From Plans to Power

Strengthening local planning policy on renewables

DEC 2025

Created for Innovate UK Net Zero Living programme by Regen

Acknowledgements

About Net Zero Living

Net Zero Living (NZL) is a programme of work run by Innovate UK. The programme provides support to local authorities, their partners and communities to overcome non-technical systemic barriers to the scaling and adoption of net zero solutions.

Within the programme, there are 52 local authorities – the NZL participants – at various stages in the development and delivery of their local net zero plans.

Regen provides expert support on policy and regulation to the NZL programme, and this paper has been informed by these interactions.

About Regen

Regen provides independent, evidence-led insight and advice in support of our mission to transform the UK's energy system for a net zero future. We focus on analysing the systemic challenges of decarbonising power, heat and transport. We know that a transformation of this scale will require engaging the whole of society in a just transition.

Regen is a membership organisation with over 200 members who share our mission, including clean energy developers, businesses, local authorities, community energy groups and research organisations across the energy sector. We manage the Electricity Storage Network (ESN) – the industry group and voice of the grid-scale electricity storage industry in GB.

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Executive Summary

This paper emerged from discussions with NZL participants, who had responded to an invite to be involved in a series of deep dives on local planning. Through these conversations, planning policy for renewable energy surfaced as a key barrier to renewable energy project delivery.

This thought piece explores this topic in more detail, aiming to provide clarity on the current landscape of local planning policies and to share insights on what needs to change in order to ensure that local level policies achieve their aims.

'A landscape of chaos' was how one local authority planner described the disparity in local planning policies on renewables across England. Their words capture the overall challenge voiced by both developers and planners – the lack of clarity and consistency in local planning policy. Yet, alongside these challenges, there are examples of local authorities leading the way with clear, ambitious and enabling policies that demonstrate what can be achieved.

Local planning authorities are on the front line of delivering the UK's transition to net zero. With the right policy frameworks, they have the power to unlock significant investment in renewable energy and storage, helping to drive local economic growth, energy security and decarbonisation.

Local authorities have the power to unlock potential for renewables, but need clarity and consistency on local planning policies.

Key challenges

Many local planning policies, and their evidence bases, are outdated

A third of local authorities in England (34%) have not reviewed their energy planning policies for over a decade, leaving them misaligned with both technological advances and national priorities for clean energy.

The quality and timeliness of supporting evidence also varies significantly. While some plans draw on technical studies such as renewable resource assessments, many of these are now out of date or were already outdated when adopted. The limited use of current, evidence-based data reduces the effectiveness of policies and weakens their ability to guide decision making.

Policies often fail to reflect newer technologies and sector advances

Only 10% of local plans include a policy on battery storage, 4% on repowering (upgrading existing renewable energy sites with newer, more efficient technology) and 5% explicitly restrict fossil fuel generation. This gap highlights how many plans are not keeping pace with rapid innovation across the sector. Broader adoption of forward-looking policies would enable local authorities to better support modern renewable infrastructure and accelerate progress towards net zero.

Well-intentioned policies can create unintended barriers

A third of local plans allocate specific areas for renewable energy, but these allocations can sometimes limit opportunity rather than unlock it. Many policies restrict development outside designated zones, while strict criteria, outdated assumptions, or subsequent land-use changes often make allocated sites unviable.

Similarly, many renewable energy policies include supportive opening statements followed by extensive criteria that, in practice, make renewable projects difficult to approve, introducing additional delays and uncertainty.

However, there is evidence of promising emerging practice

Despite these challenges, a number of local authorities are developing ambitious and enabling approaches. Some are adopting flexible safeguarding policies, identifying priority areas for renewables without restricting development elsewhere. Others are beginning to limit fossil fuel generation or explicitly support community energy. These examples demonstrate how sharing best practice across local planning authorities could help raise ambition and consistency nationally.

Opportunities for the UK Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government of the United Kingdom

1. **Create an easier route to update renewable energy policies**

Provide a mechanism for local authorities to refresh renewable energy policies without waiting for full local plan review or examination.

A targeted Development Plan Document, as used in Cornwall, could allow energy policies to evolve in step with technology and market change. However, other potential mechanisms could be explored and guidance and training should be provided to local authorities to help them progress such options.

2. **Deliver clear guidance to support local authorities**

Establish national guidance defining what a strong, enabling renewable energy policy looks like in local plans, along with associated training, peer learning and resource funding so planning teams can respond confidently to rapidly changing energy and climate policy.

