



**RTPI
Research**

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REGEN

Spatial Approaches to Local Energy Planning

**Part one: An introduction to the
SALEP resource suite.**

The Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI)

The RTPI champions the power of planning to create prosperous places and vibrant communities. We have over 27,000 members in the private, public, academic and voluntary sectors. Using our expertise and research we bring evidence and thought leadership to shape planning policies and thinking, putting the profession at the heart of society's big debates. We set the standards of planning education and professional behaviour that give our members, wherever they work in the world, a unique ability to meet complex economic, social and environmental challenges. We are the only body in the United Kingdom that confers Chartered status to planners, the highest professional qualification, sought after by employers in both private and public sectors.

This resource is part of the Spatial Approaches to Local Energy Planning (SALEP) suite

This resource is part of the RTPI's SALEP (Spatial Approaches to Local Energy Planning) suite of guidance, analysis and in-depth case studies on integrating energy planning with town planning across the UK. It was produced in collaboration with Regen.

For more information and access to the rest of the suite, please visit the [SALEP webpage](#).

Authors

This document was produced by the RTPI with input from Regen.

Cover image

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Foreword from the RTPI's Board of Trustees

Climate Champion

"As the RTPI Board of Trustees' Climate Champion, I am very glad to see the publication of this much needed Spatial Approaches to Local Energy Planning (SALEP) suite of resources.

The Climate Change Act 2008 sets out the UK's legally binding target of 100% reduction in 1990 emissions by 2050. We have so far met our targets in the first three carbon budgets, and we are on course to meet the fourth one.

However, from here onwards the task becomes one of further optimisation. The low-hanging fruit is largely picked and we need to become better as planners in delivering development which meets the needs of future generations.

The Climate Change Committee's Seventh Carbon Budget, published in 2025 ([Climate Change Committee, 2025](#)),¹ is a huge challenge to our profession. It identifies 'buildings' as the sector requiring the largest share of carbon emission reductions over the reporting period, with the electrification of heating a key part of achieving this. Energy at all scales, from new power plants and smart grids to retrofitting our ailing housing stock and community-led energy co-ops, is and will be the talk of the town for a long while.

And on a geopolitical level, the UK's energy security as an island nation with vast renewable potential has never been more important. Being able to deliver critical energy infrastructure alongside communities and traditional planning considerations is key. The recommendations and challenges the SALEP project sets out to Government and the planning profession are timely, raising key questions about our engagement with energy planning institutions, policies and initiatives."

Simeon Shtebunaev

¹ Climate Change Committee, 'The Seventh Carbon Budget', Climate Change Committee, 2025
<<https://www.theccc.org.uk/publication/the-seventh-carbon-budget/>> [accessed 21/05/2025]

1. Introduction

1.1 Town planning and energy planning in a rapidly changing landscape

Decarbonising the UK's energy grid is central to securing greater energy security and achieving its net zero ambitions. Indeed, the government's goal for Great Britain is that clean sources will produce as least as much power as Great Britain consumes by 2030 ([NESO, 2025](#))². Beyond this, the UK's legally-binding 'net zero by 2050' target remains.

Meeting these targets is partly a technical challenge. It requires identifying and harnessing the UK's renewable energy sources, huge investments in renewable energy projects and the grid, and strategies for coordinating and targeting this investment for maximum effect. Across the UK, nationally and locally, new institutions, initiatives and energy plans are coming into place that set out pathways and actions to achieve a net zero energy system. The energy policy landscape is changing rapidly at different levels and across the UK nations.

Local authority town planners have a crucial role to play in this transition. Indeed, it is the local level at which practical challenges concerning delivery, infrastructure and competing development priorities become 'real'. The delivery of energy infrastructure has to be considered in the context of the wider built environment and sometimes conflicting social, environmental and economic needs. Town planning enables this.

But delivery is also a social and political challenge, and town planners are at its frontline. It is through effective engagement during planning that communities can genuinely shape the way their places develop, including in relation to renewable energy projects.

