

Planning Reform Team  
Communities and Local Government  
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**Response to the Communities and Local Government's White Paper - Planning for a Sustainable Future.**

Dear Planning Reform Team,

The Social Enterprise Coalition ("the Coalition") welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Communities and Local Government's White Paper - *Planning for a Sustainable Future*.

The Coalition was established in 2002 as the national body for social enterprise. The Coalition represents a wide range of social enterprises, umbrella bodies and networks, with a combined membership reaching over 10,500 social enterprises. These include co-operatives, development trusts, Social Firms and other social enterprises. Social enterprises are businesses with primarily social or environmental objectives whose surpluses are principally reinvested for that purpose in the business or in the community, rather than being driven by the need to maximise profit for shareholders and owners. In preparing this response the Coalition has consulted with our members particularly those working in the areas of renewable energy including Energy4all and Community Renewable Energy (CoRE) <sup>1</sup>.

While the Coalition is supportive of the overall intention of the White Paper – to improve the planning system, we feel that it is essential that this should not take place at the detriment of community consultation and environmental sustainability. It is imperative that a greater recognition should be placed on the role and benefit of community ownership and renewable energy and its role in contributing to the government's target of 10% of electricity supply from renewable energy by 2010.

We are concerned that the recommendations in this White Paper will reduce the opportunity for community consultation and participation to take place. We fear that this will not only limit individuals opportunity to influence what occurs in their own communities, but we feel it is also contrary to the wider governmental policy agenda for increased participation, community involvement and individual choice which runs through a number of key policy documents including the White Papers *Our health, our care, our say* and *Strong and Prosperous Communities*, the Every Child Matters agenda and the UK Sustainable Development Strategy.

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<sup>1</sup> Community Renewable Energy (CoRE) aims to develop renewable energy systems that will generate income for communities and provide them with sustainable, low cost reliable energy supplies. CoRE is supported by the NESEP Inspire Project (Funded by ESF Equal and OneNE)

The White Paper appears to be disproportionately focussed on the premise that the principal failings of the current planning system are its bias towards sustainability and environmental protection at the expense of economic development. As many social enterprises hold environmental gains as central to their overall objective we are concerned that this premise will undermine sustainability and environmental protection and is at odds with the principles of sustainable development.

Whilst we welcome the White Papers focus on delivering more renewable energy, we believe there are a number of factors that are not considered within the White Paper that could increase uptake of renewable energy in England. Firstly we are concerned that the White Paper only refers to large onshore wind projects with no emphasis given to smaller onshore wind farms and community owned renewable energy, the establishment of which currently faces a number of planning barriers.

Further, the lack of recognition of social enterprises in existing planning policy as a distinct category of business is resulting in many authorities treating them as commercial business and without taking account of the potential social and environmental gains from their activities.

Similarly there is no benefit awarded within the current planning system for the advantages of community ownership in the planning process and its contribution to regeneration, employment and community development. The social economic and environmental benefits of local renewable energy owned by the community can be demonstrated clearly, however at present a community wishing to put up a wind turbine has to deal with planning regulations of the same nature as organisations developing a large wind farm which has no links with the community and local area. Taking account of these benefits in the decision process would aid the planning process. This is currently taking place within Welsh Planning Policy and we would urge the government to introduce similar measures in England.

Seeking to secure planning permission for renewable energy programmes can also be prohibitively expensive in both time and resources. Projects in progress can fail where regulatory barriers cannot be overcome. This burden is disproportionately great for smaller organisations. Larger mostly private enterprises can easily deal with complex regulation because of scales of economy or, and usually more significantly, overcome their financial and political power. This is not possible for smaller enterprises. We believe that a simplification strategy is required to address such barriers.

Furthermore, increasing the uptake of renewable energy schemes requires more than just changes to the planning system. Clear guidelines along with comprehensive education programmes working alongside the planning regulations are required to increase support for renewable energy schemes and speed up the decision making process. Greater emphasis is required in monitoring and enforcing the delivery of planning policy at a local level, as local decision making bodies are often ill-informed or fail to give sufficient weight to the agreed national position. These measures will also play an integral role in assisting the government to meet its target of 10% of electricity supply from renewable energy by 2010.

Should you require any further information regarding this response please contact Ceri Jones on [ceri.jones@socialenterprise.org.uk](mailto:ceri.jones@socialenterprise.org.uk) or 020 7793 2320.

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