3. **Ensure that national planning policy strengthens the weight given to climate change and renewable energy**

A future update to the National Planning Policy Framework could strengthen the weight given to climate change and renewable energy. This could include updating the current Paragraph 168(a) of the National Planning Policy Framework to afford 'substantial weight' (rather than 'significant weight') to the benefits of renewable and low-carbon energy generation, and to the contribution of such proposals to achieving net zero and identifying all forms of renewable energy and energy storage projects as a 'Critical National Priority'.

This could involve pursuing the recommendation in the 2023 Climate Change Committee report of introducing a statutory planning duty to ensure regulatory alignment between the Town Planning Acts and the Climate Change Act.

Introduction

Meeting the UK's renewable energy commitments, towards Clean Power 2030 targets and beyond, requires not only ambitious national frameworks but also effective local delivery.

Local planning authorities (LPAs) play a pivotal role in enabling this transition. Through their local plans and associated policies, LPAs shape whether, where and how renewable energy projects are realised on the ground.

Yet the current planning landscape is uneven. Many local plans are outdated, inconsistent or insufficiently ambitious to support the scale of deployment required. This raises critical questions. Are LPAs being adequately supported to embed effective renewable energy policies? What constitutes good practice in policy design and implementation? And how might national policy better enable and guide local action?

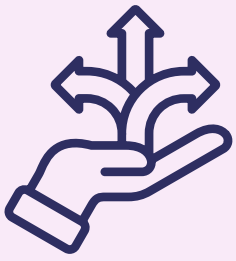
This paper addresses these questions through a systematic review of renewable energy policies in local plans across England. It assesses the ambition, clarity and consistency of these policies, identifying patterns, gaps and examples of emerging best practice.

The review identifies widespread variation in the strength and ambition of local plan renewable energy policies. To address this, the report identifies three key opportunities for the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG).

Opportunities

Enable

Enable faster policy updates, allowing LPAs to revise renewable energy policies without undertaking full plan reviews



Guidance

Provide clear national guidance and capacity-building, to help planners understand what strong, enabling policy looks like

Strengthen

Update the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) to strengthen the weight given to climate change and renewable energy.

Context for this research

This paper builds on insights and technical support provided by Regen through Innovate UK's Net Zero Living (NZL) Programme to local authorities participating in the programme.

For participants, local planning policy for renewables emerged as a consistent challenge for projects. The programme highlighted the need for greater clarity, consistency and sharing of best practice to support local authorities in this space.

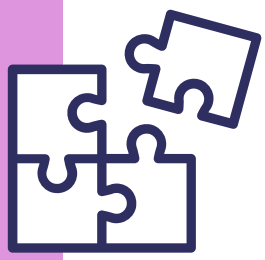
A growing body of research complements these insights, examining the challenges and opportunities of embedding net zero and renewable energy within local planning frameworks. These studies help explain why this paper is needed, while national ambition for net zero is clear, local implementation through planning remains highly variable. Feedback from planners, consultants and developers reinforces this picture, showing that even well-intentioned local planning policies can fail to deliver in practice. This chapter summarises key themes from the existing literature before turning to the on-the-ground challenges faced by developers.

Insights from existing literature

Existing research consistently identifies wide variation in how local plans address renewable energy. For example, a 2023 survey commissioned by the Climate Change Committee (CCC) found that 22% of respondents reported their local plan contained no renewable energy policy. However, to date, no study has examined the detailed differences in policy coverage and approach across all English local plans.

Studies by organisations including the Town and Country Planning Association (TCPA), Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI) and CCC emphasise that strong local plans should include explicit, evidence-based policies on low-carbon energy. Clear and detailed policy wording provides certainty for developers and communities, while high-level or absent policies often lead to case-by-case decision making and inconsistency.

The wide variation in how local plans consider renewables is regularly identified as a challenge.



Research from the Aldersgate Group and The Institute For Public Policy Research (IPPR) highlights that local planning for renewables remains largely reactive, with decisions taken in isolation rather than through strategic planning. This approach can create uncertainty for both developers, decision makers and local communities, and limit opportunities for coordinated renewable energy deployment.

Several studies stress the importance of a robust evidence base, such as resource assessments, heat maps and grid capacity data, to inform plan making. The Aldersgate Group and UK100 also advocate for digitalisation and improved data access to support both plan preparation and application assessment.

Across the literature, there is broad agreement that while local plans can and should play a central enabling role in renewable energy deployment, their effectiveness depends on:

- Stronger statutory framing and national alignment in terms of climate change objectives
- Comprehensive spatial evidence and mapping
- Improved local authority capacity and resourcing.

These factors have helped to inform the design of our local plan review.