Conversely, if new renewable projects happen 'to' communities, rather than with them, resentment and opposition may grow. There are already concerning signs that a backlash against renewable energy projects is underway ([The Guardian, 2025](#))³.

1.2 Integrating town planning and energy planning

Despite the prize, and despite the risks, there is often a disconnect between town planning and energy planning, particularly at the local level.

To some extent this is because of the current pace of policy change, but it is also because local planning authorities face acute resourcing challenges. A quarter of UK planners left the public

² NESO, 'Clean power 2030', NESO, 2025 < <https://www.neso.energy/publications/clean-power-2030> > [accessed 21/05/2025]

³ Horton, Helena and Elgot, Jessica, 'Reform's green energy assault in Lincolnshire 'puts 12,200 jobs at risk'', The Guardian, 2025 < <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2025/may/07/reform-uk-green-energy-assault-lincolnshire-jobs-risk> > [accessed 21/05/2025]

sector between 2013 and 2020 ([RTPI, 2023](#)),⁴ and 45% of planning departments in English local authorities reported a skills gap in energy and climate change ([MHCLG, 2025](#)).⁵

This disconnect also has long-term roots. Much of the UK's energy grid was built in the post-war period to support fossil fuels. It focused on large, single, points of generation at power stations. While the country's reliance on fossil fuels continued, there was little need to fundamentally alter the grid. But because renewable generation tends to happen in a dispersed way, at multiple smaller points across the grid, the location of energy infrastructure developments has become an important question. Community engagement and competing land uses are, in many ways, now much more important issues for energy planning than they have been for a very long time.

To deliver these projects with local support and in ways that generate environmental and social benefits, good town planning is essential. Conversely, without integration with, and guidance for, town planning, local decision makers often find there is a disconnect between local development plans and their decarbonisation ambitions.

The prize for integrating town planning and energy planning is huge, but so too are the risks of missed opportunities if it is not done. This suite of resources aims to help local planners and other decision makers bridge the gap between energy planning and town planning.

2. Who is this suite of resources for and where does it cover?

Though it may be valuable to anyone interested in understanding more about how town planning and energy planning interact across the UK, this suite of resources focuses on providing:

- **Guidance for energy planners** (and other stakeholders) on planning processes;
- **Guidance for town planners** on policy and site considerations for different energy technologies; and
- **Recommendations to central government and local government** on how energy planning and town planning can be better aligned at the local level.

Geographically, this suite covers all four UK nations. It is therefore important to state from the onset that while the UK Government sets the overall policy framework for energy at the UK level

⁴ Csontos, Gabor, 'State of the Profession 2023: The UK planning profession in numbers', RTPI, 2023 < <https://www.rtpi.org.uk/media/16015/state-of-the-profession-2023-final.pdf> >: [accessed 21/05/2025]

⁵ Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) and Verian, 'Local Authority Planning Capacity and Skills Survey 2023 Survey Report: Findings from Local Authorities and National Park Authorities in England', MHCLG, 2025 < https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/677d098fd721a08c006654e9/MHCLG_Local_Authority_Planning_Capacity_and_Skills_Survey_2023.pdf > [accessed 21/05/2025]

(including the 'net zero by 2050 target'),⁶ planning is the responsibility of the devolved administrations. It is therefore essential to appreciate the different challenges each nation faces while sharing best practices across the UK.

3. What does this library of resources comprise?

The resources in this suite build on one another to provide a comprehensive overview of the energy planning landscape in the UK, reference materials for town planners, and a series of recommendations for central and local government.

Though each resource can be read independently, we suggest that the following order provides the best overview.

3.1 Summary

1. This introduction and high-level summary of the RTPI's recommendations to government on joining-up energy planning and town planning.

3.2 Guidance and reference materials

2. An [overview](#) of energy-related policy and public bodies, and consenting (planning) regimes, across the UK.
3. An [overview](#) of the major siting constraints and considerations for different types of renewable energy projects in the UK, with recommendations for how the governments can improve this aspect of energy infrastructure planning.

