

Carl Sargeant AC / AM
Y Gweinidog Tai ac Adfywio
Minister for Housing and Regeneration



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

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To All Local Authority Cabinet Members with
Responsibility for Planning

18 December 2013

Dear Colleagues

In “Energy Wales” the Welsh Government has set in place an ambitious programme to facilitate the transition to a low carbon economy in a way that harnesses our natural assets and creates long term skilled employment in Wales. The work needed to deliver our ambitions cuts across many Government portfolios and involves a wide range of stakeholders. A key priority of “Energy Wales” is making sure that communities benefit from energy infrastructure developments. This objective underpins the Ynni'r Fro initiative, which supports local communities to develop renewable energy opportunities, and to reinvest the benefits of such developments locally.

In seeking to promote community renewable energy projects, I recognise that the planning system plays a crucial role and is fundamental to the deployment of community energy projects in Wales. I want a planning system that is transparent and consistent across Wales, and I have issued a draft Planning (Wales) Bill this month which sets out in more detail my vision for the future of the planning system in Wales. However, in addition, the local authorities should recognise that community groups and organisations who seek to promote renewable energy projects may require particular assistance in navigating their way through the planning system. Such groups or organisations may be unfamiliar with the technical processes and requirements of the planning system, and I expect local planning authorities to be as accommodating as possible when dealing with community projects.

There are a few practical ways in which local planning authorities can help and early engagement is often essential. In this context I would remind both local planning authorities and organisations promoting community led renewable energy projects of the guidance issued by the Welsh Government in 2012 to encourage pre-application discussions in order to help improve the quality of planning applications and the speed of decision making.

Our national planning policy, Planning Policy Wales, recognises the potential for communities and small businesses to invest in ownership of renewable energy projects or to develop their own projects for local benefit. The Welsh Government's policy is to support community driven renewable energy projects where benefits from the projects are returned to the host community.

In making their decisions on any renewable energy application I expect local planning authorities to conform to the legal requirement to take decisions in line with their development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. Furthermore, in assessing planning applications for renewable energy projects, the economic and job creation benefits associated with any development should be fully factored into, and given weight in, the decision making process as set out in Chapter 7 of Planning Policy Wales.

Planning decisions should be based on an assessment of the impacts of any proposed development irrespective of who the applicant is. However, by recognising the particular needs of community groups and organisations, and offering the opportunity for early engagement in the planning process, I hope that we will be able to realise our ambitions to see community owned renewable energy projects flourishing across Wales.

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Carl', written in a cursive style.

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