The on-the-ground experiences of local planning policies

Feedback from industry stakeholders highlights that the variation in local authority planning policies for renewable energy is creating uncertainty and unnecessary barriers to deployment. Developers involved in Regen's planning working group reported that the lack of high-level alignment between local plans means that navigating planning requirements can be unpredictable, resource-intensive and, in some cases, prohibitive.

A particular challenge stems from the persistence of outdated policies, which do not reflect the pace of change in renewable technologies or national policy ambitions (see the wind energy example below). Industry representatives also stress that, while many local authorities are keen to encourage renewables, some policies that are well-intentioned have unintended consequences. For example, policies designed to allocate suitable areas for renewables can create designations that are not feasible for development, or wording that is overly restrictive can create grounds for objection and delay.

Taken together, these discrepancies increase costs, extend project timelines and reduce investor confidence.

Example of an unintended policy impact

Wind energy policy in Rossendale District Council (NZL Demonstrator project)

Summary:
The wind energy policy in Rossendale's Local Plan (adopted December 2021) is based on a 2014 landscape sensitivity study. Developers who have pursued onshore wind projects in this area identified this policy as a challenge. They argue this is now outdated, given advances in turbine technology, improved mitigation methods and shifts in national policy. See the local plan here.

Policy detail:
- Areas identified in the 2014 landscape sensitivity study are classed as suitable for wind turbines
- Repowering or new generation projects in these areas are supported, subject to additional criteria
- Projects outside the areas will be 'resisted'. However, the policy also requires such proposals to demonstrate compliance with the original sensitivity analysis and the additional criteria, suggesting that in some cases these projects may be supported, although this is not explicitly stated.
- The policy has created confusion for developers.

Industry concerns:
- Lack of clarity makes decision making unpredictable, creating uncertainty for developers
- Equal treatment of repowering and new projects misses opportunities to reduce turbine numbers, standardise sizes and improve visual impacts while boosting generation. This may create challenges in the future as there are a relatively high number of existing wind projects in the area.

Rossendale's local plan is due to be reviewed and will take into account the latest updates to the NPPF.

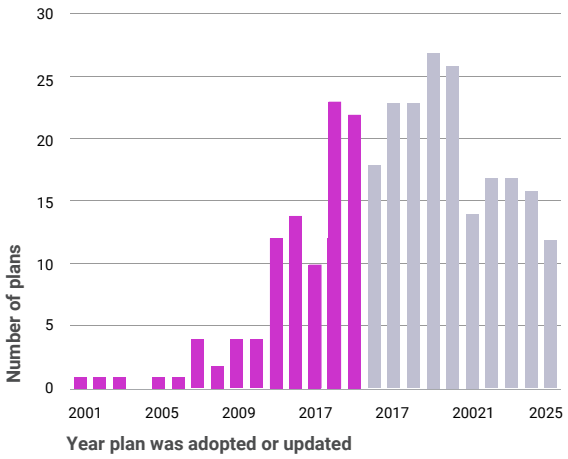
Learning:
Reliance on outdated evidence and restrictive wording can limit renewable energy opportunities and deter investment, even in areas with a strong existing project base.

Review of adopted local plans

As the need for renewable energy becomes increasingly urgent, local planning authorities play a critical role in shaping the transition to a low-carbon future.

This chapter presents the findings of a review of adopted local plans across England, examining how effectively they incorporate renewable energy policies. It highlights emerging trends in ambition and approach, revealing both common strengths and areas where policy falls short. By drawing attention to examples of innovative and effective practice, this review not only maps the current landscape but also offers practical examples for authorities seeking to strengthen their planning frameworks and accelerate the deployment of renewable energy at the local level.

34% of local plans have not been updated in the last decade



52 local plans reference renewable resource studies from 2010 or earlier

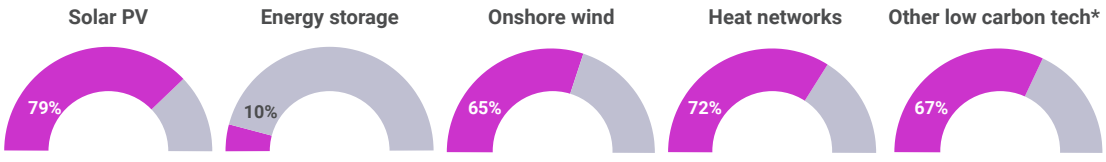
10% of local plans have a policy on energy storage