3.3 Case studies

4. A series of case studies that draw out key challenges and insights related to integrating energy planning and town planning at the local level:
 - a. Community-led energy planning in [Oldham](#).
 - b. The long-term integration of energy planning and town planning in [Bristol](#).
 - c. Data sharing, digital tools and involving town planners in the Local Area Energy Plans process in [Leicestershire](#).
 - d. Prioritising and reducing risks associated with investing in energy projects in [Belfast](#).
 - e. The governance challenges associated with integrating energy planning into town planning approaches in [Denbighshire](#).
 - f. The benefits of ensuring town planners are involved early in the energy planning

⁶ Department for Energy Security and Net Zero and Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy, 'Net Zero Strategy: Build Back Greener', Government publications, 2021 < <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/net-zero-strategy> > [accessed 21/05/2025]

process, in [Perth and Kinross](#).

3.4 Overarching analysis and recommendations

5. Our [analysis and recommendations](#) on how emerging local energy plans can be better integrated with town planning across the UK. This builds on the siting constraints, case study resources and overarching analysis. It focuses on Local Area Energy Plans (LAEPs) across the UK, and in Scotland also includes reference to Local Heat and Energy Efficiency Strategies (LHEESs).

4. Summary of key recommendations

From our case studies and overarching analyses, we have produced the following recommendations for central government and local authorities across the UK.

For our full recommendations and more detail on implementation please see the [SALEP analysis and recommendations resource](#).

4.1 Local authorities

Challenge 1: Planners and energy teams often work in isolation, leading to missed opportunities for integrating energy and town planning.

Recommendation 1: Local authorities should establish formal governance structures to integrate town planning and energy teams. This could include:

- Creating cross-departmental working groups or steering committees; and
- Embedding energy planning discussions in local plan development cycles.

Challenge 2: Energy plans procured from external consultants often lack consistency in data outputs, miss upskilling opportunities for local authority teams, and overlook meaningful community involvement.

Recommendation 2: When commissioning energy planning processes, local authorities should set clear contractual expectations with consultants regarding:

- The specific types of analysis outputs required;
- Data-sharing protocols to enable long-term use by local authorities;
- Training and knowledge transfer for local authority staff to enhance internal capacity; and
- Defined community engagement processes to ensure public input is incorporated.

4.2 Central government

Challenge 3: Development plans are not consistently aligned with net zero goals, limiting their

effectiveness in driving decarbonisation.

Recommendation 3: The UK Government (in England) should strengthen the requirement for local plans to be net zero compliant, ensuring that:

- Net zero compliance is a statutory requirement in all local plans;
- Clear, enforceable criteria define what a 'net zero compliant' plan entails; and
- Support is provided to local authorities to achieve this.

Challenge 4: There is a lack of clarity on the distinct roles of town planning and energy planning, and methods of integration, leading to potential inefficiencies in policy and project delivery.

Recommendation 4: The UK Government and devolved administrations should issue guidance clarifying:

- The respective roles and interactions of town planning and energy planning; and
- Best practices for integrating energy planning into local town planning policies.

Challenge 5: Inconsistencies in data across energy planning processes make it difficult for local authorities to develop coherent strategies.

Recommendation 5: The UK Government and devolved administrations should provide guidance on standardising data outputs from energy planning to ensure that data is provided in accessible and usable tools, and that local authorities are provided with clear instructions or support for its use.

Challenge 6: Local planning authorities face chronic resource constraints, limiting their ability to engage with energy planning.

Recommendation 6: The UK Government and devolved administrations should address resourcing challenges by providing more funding and support to increasing local authority resourcing.

Challenge 7: Many planning officers lack the necessary expertise to engage with energy planning processes effectively. This can create unnecessary delays and overall increased costs.

Recommendation 7: The UK Government and devolved administrations should fund training programmes for local planning authorities to improve knowledge on:

- The overall energy system as well as technology-specific requirements; and
- Best practices for integrating energy planning into local plans.



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