

Report from the Climate Change Group

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Summary: A sub group has been formed to consider the implications of climate change in the Chilterns. It has considered the potential impacts on main landscape types and undertaken an initial assessment of renewable energy technologies and potential impacts on the Chilterns. This approach needs to be refined and an action plan devised for both the AONB and Conservation Board.

Purpose of Report: To report the progress of the Climate Change Group and to seek feedback on its initial assessment.

Background

1. The Climate Change Group has prepared a table based on potential impacts on the landscape types of the Chilterns with an assessment of the possible mitigation and adaptation options. (Appendix 1).
2. In summary, based on current available evidence, changes are likely to be gradual and complicated by other factors.
3. The outputs from this work should be:
 - A climate change action plan for the Chilterns AONB.
 - A climate change action plan for the Conservation Board.
 - A reference work to be used in the review of the AONB Management Plan.
 - A policy statement on renewable energy options.
4. The group has also undertaken an initial assessment of renewable energy options and their potential impact on the Chilterns (appendix 2). In general terms solar and ground source heat pumps have the least landscape impact whilst wood fuel offers the most direct benefits as it will encourage the management of woodlands. The Board has already supported a number of events to promote the use of wood fuel.
5. The appearance of wind turbines, particularly along the scarp ridge would be the most contentious renewable energy scenario. In general large scale off-shore wind farms seem to be preferred by the industry as gaining planning consent inland in the south of England is difficult. There also doubts about the viability of small scale wind turbines. It would almost certainly be unacceptable to the planning authorities to construct large turbines in such a prominent location at the ridge. It is more likely that there will be applications for medium sized turbines (12- 20 metres) in other locations. The Board could usefully develop a special policy as there may be a few locations where that scale of turbine could be sited without being unacceptably intrusive.

6. A major factor affecting the possible take up rate and therefore impact of renewable energy technologies is the price of fuels and the availability of grant aid. The solar industry is primarily based on the domestic market and is driven by lifestyle choices and grant schemes. The economics rarely compare well with conventional fuel systems and thus the take up will not yet be driven by the market. The government grants have been changed significantly and in the view of many are under funded thus slowing the industry.
7. Farmers have more choices of biofuel and biomass crops with miscanthus (elephant grass) most often referred to. This can grow up to 12 feet and appear more like a woodland coppice than an agricultural crop. It will probably begin to make an appearance in the Chilterns but probably not on a large scale. The impacts will tend to be localised. Rape seed oil is now a familiar crop and may be grown on an even more extensive basis in future.

Recommendations

1. **Board members provide feedback on the initial assessment of climate change impacts on the AONB.**
2. **The Board members provide feedback on the initial assessment of the impacts of renewable energy technologies.**