1 local plan refers to a Local Area Energy Plan

1/3 of local plans designate areas for renewables

Solar PV is the most referenced technology

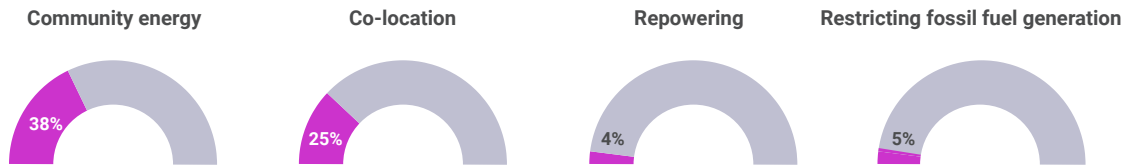
Percentage of local plans referencing technologies



* E.g. Geothermal energy, hydroelectricity and bioenergy

Innovative approaches are emerging

Percentage of local plans referencing innovative approaches



A third of local plans haven't been updated in the last decade

Across England, 74% of local authorities have a local plan that was adopted or updated over five years ago, and 34% have plans over ten years old.

Older plans tend to contain fewer policies supporting renewable energy. For example, 6% of plans over a decade old don't address renewable energy, compared with only 1.6% of plans updated within the last ten years.

This pattern extends to other criteria as well: more recent plans are more likely to reference energy storage technologies, include supportive policy language, support repowering and restrict fossil fuel generation. These trends suggest that areas without up-to-date local plans may face additional barriers to delivering renewable energy projects.

However, it is also worth noting that many plans adopted or updated within the last ten years reflect the 'de facto national ban' on onshore wind between 2015 and 2024. There is a need for clarification at the national level that such policies should no longer be given consideration in decision making due to the overturning of this 'de facto ban'.

Many plans are reliant on an outdated renewable energy evidence base

Most local plans are informed by local studies or resource assessments, providing a technical foundation for renewable energy policy. 83% of plans reviewed reference such evidence, a figure that is broadly consistent regardless of the age of the policy.

However, many plans rely on outdated studies:

- 52 out of 293 plans reference studies from 2010 or earlier
- A further 52 plans reference studies over 10 years old (from 2015 or earlier)
- Although some of these studies would have been up to date when the plans were adopted, 44 were already over five years old when the plan referencing them was published, and a further 13 were already over ten years old.

Technical studies, including resource assessments, grid capacity mapping and landscape sensitivity analyses, can help local authorities develop proportionate, defensible and locally grounded policies. However, evidence is only valuable if it remains current. Outdated assessments, reflecting old technology costs or turbine scales, can create unnecessary barriers, requiring developers to conform to constraints that no longer align with industry standards or market realities.

Maintaining and periodically updating the technical evidence base ensures that renewable energy policies remain relevant, practical, and responsive, enabling timely, effective decision-making and supporting deployment at scale.

Wirral's Example:
Wirral's Local Plan makes reference to the Wirral Local Plan Climate Change and Renewable Energy Study (Arup, 2020). The study provides resource modelling for renewable energy opportunities and presents planners with a map indicating geospatially mapped constraints alongside indicative energy yield, carbon savings and grid infrastructure capacity. This study is strongly integrated into policy wording, providing guidance for developments.

Only one local plan refers to a Local Area Energy Plan

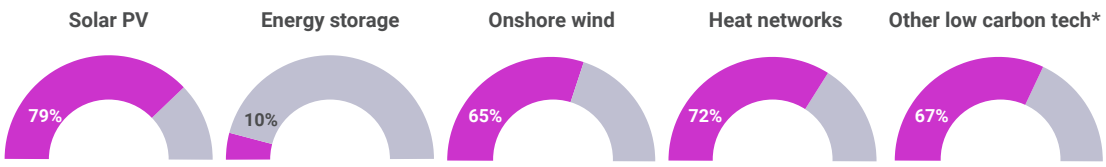
Despite many local authorities having adopted a Local Area Energy Plan (LAEP), only one adopted local plan in England currently references a LAEP – Greater Manchester's plan. The plan draws on both the Greater Manchester LAEP (2022) and the Spatial Energy Plan (2016), which assess existing energy demand and supply, analyse future growth impacts and identify potential for decentralised low-carbon and renewable generation. These studies directly inform the plan's renewable energy policies, including the 'Heat and Energy Opportunity Areas' based on factors such as demand density, grid capacity and development potential.

LAEPs can provide a valuable, evidence-based link between spatial planning and energy system needs, identifying optimal locations for renewable generation, storage and heat infrastructure. Recent research undertaken by Regen and the RTPI highlights that if a local authority has or is going to produce a LAEP then aligning local plan policies with LAEPs can support more strategic, place-based decarbonisation. However, to do so there is a need for clearer guidance and support on how to incorporate LAEP evidence effectively into plan making.

Coverage of renewable energy technologies in local plans varies significantly

Only 10% of local plans include a dedicated policy on energy storage. In terms of broader clean energy coverage, 69% of plans explicitly reference three or more technologies, 23% reference one or two technologies, and 8% do not mention any specific clean energy technologies.

