



Campaign to Protect
Rural England

Policy Position Statement

Onshore Wind Turbines

Summary

CPRE believes that climate change caused by greenhouse gas emissions is a major threat to the global environment, and to the character and quality of England's countryside. We therefore recognise the need to exploit the potential of a range of renewable energy sources to meet the Government's target of an 80% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 2050. While wind energy can make an important contribution to tackling climate change, CPRE believes this should not come at the expense of the beauty, character and tranquillity of rural England. We assess wind turbine proposals for their potential impact on the landscape, taking account of their cumulative impact, and strongly resist those whose impact we consider to be unacceptable. To help tackle climate change we are also campaigning for significant reductions in energy consumption, especially through improved transport policies, better planning and design of new development, and greater energy efficiency in existing buildings.

Introduction

Wind turbines convert energy from wind into electricity. Unlike conventional power from fossil fuels, they produce no air pollutants or climate-changing carbon dioxide when in operation. But because they use wind as their energy source, they need to be sited in areas of high wind speed, which are often in the UK's most remote and beautiful

landscapes. In order to capture the wind, they are also very tall, sometimes exceeding 100 metres – taller than the clock tower of Big Ben. Being large industrial structures, they stand prominent in any landscape, as do the access roads and power lines required to service them. While some people may find them aesthetically pleasing, others do not. Some landscapes, especially industrialised areas, may be better able to accommodate such visual impacts. But when insensitively located, onshore wind turbines harm the natural beauty and character of the English countryside.

In contrast with conventional power stations, wind turbines need to be built in large numbers in order to contribute significantly to overall power generation. Because they only work when and where the wind blows, greater reliance on such intermittent energy sources will require substantial and innovative changes to the way in which electricity is distributed and stored if they are to play a much greater role. In May 2008, there were 165 onshore wind farms operating in the UK, comprising around 2,000 turbines, mostly in open countryside. These produce around one percent of the nation's total electricity. To deliver its UK target of 15% of energy coming from renewable sources by 2020 – which CPRE supports – the Government estimates that up to 4,000 new 3MW onshore turbines might be required. This could have very significant implications for the countryside to which the Government has not attached adequate importance.

For further information
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In 2004, the Government published its Planning Policy Statement (PPS) 22: *Renewable Energy*. This places much greater emphasis on the planning system actively supporting renewable energy, including wind turbines, which we fear undermines landscape protection. There is also a danger that reforms introduced under the *Planning Act 2008*, including the creation of an Infrastructure Planning Commission and a new National Policy Statement on renewable energy, could further bias planning decisions in favour of wind turbines, in spite of other considerations.

CPRE's approach

CPRE believes there is a role for wind energy in providing electricity in the UK but the intermittency and major visual impact of onshore wind turbines limits their potential contribution. Their location and extent need to be carefully controlled.

The planning system has an important role to play in promoting wind and other renewables development while protecting sensitive areas of landscape from adverse impacts and minimising the effect on the character of the wider countryside.

Decisions on the scale and location of wind power development and other forms of energy generation should avoid damaging valued rural landscapes – not only those that are designated as National Parks or Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs). Landscape character assessment should be used to identify broad locations which may be appropriate for renewable energy development, and those where the landscape would be unacceptably harmed. The planning system also needs to take proper account of the value that affected communities place on their local landscape.

Increasing our use of wind energy while avoiding unacceptable impacts on the English countryside could be achieved by considerably greater emphasis on the development of wind farms offshore. At sea, wind speed is higher and more consistent, meaning that each turbine produces more electricity. Offshore wind farms are less likely to damage cherished landscapes but they should be sited sensitively to avoid damaging seascapes and the marine environment.

CPRE has major concerns about the process for deciding applications for major onshore wind development. If a project has an installed capacity of 50 megawatts or more, decisions are in future set to be taken by the Infrastructure Planning Commission in line with the relevant National Policy Statement. We fear this process is likely to entail a serious democratic deficit and may well undermine landscape protection. We welcome the Government's commitment to increasing electricity generation from renewable sources. The countryside must contribute, but this needs to be in ways that avoid unacceptable harm to the character of the countryside. So, renewable energy policy should:

> **work within a democratically based plan-led system** to steer wind farm development to areas of least landscape sensitivity and encourage development on brownfield sites where appropriate, taking account of community views. As part of the planning process, local and regional planning authorities should identify broad locations that might be suitable for production of renewable energy, including wind turbines, and assess their suitability in the landscape. This should be subject to Strategic

Environmental Assessment and public consultation to identify and resolve conflicts, investigate alternative options, and ensure all relevant environmental issues are properly considered. Plans should not set technology-specific targets for renewables as this could restrict the development of other more efficient, but currently less commercially viable alternatives, and result in an over-reliance on onshore wind despite its potentially serious impact on the landscape;

