver sustainable economic growth and calls for *"a clear and consistent approach to the use and application of renewable energy in the county"*. Increasing renewable energy will contribute to the corporate success measure of the *"amount of renewable and low carbon energy generated in the county"*.

WCC's [Carbon Management Plan](#) sets an ambitious target to reduce the council's 2009/10 CO₂ emissions by 30% by 2016, noting that *"anything we do now to increase energy efficiency or to invest in renewable energy technologies, will significantly reduce our energy costs into the future"*. One of the Plan's key objectives is to *"develop renewable energy generation, where possible and affordable, to reduce our dependence upon the National Grid"*.

WCC's adopted [Waste Core Strategy](#), which is part of the Development Plan for Worcestershire, includes an objective to base decisions on the need to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and to be resilient to climate change, and includes a policy that specifically requires a renewable energy contribution from waste-related developments over a certain size.

The Worcestershire Partnership's [Climate Change Strategy 2012-2020](#) aims include to *"help to realise the county's potential to harness the power of renewable energy, recognising the importance of public perception"*. It recognises the role of this strategy as a local delivery tool to help to make this happen.

The Worcestershire Local Enterprise Partnership's [Strategic Economic Plan](#) recognises 'agri-tech' (including green energy) as one of the county's three growth sectors. Among Worcestershire's key infrastructure issues that need to be addressed, it identifies an over-reliance on energy supplies from outside the county and an over-reliance on energy from non-sustainable sources. As part of the SEP's aspirations to create a world-class business location, it recognises that *"renewable energy generation has the potential to relieve pressures on the existing energy infrastructure, as well as providing potential employment opportunities and cost reductions"*.

Looking at the county's long-term future, Worcestershire's [Next Generation Plan](#) recognises the need to *"invest in our environment and use our resources wisely"*. The Plan supports renewable energy and includes a commitment to *"encourage green technology and green businesses in order to grow our economic prosperity [to] ensure that Worcestershire benefits from renewable and environmental technologies"*.

Implementation

WCC is driving this strategy, but it can only be fully effective across the county if it responds to the needs of district councils, the wider public sector, developers, businesses and communities.

Please contact us if you need this document in another format, or if you have any questions.

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