Percentage of local plans referencing technologies



E.g. Geothermal energy, hydroelectricity and bioenergy

Kirklees example:
Kirklees provides a strong example of comprehensive policy coverage, using open and positive language:

> **" There are opportunities for renewable and low-carbon energy development using a range of technologies including: wind; solar photovoltaic (PV); solar thermal; heat pumps (ground source, air source, water source); hydro; biomass combustion; biomass anaerobic digestion; district heat networks."**

The use of the word 'including' signals flexibility, allowing additional technologies to be considered beyond those listed, while providing planners with clear guidance on a broad range of options.

The effectiveness of policy lies not only in naming technologies but in establishing clear, flexible and future-proofed criteria that can accommodate evolving energy solutions.

Many policies contain restrictive criteria

While 98% of local plans include broadly supportive wording for renewable energy, most policies also contain significant restrictions.

97% of local plans include qualifying phrases such as 'will only be supported if' or 'will not be supported unless'.

Many policies begin with positive intent but are followed by a long list of potential adverse effects to be avoided. While recognising that siting considerations are important, this framing often creates a negative default position, making it harder for planners to confidently approve renewable projects.

By contrast, some policies adopt a more enabling approach, focusing on clear criteria for approval.

→ **West Suffolk example:**
West Suffolk states:
" **All proposals for renewable energy technology, or the integration of renewable technology on existing or proposed structures, including any associated infrastructure, will be supported where the following criteria are met."**

This framing sets a positive baseline of support while clearly outlining the conditions that must be satisfied, giving developers confidence that projects can proceed if they meet defined standards.

A third of local plans designate areas for renewables, potentially creating unintended consequences

30% of local plans designate specific areas for renewable energy, most commonly onshore wind (42 plans) and heat networks (32 plans). While site allocations can provide apparent certainty and strategic direction, in practice they can sometimes produce unintended consequences.

Allocations are often accompanied by detailed criteria that may be overly restrictive, such as thresholds that few schemes can meet. They can also quickly become outdated as local contexts evolve, for example, new housing developments, transport infrastructure or environmental designations may reduce the feasibility of a previously identified site. In some cases, allocations are based on assumptions about older technologies, such as smaller turbine sizes or fixed solar layouts, which no longer reflect current industry practice.

→ **The Redcar and Cleveland example:**
The Redcar and Cleveland Local Plan identifies 13 'potentially suitable areas for small scale' onshore wind. Their definition of small scale is 'less than 50m to tip'.

Their policy states:

> **"We will support appropriate schemes for wind and solar energy where they are located within the South Tees and Wilton industrial area and other potentially suitable areas as identified on the Policies Map."**

Feedback from developers in Regen's planning working group indicates that revisiting these allocations with modern technology and updated environmental standards often renders sites unviable. Consequently, rather than facilitating renewable deployment, overly prescriptive allocations can narrow opportunities and add complexity to an already challenging consenting landscape.

However, some authorities have adopted more flexible approaches. Sheffield City Council, for example, identifies two potential large-scale wind sites but clarifies that support for these areas is 'not to the exclusion of other sustainable locations'. Similarly, Thurrock Council states that it will promote and facilitate renewable energy proposals 'including but not exclusively at' the sites identified.

9% of local plans safeguard sites for renewables

Unlike allocating specific sites, a safeguarding approach provides a more enabling framework: it identifies areas with the strongest renewable potential and protects them from competing uses, such as housing or industrial development, without restricting development solely to those areas.

This approach signals long-term local authority support for renewables while maintaining flexibility for developers to propose projects that reflect evolving technologies, grid constraints and environmental considerations. Safeguarding can, therefore, serve a dual purpose: it maintains spatial priority for energy generation while avoiding the risks of sterilising land through overly prescriptive allocations.

When combined with clear, criteria-based policies and up-to-date evidence, safeguarding can provide both direction and adaptability, allowing local authorities to plan positively for renewables without locking the sector into unsuitable or obsolete sites.

Across England, 27 local authorities include safeguarding policies, with onshore wind and heat networks again being the most commonly referenced technologies, although many plans refer more generally to renewable or low-carbon energy.

→ **Cornwall Council example:**
Cornwall Council safeguards strategic wind energy sites, permitting other forms of development in these areas only if they are temporary or have no adverse effect on future wind energy installations. This ensures that long-term renewable potential is preserved while allowing appropriate complementary uses.

