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Renewable Energy Advice – A Holistic Approach to Advice

Providing renewable energy business advice requires experience, independent specialist knowledge, attention to detail and back up support. But also an open mind is required to be able to assess all available opportunities and provide independent advice to meet the requirements of the business.

Brown & Co property and business consultants apply industry respected technical business knowledge and business experience to very specialist area of renewable energy.

Every business is different, the resources available and the aims and objectives of the individuals' involved. It is vital that a consultant understands the different needs of a business, especially given the new and exciting nature of renewable energy.

When advising a business or landowner for a renewable energy project, it is necessary to keep an open mind when making the first visit. Many initial visits are based upon the preconceptions of one particular technology such as wind energy, solar photovoltaic, biomass heating etc. It is important to first understand the reasons behind a client's initial choice of technology or scale of project, finding out the business details and available resources.

Once the energy/investment requirements of a business, farmer or landowner have been ascertained it is then possible to discuss all available technologies, the different project scales, the limitations or difficulties the suggested site(s)/location(s) may create and the possibilities of an "energy mix" utilising more than one technology.

For example, a farming business may operate a feed mill, which requires a large amount of electricity, in this scenario a combination of solar PV panels on the building roof and a small scale wind turbine may be better placed to meet the energy requirements of the business, rather than say just a single larger wind turbine. Obviously there are pros and cons for each option but, if the client has them explained and the site(s) assessed then they are better informed to make a decision.

Another classic example is when the farmhouse fossil fuel boiler needs replacing, this is a perfect opportunity to look at a biomass alternative. This decision may be aided if there are other buildings, workshops, offices or holiday cottages nearby that could utilise the heat as well, developing a small district heating system. There is then the opportunity to look at the potential of woodland management or growing energy crops on the poorer land of the farm/estate, to provide at the least some feedstock material.

In 2010, Brown & Co identified the need for a holistic approach to advice and explanation in the emerging sector of renewable energy. Brown & Co developed and launched an on-farm renewable energy audit explaining the background to renewable energy and technologies. This has been a great success and businesses that have had the service finding they understand the reasons behind the Feed in Tariffs and Government policies and the differences between the technologies that are available to them.

As a consultant advising businesses, farmers and landowners it is important to have an in depth knowledge of business finance, planning, energy requirements and usage, and of course different renewable energy technologies. From an initial visit/discussion with a business, learning the aims, objectives and resources available, to then assessing the best potential renewable energy options which may end up being different from the original intention of the visit/discussion, is why an open mind is needed.

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Notes to editors

Brown & Co is a firm of independent rural property, land and business specialists operating from ten offices in the East of England, London, Poland, Argentina and St Lucia.

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