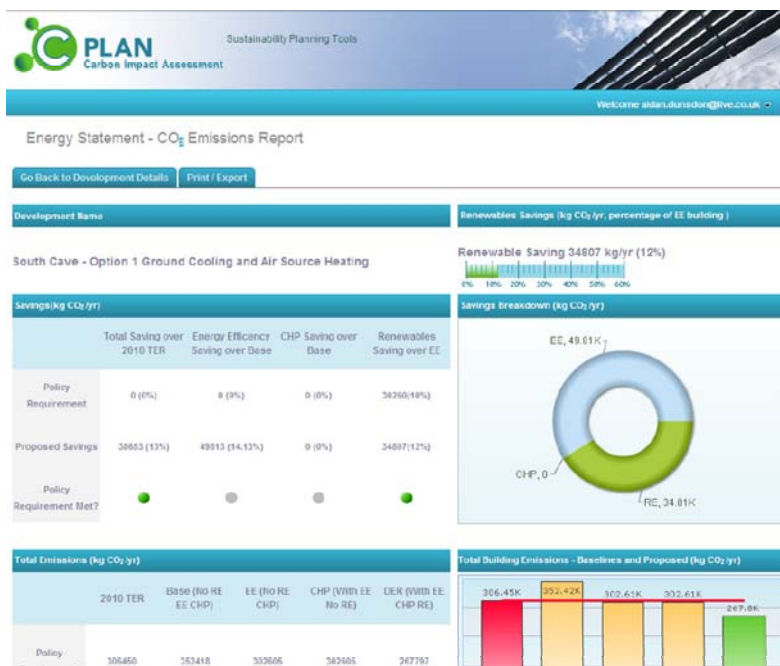


Roll out of C-Plan to assist local planning authorities in Yorkshire and Humber secure renewable energy and carbon reductions in new developments

During 2011 and 2012 the primary area for requests for help to the Climate Change Skills Fund Technical Support Service has come from planning officers struggling to deal with implementation of climate change policies and discharge of conditions. In both urban and rural authorities planning officers are now receiving proposals from applicants to show how they are going to meet the policy requirements but they have not got the skills to evaluate the proposals. Additionally house builders have started putting forward arguments to not fully comply with policy requirements or alternative proposals. Again officers have not had the skills to assess the merits of these cases. The fund provided training to officers in the Leeds City Region on what to ask for in an energy statement and how to evaluate it, but this did not remedy the problem. From talking with officers processing these applications and with Service Heads it was agreed a tool was needed to help applicants submit proposals in a way that provides the necessary information and that would evaluate the proposals. Having looked at various options it was decided C-Plan (www.sustainabilityplanner.co.uk) provides the software and support planning officers throughout the region will benefit from.

Planning authorities that have issued consents with conditions requiring schemes to demonstrate compliance with the RSS requirements for renewable energy or local policies seeking carbon reductions above building regulations either through efficiency or renewables, will find C-Plan invaluable for assessing and understanding applicants' proposals.

ECSC Thamesway Ltd, the company behind C-Plan, worked in conjunction with energy and built environment specialists from London South Bank University to develop the first online energy and carbon planning tools in the UK. The involvement of local authority planners in the design of C-Plan has ensured that complex energy calculations are presented in a clear, consistent and easy-to-understand format for planners with no specialist knowledge about energy.



C-Plan handles complex information on the energy demand, output of renewable energy and carbon emissions of development proposals and displays these in a format that can be readily understood by planners. Charts and indicator lights explain how a development measures up against the energy targets in a planning policy. These are displayed on-screen (left) and in a summary report for the planning officer.

The C-Plan service provides an online portal that tests and evaluates proposals combined with support for planners provided by ECSC Thameswey's energy specialists.

C-Plan is in use by a number of local planning authorities and as a result some are now requiring energy statements to be provided as part of their validation process. Three Rivers District Council in Hertfordshire was one of the first local authorities to pilot the use of C-Plan. Since its introduction in 2008, the council has used C-Plan to assess the carbon and energy impacts of developments ranging in size and complexity from individual houses to the new Warner Brothers studios where the 'Harry Potter' attraction opened earlier this year. In addition, Three Rivers is using C-Plan's sustainability tools to provide applicants with a checklist covering other issues such as water, waste, transport, design and biodiversity. The council's adopted Core Strategy requires energy and sustainability statements to be submitted online via C-Plan. Claire May, Principal Planning Officer at Three Rivers explains how C-Plan has helped the council:

"C-Plan has enabled our Development Management Officers to ensure renewable energy is routinely provided in new developments even before we had an adopted policy. The way C-Plan assesses the technical details and reports them in graphs and indicator lights is quick and easy saving hours of Officer time in checking the energy proposals for a scheme. We have also been able to use the results from C-Plan as evidence to support our policy at the recent examination of our Core Strategy. The Inspector noted the way we have used C-Plan to secure consistently higher levels of performance than the minimum standard set by the Building Regulations and endorsed our requirement that applicants use C-Plan to submit energy and sustainability statements."

Sean Rendall, head of consultancy at ECSC Thameswey summarises the idea behind C-Plan as a solution 'designed with planners, for planners'. With over twenty years' previous experience working for local planning authorities, he has been keen to ensure C-Plan provides a robust way to analyse complex technical data and report against individual local authorities' policy targets in a clear, consistent format that can be easily understood by planners.

C-Plan has been the subject of a case study carried out by the IDeA for the Planning Advisory Service. It concluded that C-Plan has been accepted and well received by applicants, who find the process clear and relatively simple and has been invaluable for planners providing concise and clearly presented answers to the question of policy compliance, reducing the amount of time spent analysing technical information submitted in support of planning applications. The case study is available at:

<http://www.pas.gov.uk/pas/core/page.do?pagelId=120156&path=108847.108832&activeId=120256>

Over the next few weeks, Thameswey and LGYH will be holding a series of workshops with planning authorities explaining in more detail how C-Plan works and the ongoing support that will be provided to planning officers. There is more information about C-Plan at www.sustainabilityplanner.co.uk.