The policy is located in their 2023 Climate Emergency Development Plan Document, Policy RE2 as set out below:

> **Policy RE2 – Safeguarding strategic renewable energy sites**
> Planning permission for proposals that are not renewable energy installations within areas identified on the Policy Map as being potentially suitable for wind energy will only be granted where it can be demonstrated that the proposal would:

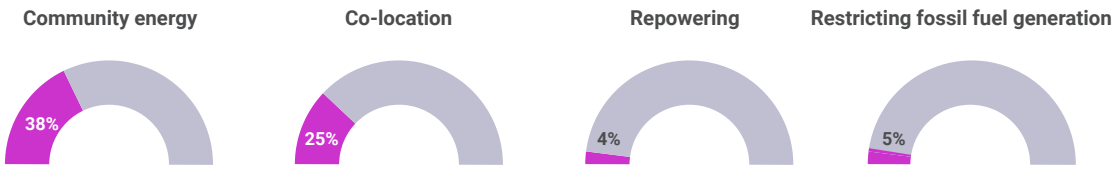
1. Not introduce adverse impacts within close proximity or interfere with the operation of any installed or permitted or proposed (at planning applications) renewable energy installation and enabling infrastructure; or

2. is a temporary use that will be re-located or removed prior to the renewable energy proposal commencing and there is a mechanism to ensure that this happens; or

3. It can be demonstrated that there is no reasonable likelihood of a renewable energy installation coming forward on or within reasonable proximity to the application site or that an exception should be made based on substantial public benefits of the proposal."

Some local plans are including more innovative policies

Percentage of local plans referencing innovative approaches



Some local planning authorities are going beyond traditional policy wording by introducing innovative policies to actively encourage renewable deployment. These include incentives such as those set out below, to support co-location, repowering and community energy projects and to restrict fossil fuel development. Such enabling measures help shift planning from a regulatory gatekeeper to a proactive facilitator of the energy transition, encouraging investment and innovation at the local level.

25% of local plans have a policy on co-location

25% of local plans include a policy on co-location supporting the shared location of technologies such as solar farms with battery storage or on-site demand. Co-location can optimise land use, improve grid stability and enhance project viability, but planning frameworks have often lagged behind technological innovation.

Policies that explicitly support co-location provide certainty for developers, while guidance on cumulative impacts and operational considerations help balance innovation with environmental protection. Co-location with demand is most common.

→ **Northumberland example:**
Northumberland Local Plan (2022) supports the co-location of energy storage with existing or proposed renewable generation projects, provided effects are acceptable. It does so through providing a separate policy. This is set out in Policy REN 1: Renewable and low-carbon energy and associated energy storage – a detailed policy which includes the following wording:

" **Proposals for energy storage units associated with a proposed or an existing renewable energy and low carbon energy development will be supported where:**

a. they will improve the efficiency of the development; and

b. it can be demonstrated that the effects of the proposal, individually and cumulatively, are acceptable or can be made acceptable with regard to the criteria under part 3 of this policy."

Only 4% of local plans have a policy on repowering

Repowering – upgrading existing renewable energy sites with newer, more efficient technology, offers a key opportunity to increase low-carbon generation, especially from older sites. Explicit repowering policies provide clarity that such proposals are supported in principle, typically subject to environmental and community considerations.

Only 4% of local plans reference repowering. Some require repowered sites to meet the same criteria as new developments, while others give greater support in recognition of its efficiency benefits. Repowering is mostly addressed in more recent plans: seven of the eleven plans mentioning it were adopted in the last five years.

Support for community energy projects

Local planning policy can play a critical role in enabling community-led renewable energy schemes, which often face greater resource and technical barriers than commercial projects. Policies that explicitly support community energy, for example, by recognising it as a material planning consideration or providing simplified criteria, can make the planning process more accessible, helping to increase local ownership of renewable projects.

Around 38% of local plans explicitly support community energy or community-led schemes. Where supported, policies often highlight the benefits of small-scale generation – meeting local energy demand and delivering financial gains for communities. Plans use wording such as 'supported', 'encouraged', 'prioritised' or 'actively encouraged' to signal positive policy intent for community-led projects.

→ **Examples:**

- Woking Borough Council's Local Plan encourages renewable energy developments and "particularly encourages applications from community-based and community-owned projects"

- Plymouth and South West Devon Joint Local Plan includes a dedicated community energy policy and supports shared ownership, integrating community participation into commercial projects.

Only 5% of local plans restrict energy generation from fossil fuels

A small number of local plans are beginning to include policies that explicitly restrict new fossil fuel generation or extraction. By defining fossil fuel development as contrary to sustainable development goals, local plans can ensure decisions reinforce local climate strategies and national decarbonisation commitments.

Currently, only 5% of local plans include explicit restrictions on fossil fuel generation, though others do place limitations upon fossil fuel extraction in their areas.

