

Joint Advisory Committee, Thursday 8th November 2007



Recommendation

Sustainable Development Commission 'Turning the Tide' Report

The Sustainable Development Commission (SDC) report on tidal energy in the UK was launched on 1st October 2007. As a result of their research, Government are scoping for a feasibility study.

The Severn Estuary Partnership involves local authorities, government agencies, other organisations and users of the Severn Estuary working together to ensure the sustainable management of the estuary.

SEP are already being approached by other organisations seeking participation in various studies and proposals relating to the estuary. It is proposed therefore that the future role of the Severn Estuary Partnership (SEP) in relation to tidal energy and the barrage related issues is considered and agreed by the Joint Advisory Committee (JAC) meeting at the biannual Estuary Groups Day on 8th November 2007.

There is a key role for local authorities and other local & regional stakeholders in the decision-making process. SEP has existed since 1995 to encourage collaboration between local authorities, stakeholders and estuary users.

The SEP Management Group proposed the following statement as to the role of SEP, for the consideration of the JAC. The Severn Estuary Partnership should:

- Have a watching brief on the process;
- Promote an unbiased and balanced position at all times, without compromising partners needs to take forward their own views and positions;
- Facilitate informed discussion and encourage a positive approach towards informed debate;
- Inform the process of decision-making by pointing out estuary-related issues;
- Co-ordinate the provision of information to stakeholders;
- Ask questions that need to be asked, and help to ensure relevant parties are involved;
- Play a key role in local and regional stakeholder involvement in the decision-making process;
- Seek wider public awareness of facts and wider access to accurate information;
- Provide consultation support for the feasibility study if appropriate;
- Ensure that an estuary wide and cross boundary approach is taken to consultation and investigations - provide the 'estuary voice'.

Observations about the decision-making process:

- Recognise the benefits of renewable energy;
- There is a need to look at the broader picture;
- EC Directive on Environmental Impact Assessment requires that the full range of options including harnessing tidal energy should be evaluated;
- Early consideration should be given to the EC Directives relating to the candidate Special Area of Conservation and Special Protection Area and the Water Framework Directive;

- Available knowledge should be fully utilised and new research progressed where necessary;
- Experience from elsewhere should be utilised;
- A precautionary approach must be taken to ensure that any development solutions are sustainable.
- It is also noted that a feasibility study would assess the baseline conditions in the estuary (e.g. State of the Estuary report), and this could help to underpin a review of the existing Strategy for the Severn Estuary (2001) as a voluntary framework for co-ordinating planning and management.

Proposed public statement on the role of the SEP:

The Severn Estuary Partnership recognises the potential benefits of renewable energy from the Severn Estuary. It acknowledges that the Sustainable Development Commission report is an important step in considering the feasibility of harnessing of tidal power from the Severn Estuary, and welcomes the proposal for a feasibility study. Given the international environmental and economic importance of the estuary, as well as climate change issues, it is essential that all options are appropriately evaluated.

The SEP has a unique and strong track record in providing a neutral co-ordination role in the decision-making process; bringing together local authorities, statutory agencies and other organisations with responsibilities for planning and management of estuary resources. It has easy access to the wide range of estuary stakeholders and users who collectively have significant knowledge to offer. No one organisation has all the knowledge, powers and resources to ensure that all uses of the estuary are sustainable - working together is therefore of vital importance. Decisions regarding the future use of the estuary should be made on the basis of sound science, stakeholder and public engagement. SEP exists to encourage information exchange, facilitate discussion and advocate informed decision-making.

SEP is able to offer cost effective support towards consultation, information co-ordination and dissemination and provide a watching brief on the process. This would work to the benefit of existing partners, the Sustainable Development Commission and Government. A neutral position will be taken by SEP at all times, informing the decision-making process by pointing out estuary-related issues and acknowledging that partners will each take their own individual positions. SEP will neither be a decision-maker or promoter, but offer avenues for gathering opinion. SEP will encourage questions that need to be asked and help to ensure that relevant parties are involved - in particular seeking to ensure that local and regional stakeholders are fully represented and that the estuary wide perspective is given due weight.