

## Planning Working Group

Thursday 23 May 2024

14:00 – 16:15

### Minutes

#### Updates on actions following Regen planning event

- Regen highlighted [its response](#) to DLUHC consultation on an ‘accelerated planning system’, which did not mention renewables.
- Regen was [invited to speak](#) to the Parliamentary Renewable and Sustainable Energy Group (PRASEG) about planning and community acceptance. The group discussed MPs promoting incorrect information. Regen is working with PRASEG on a myth-busting document addressing misinformation.
- Regen updated on a recent meeting with DESNZ officials to discuss the Strategy Spatial Energy Plan (SSEP).
- Regen highlighted its [insight paper](#) setting out key issues on local planning reform and recommendations.

#### Actions:

- **Members are to send any misinformation they want addressed in a myth-busting document to Regen.**
- **Members to feed in thinking and resources from planning applications for renewable energy and battery storage projects.**
- **Rebecca Windemer (RW) to share a draft myth-busting document with members for review.**
- **RW to invite DESNZ contact to update members on SSEP at the next working group.**

#### Attitudes to public engagement - local opposition research – Bertie Wnek (BW), Public First

- BW presented research investigating local attitudes to renewable energy projects.
- A question was asked whether people feel ignored if they provide feed back and this doesn’t result in changes. BW responded that it’s important to follow up and be clear about why.
- A question was asked about how people want to be engaged. An example was given of a poorly attended public consultation. It was commented that the sector is not doing enough to reach young people and there should be more online engagement. A modern digital marketing approach is needed since people are often too busy to attend events. Attending existing local events can be better too.

- A question was asked about the engagement of local councillors. BW responded that some people have limited trust in local representatives, so wider consultation is important. Comment regarding the need to use trusted local champions in the community as messengers separate from politicians.
- A question was asked about the impact of community benefits and whether people expect them. BW responded that public ownership and community benefits are important. They are not always expected, but the downsides of not having them can be severe if there's poor engagement, and the upsides are real regarding support for developments. It was commented that consultation on desired community benefits can lead to tangible results for residents.
- An example of a popular community benefit fund run by an independent company was given. In addition, the developer is investigating a new near neighbourhood fund to contribute to the energy bills of the nearest neighbours to a site. Given the administrative burden of having residents share bills, this may end up an unrestricted payment to residents.
- Comment that the forthcoming myth-busting document will be useful for residents as well as MPs.
- Comment that engagement of wider community such as children and faith organisations is impactful.

**Actions:**

- **Emily Bell to share an example of engaging SSE digital content with the working group**
- **Members to email Hannah if they would like further information from Bertie Wnek**

**Update on fire safety and environmental permitting** – Olly Frankland, Electricity Storage Network

- An update was provided on forthcoming National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) guidance that is expected to be published in the Summer.
- OF informed members about a pre-consultation industry workshop planned with Defra. This is ahead of a new environmental permitting process for battery storage sites being developed. The workshop is likely to be delayed due to the election announcement.

**Actions:**

- **Members to contact OF if interested in joining a workshop with Defra on a new environmental permitting process** – this will be delayed due to the election. [Email Olly](#) to register interest.

**Round table with industry and priority discussion for planning working group**

Several themes emerged from the round table as key areas.

- Many members referenced education and myth-busting. It was commented that engaging content and resources is crucial to inform planning committees and communities. Misinformation is pervasive across the sector. The forthcoming Regen / PRASEG myth-busting document and Solar Energy UK's factsheet will be useful. It was commented that myth-busting should also be interactive and appropriate for online/social media, i.e. video content.
- A lack of resources in local planning authorities was flagged a number of times. A question was asked about the possibility of private sector secondments into planning authorities. There was an identified need to explore different options for addressing this challenge.
- A number of participants identified the need for planning reform to bring the local level planning process for renewables more in line with the NSIP process in terms of the priority given to renewables. Support for developers regarding onshore wind in England was also requested, reflecting a recommendation in the Regen planning insight paper. A question was asked about the potential for replicating Scotland's Onshore Sector Deal in England. It was commented that a new government should be engaged in supporting the sector and barriers to renewable projects on 'best and most versatile agricultural land' (BMVAL) challenged.
- Better community engagement and community benefits were flagged. The need was expressed for knowledge sharing on best practices for community engagement and community benefits options. A question was asked whether this could take the form of a standard or guidance document. It was also suggested that this group could be used to share best practice. It was noted that Solar Energy UK now specify a minimum £400 per MW for solar PV.
- Grid reform was also flagged as a concern. Members highlighted the impact of TMO4+, which could lead to more pressure on the planning system and timeframes associated. This challenge links to the local authority resourcing challenges.
- Fire safety was also referenced. A need was expressed for battery storage specific myth-busting and clarity on the content and impact of the new NFCC guidance expected for publication in the Summer.

#### **Actions:**

- **Lucy James, EQ communications to work with Regen to start the development of a best practice guide for community engagement, including online and social media options.**
- **John Arthur, TLT - to put together a list of key planning statements that are a barrier for new projects (e.g. Eric Pickles statement in 2015)**
- **Members to speak to Rachel or Rebecca about registering interest for chair or vice-chair role in the Planning working group.**

**The next working group meeting will be online from 14.00-15.30 on Tuesday 10 September.**

[Book online here](#)