→ **Examples:**

- London boroughs such as Islington and Kensington & Chelsea include explicit restrictions on fossil fuel generation, motivated by efforts to improve local air quality.

- Cornwall Council specifies that non-renewable energy generation will only be supported in exceptional cases and must be temporary and as low carbon as possible.

Local plans reflecting a climate emergency, but with little policy impact

Around 64% of local plans reference a climate strategy, climate emergency declaration or similar, rising to 80% among plans adopted in the past five years. This increase likely reflects the influence of the 2019 national climate emergency declaration.

However, the depth of integration varies considerably. Only a small number of plans, such as Cornwall and South Oxfordshire, clearly align planning policy with local energy or climate strategies. In most cases, references are high-level or symbolic, with limited evidence that carbon impacts are considered consistently across the plan. As a result, some policies may inadvertently enable development patterns or infrastructure decisions that increase emissions, rather than contributing to an overall reduction.

What's often missing is the next step – linking planning decisions directly to measurable emissions reduction or clean energy targets. Such evidence-based alignment would give planners a clearer rationale for supporting renewable energy development and for avoiding policies that lock in higher-carbon outcomes. However, achieving this kind of systemic change may ultimately require updates to the NPPF, as previously suggested by the CCC.

Overall it is clear that local plans are not keeping pace with the level of change in the clean energy sector.

Conclusions & recommendations

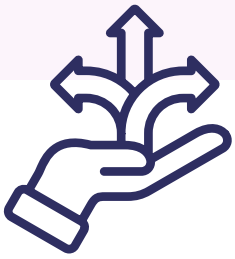
This research highlights significant variation in how LPAs across England address renewable energy within their local plans.

While some authorities have developed clear and enabling policies, most do not yet go far enough to actively support renewable energy deployment at the scale required to meet national clean energy targets.

A substantial proportion of policies, and the evidence bases that inform them, are outdated. Around a third of local plans (34%) have not been updated in the last ten years and three quarters (74%) have not been updated in the last five. As a result, many plans fail to reflect emerging technologies such as battery storage, the evolving scale and siting requirements of modern renewables, or innovative approaches such as repowering and the restriction of fossil fuel generation.

In addition, some policies that are intended to be supportive can have unintended consequences. For example, broadly positive policy statements are often followed by extensive criteria that in practice make renewable projects difficult to approve. Similarly, site allocations intended to guide development can inadvertently constrain flexibility or exclude viable opportunities elsewhere.

To address these challenges and strengthen the planning system's role in supporting the UK's transition to net zero, the following opportunities are proposed for the MHCLG:



1. Provide guidance for local planning authorities

The paper revealed a patchwork of local planning policies on renewables. Local planning teams have raised the need for greater support to understand what 'good' looks like in local renewable energy planning policy. National government, professional bodies and industry partners should collaborate to develop guidance on best practice for renewable energy planning, covering example policy wording, evidence requirements and effective engagement with developers and communities.

Accessible, practical support will help planners build confidence in developing and implementing robust, enabling renewable energy policies.

2. Enable local authorities to update renewable energy policies more flexibly

This paper has identified that a significant proportion of local plans have not been updated in the past decade. The current requirement to update a full local plan can delay the introduction of improved renewable energy policies, as plan examinations are resource intensive and time consuming. To ensure that policies remain up to date and responsive to technological change, government should provide a clear mechanism for local authorities to update or supplement renewable energy policies independently of a full plan review.

This could be achieved through the preparation of a topic-based Development Plan Document (DPD), as demonstrated in Cornwall, or a similar fast-track route for climate and energy policies. This approach would allow authorities to strengthen renewable energy policy frameworks more quickly, avoiding delays that currently hold back deployment. However, to date, such an approach is not commonplace so there is a need to make it easier for local authorities to do this.

3. Ensure that national planning policy strengthens the weight given to climate change and renewable energy.

A future update to the NPPF to strengthen the weight given to climate change and renewable energy. This could include updating the current Paragraph 168(a) of the NPPF to afford 'substantial weight' (rather than 'significant weight') to the benefits of renewable and low-carbon energy generation, and to the contribution of such proposals to achieving net zero and identifying all forms of renewable energy and energy storage projects as a 'Critical National Priority'.

This could involve pursuing the recommendation in the 2023 CCC report of introducing a statutory planning duty to ensure regulatory alignment between the Town Planning Acts and the Climate Change Act.

