Opposition Policy Item

Supporting Solar Systems

Corporate priorities and policy considerations

This policy item is consistent with Corporate Plan (2006/07 – 2009/10) key priorities *Clean, Green & Safe* and *A Successful Suburb* and, with the Corporate Plan's emphasis on supporting an active community. It is also consistent with the obligation now placed on local authorities to provide leadership and to enable change.

Recommendations

1. That the Cabinet **considers** an amendment to the Corporate Plan to include an additional service objective under the key priority *Clean, Green & Safe* of *"encouraging the community to take positive steps to improve the energy efficiency of their homes – including through the installation of the new generation of solar energy systems."* Further, that the Cabinet **considers** an amendment to the Corporate Plan to change key priority *A Successful Suburb* (service outcome 35) to insert the words *"energy efficient"* between the words *"high quality"* and *"sustainable".*
2. That the Cabinet **considers** investigating the feasibility of community-run local cooperatives and/or a single Barnet-wide co-operative for the production of solar energy, and, if feasible, establishing of a pilot project
3. Depending upon the outcome of (2), the Cabinet **considers** promoting the establishment of local cooperatives and/or a single Barnet-wide cooperative through *Barnet First* and the Barnet Council website
4. Depending upon the outcome of (2), the Cabinet **considers** the desirability, practicality and legality of contributing some of its roof space to the cooperative for the installation of its equipment

Risk management issues

The risks of the adoption of this policy item will be identified during the feasibility study and pilot exercise. The only risk worth considering at this stage would be the failure to recognise an opportunity and adopt an innovative scheme which would both utilise one of the Borough's chief strengths – its active community - and confirm Barnet Council's role as a leading local authority.

Legal issues

The legal issues arising out of the adoption of this policy item will be identified during the feasibility study and pilot exercise.

Financial, staffing and property implications

The role of the Council in respect of the adoption of this policy is to provide leadership and enable change. In the Corporate Plan (2006/07 – 2009/10) it states that *"…the Council is committed to promoting civic pride, supporting an active community…"* It is not the intention of

this opposition policy item to commit large sums of public money or resources to its delivery. It is consistent with the following statement from the Corporate Plan

> *"Barnet's residents have always taken an active interest in civic affairs. A recent Citizen's Panel survey showed that 26% of Barnet's residents volunteer, and 79% have given up their time in the last year to help someone else…The Council have a pivotal role in encouraging and supporting such an active and involved community by listening to residents and working with them to build civic pride."*

Some staff resource will be required to undertake the feasibility study and to establish the pilot. Promotion of the scheme - if this policy item is adopted and found to be feasible - will be through existing facilities i.e. *Barnet First*, the Barnet Council website and through the press office.

The use of Council property for the installation of solar equipment (subject to the necessary approvals) is intended to utilise space that is currently of little use or value and will be at the cooperative's expense.

Background Information

This Opposition Policy Item and its recommendations have been framed in such a way that it fully recognises the Cabinet's responsibility for deciding whether to undertake a more formal examination of this proposal. This item is intended to start the debate – it does not represent the final word. Members are asked to consider the points made.

The solar energy Britain has the potential to use each year is 750 times greater than our national energy consumption, yet there are currently on 20,000 homes in the UK with such panels or photovoltaic tiles (similar, but more expensive) to help provide hot water for bathing and central heating.

Great Britain is a long way behind many countries: in Germany for example 140,000 homes have solar panels and there are 400,000 in Japan. Spain has issued national guidelines insisting that the number of solar-assisted (a more accurate term than solar-powered) homes increases tenfold by 2010.

Almost any property can be fitted with a solar-assisted water heating system: all that is required if for the house to have an area of roof that is roughly south facing, for maximum exposure to daylight. The solar panels or photovoltaic tiles absorb the suns' energy and convert it into heat, which joins the heat generated by a standard domestic boiler.

On overcast days the boiler must do most or all of the work, but on brighter days the solar system can provide all of the hot water needed for an average house.

The technology now needed is 90% cheaper than it was in the 1970s and houses with solar roof tiles can in fact generate more electricity than is needed at certain times in the day. This surplus energy can be sold back to local electricity companies making solar energy very cost effective.

As with most renewable energy systems, however, the initial costs make setting up these projects initially quite expensive. Notwithstanding the fact that the savings on electricity bills in the long-term should make up for the initial costs year on year, and the fact that the costs are falling, many householders are discouraged from installing solar systems. This is particularly

the case where limited roof space means that too great a proportion of the installation cost would be spent on labour rather than the equipment itself. In some cases, the roof space available precludes investment in solar energy altogether.

One innovative solution to this problem has been investigated and proposed by a Childs Hill resident.

At it simplest, a cooperative of households could be established covering a discrete area (a terrace of houses, a whole street etc.). The cooperative would pay for the equipment and share the labour costs. More ambitiously, however, a cooperative might be established Borough-wide. The co-operative would again pay for the equipment and install it (with the appropriate permissions) in locations where installation fees could be minimised and energy production maximised. The energy generated would be sold to the energy companies with some of the income shared by the investors of the co-operative and the rest set aside for depreciation and development. This would give every Barnet resident the opportunity of investing in and encouraging the development of a highly sustainable source of energy - including those residents who are keen to invest in a larger installation than their small roofs allow and those whose circumstances mean that they cannot afford their own PV installation at all. If the co-operative achieved charitable status, donations could be made to it from those who did not want to benefit directly – e.g. those who might wish to offset their own carbon usage. Such donations could attract gift aid, resulting in them being grossed up by taxation.

Barnet Council's contribution to the development of this idea would be as follows:

1. Amending the Corporate Plan to include *"energy efficiency"* amongst the service objectives
2. Investigating the feasibility of the community establishing local cooperatives and/or a single Barnet-wide co-operative for the production of solar energy, and, if feasible, encouraging the establishment of a pilot project
3. Depending upon the outcome of (2), promoting the establishment of local cooperatives and/or a single Barnet-wide cooperative through *Barnet First* and the Barnet Council website

There is a further way in which Barnet Council could promote the establishment of a solar energy cooperative. Should the outcome of the feasibility study and pilot prove positive, Barnet Council might consider offering a proportion of the roof space on it own buildings to the cooperative for the installation of its equipment as a "contribution".

In order to lead in this innovation without incurring sizeable expenditure, it is proposed that a feasibility study be undertaken to agree in principle to giving access to rooftops for large scale installation of PV panels. Barnet could thus set the way forward for installers in cooperation with the PV industry, to at their own cost, install, insure and maintain the equipment.. Perhaps Barnet could make roof space available on public buildings.
Also to investigate whether the Council could encourage/promote a pilot cooperative in Barnet. Council would be seen to be actively promoting renewable energy sources, as technology improves and traditional energy costs continue to rise.

By establishing a residents' co-operative if everyone in a street, an area, or a new development put up panels the proportion spent on the labour content would drastically reduce.
If a local co-operative were established, it could purchase PV panels and install them on the roofs of public or quasi-public buildings. The electricity would be sold directly to the grid, producing income to members of the co-operative.