> **protect the character of the countryside – its landscape, tranquillity, wildlife, heritage and amenity.** Wind turbines should be sensitively located to take account of their cumulative impact on the countryside, with consideration given to both their simultaneous (within one field of vision) and sequential (as one travels through the landscape) impacts, and the impact of associated infrastructure. Landscape Character Assessment should be used to determine what types, how much and what scale of renewable energy can be accommodated by an area without threatening its distinctive landscape character. The erection of wind turbines which affect nationally designated areas of landscape value are unlikely to be acceptable to CPRE, save in exceptional circumstances where the scale of development is small and appropriate to the local environment. We will vigorously oppose proposals for large-scale wind turbine development in and adjacent to Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and National Parks where these are judged to have an unacceptable impact on the landscape. We will consider supporting local communities resisting

wind turbine proposals on landscape grounds, especially if their views are not receiving proper consideration within the decision-making process;

- > **require proposals for wind turbines to be assessed on their individual merits.** There should be no presumption in favour of renewable energy development, or wind turbines in particular. A formal Environmental Impact Assessment should normally be required and should consider all aspects of proposed development including cumulative impacts on the landscape; the impact of noise and light pollution; the design and construction of associated development, such as access roads and transmission pylons; and issues surrounding decommissioning. CPRE will support wind farm proposals where they are appropriately located, taking account of the above considerations, particularly where they help meet local energy needs;
- > **require the removal of wind turbines if they have become redundant.** Licences for wind turbines should be time-limited and decommissioning requirements set out in planning permissions, with agreements for the removal of works and reinstatement of land established through enforceable planning conditions or obligations;
- > **engage local communities and secure public participation in planning for renewables.** Developers should be encouraged to consult local communities prior to applications for wind turbine development, to help identify and resolve potential concerns. Engaging the public at earlier stages in planning for renewables could also help

Further reading

UK Renewable Energy Strategy – Consultation Paper, Department for Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform, 2008.

UK Renewable Energy Strategy, A Response by CPRE, 2008. Available from CPRE Publications.

Planning Policy Statement (PPS) 22: Renewable Energy, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, 2004.

Planning Policy Statement: Planning and Climate Change – Supplement to PPS1, Department for Communities and Local Government, 2007

PPS22; Planning for Renewable Energy: A CPRE Briefing, CPRE, 2006. Available from CPRE Publications.

Responding to Planning Applications, CPRE, 2005. Available from CPRE Publications.

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spread awareness of the likely consequences of climate change and the need for local action to reduce carbon emissions, including through small-scale community schemes. CPRE has serious concerns about the widespread practice of windfarm developers offering ‘goodwill’ payments to local communities which threatens to bring the planning system into disrepute.

Overall, effective land-use planning is essential to securing reductions in energy consumption, improved energy efficiency in new and existing buildings, and producing a greater proportion of electricity generation from renewable sources while safeguarding the countryside. We also advocate research to bring forward a wider range of effective, small scale renewable energy technologies.

What can you do?

You can:

- > scrutinise the policies in the Local Development Framework for your area to ensure they maximise the opportunity for energy conservation and efficiency, including through reducing the need to travel;
- > support policies in your Local Development Framework that promote a broad range of renewables while making sure that the potential implications of wind turbines on the countryside are recognised. Object to the establishment of technology-specific targets;
- > advocate that your local planning authority assesses the potential impacts of wind development on countryside character when they are developing planning policies for renewable energy

and assessing proposals for new turbines. This should include the potential cumulative impact from a number of different developments;

- > assess the impact of local proposals for wind development on the countryside. Annex 1 of CPRE’s *Renewable Energy* campaign briefing identifies criteria on which you can base your assessment. You could also contact your local CPRE branch (see our website www.cpre.org.uk for details or call 020 7981 2800), which may be commenting on wind turbine development in your area. If you think a particular proposal is inappropriate because of its impact on the landscape, object to your local planning authority with a letter setting out your concerns (see CPRE’s guide *Responding to Planning Applications*). If you think a development has been promoted sensitively, send a letter of support;
- > request that, when wind development gets the go ahead, the planning permission includes a legal agreement and conditions to minimise its adverse impacts, and sets out when and how the turbines will be removed; and
- > ask your local MP for their views on wind energy or on particular schemes. Urge them to write to Ministers calling on them to demonstrate their commitment to safeguarding protected landscapes and the wider countryside from damaging development. Encourage them to give greater support to community renewables which are less damaging, and to a broad range of renewable technologies.

Further reading continued:

Planning for Renewable Energy: making the system more democratic: A CPRE Briefing, CPRE, 2005. Available from CPRE Publications.

Campaigning for Countryside Character: A CPRE Briefing, CPRE, 2003. Available from CPRE Publications.

Landscape Character Assessment: Guidance for England and Scotland, Natural England (formerly the Countryside Agency), 2002.

A related CPRE Policy Statement on Energy is also available. Available from CPRE Publications.