Appendix

Local plan review methodology

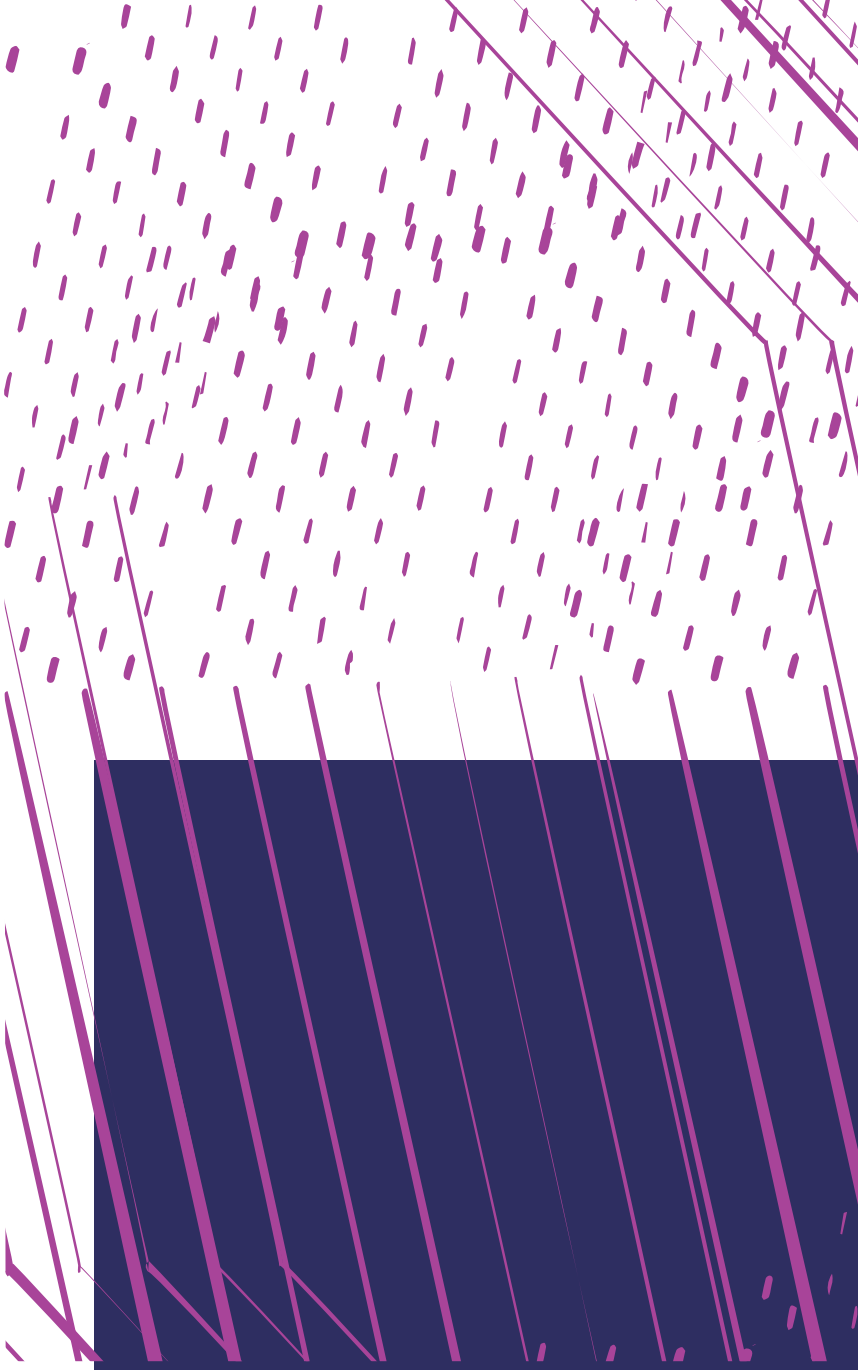
This paper involved a systematic review of local plans from all LPAs in England. The aim of the review was to assess:

- **Whether each LPA had an up-to-date local plan**
- **The presence and prominence of renewable energy policies**
- **The scope and ambition of these policies**
- **The degree of integration with other relevant strategies (e.g. LAEPs).**

To achieve this, we first set out detailed criteria for assessment and then developed an AI prompt to assess all local plan documents for these criteria. This was supported by regular error checking by our team to ensure that the AI prompt was only transferring accurate information. A random sample of the policies were also double checked and assessed by the Regen team.

We used discretion to choose the most relevant document for analysis where there were multiple documents associated with the local plan, focusing on the Core Strategy Part of the local plan in most instances. In some cases, we analysed other DPDs or supplementary planning documents where they provided an update to renewable energy policy.

The information gathered includes wording from outside of the policy, in particular supplementary information in paragraphs surrounding the policy. During our manual checking references made to information from the glossary of local plans were identified and removed.



From Plans to Power

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