



# South Downs Society

formerly Society of Sussex Downsmen

*Protecting the Beauty of the Downs*

## **CLIMATE CHANGE AND ENERGY POLICY**

### **OUR POSITION**

Climate change is the greatest threat to our countryside today. It will have major impacts on the UK's landscapes and wildlife. To minimise this threat, rapid and deep cuts in greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions will be required. We support national efforts to reduce GHG emissions and to generate an increasing percentage of our energy from renewable sources. Reaching these targets will be easier if everyone (individuals, communities, developers, business, local government and industry) curbs energy demand, uses energy more efficiently and supports a wide range of renewable technologies.

The impact of renewable technologies on the countryside, including our finest landscapes, must be seen in the context of the much greater changes that will occur as landscape tries to adapt to a new climate. The Society will seek to balance meeting the urgent national need for low carbon energy generation with our aim of promoting a beautiful, yet living and working countryside. This must be achieved using a strong, plan-led system which steers appropriately scaled energy developments to areas where the least landscape impact will occur.

The Society seeks to protect the countryside and settlements of the South Downs National Park by campaigning against threats to its landscape, tranquility, and character. We support development and lifestyle choices that help promote a sustainable rural economy with vibrant local communities. We recognise that growing energy demand, the widespread use of fossil fuels and associated carbon emissions are unsustainable. Reducing demand through energy conservation and energy efficiency is key to our vision.

We want to see a countryside where energy demand is low and sustainable. This can be achieved by increased uptake of energy saving technologies and practices, by meeting energy needs with appropriately scaled local generation and reducing distances travelled by goods and people. We want renewable energy technologies to fit with landscape, village and market town character and offer opportunities for economic diversification. They will include: small scale hydro, biomass (wood and short rotation crops), anaerobic digestion plants, appropriately scaled and located wind turbines plus domestic scale installations (e.g. micro combined heat and power, heat pumps, solar power). Even areas designated for their wildness or nature conservation, like national parks, can and must make a contribution to achieving a low carbon future, although some areas within those broad designations may be exempt.

## HOW WILL WE HELP TO MAKE THIS HAPPEN?

To contribute to our vision of a low carbon South Downs National Park we will:

1. Put our own house in order by seeking reduction in our energy use. We will maintain a rolling review of our policies and practices to ensure they help deliver low carbon outcomes.
2. Scrutinise planning applications, policies and strategies to ensure they meet, and where appropriate exceed, or promote high standards of low carbon development and overall sustainability.
3. Support development that helps sustain rural livelihoods and skills and where there are clear benefits for local communities.
4. Adopt an approach which starts with reducing energy use; then using energy more efficiently; then using renewable energy; as a last resort, any continuing use of fossil fuels must be clean and efficient. However, adopting this energy hierarchy is not an overriding reason to object to appropriate forms of new low carbon supply.
5. Maintain an “in principle” objection to further exploitation of fossil fuels within the national park owing to the possible implications for climate change and the development of renewables. This principle notwithstanding, each proposal, within or close to the park, will be considered on its individual merits. Until satisfactorily demonstrated otherwise, the Society will adopt a precautionary approach to any potential risks associated with hydraulic fracturing, or “fracking”.
6. Actively promote and support appropriately sited low carbon development including renewable energy technologies which do not significantly affect our most valued landscapes and townscapes, natural environments or historic features. Each proposal involving renewables, including individual wind turbines and domestic solar panels as well as wind farms and solar arrays, will be assessed on its merits against other environmental considerations such as visual impact on the landscapes and townscapes of the national park, wildlife and quiet enjoyment.
7. Encourage the South Downs National Park Authority and local authorities to identify suitable areas and sites to accommodate renewable energy based on robust assessments of environmental and landscape capacity; where appropriate, we will play an active role in helping identify suitable areas and sites.
8. Support the creation of local heat and electricity grids whilst reducing the landscape impacts of energy transmission and distribution networks.
9. Work together with like-minded public bodies, organisations and communities nationally, regionally and locally) to achieve our vision.

10. Engage with our members, local communities and the general public to raise awareness, publicise the benefits to our countryside of addressing climate change threats and to effect real change.