



Campaign to Protect
Rural England
NORTHAMPTONSHIRE

WINDFARMS TIME TO CHANGE DIRECTION?

Introduction

Windfarms are contentious locally. But climate change and anthropogenic global warming have caused CPRE nationally to come to support the development of windfarms provided that they are not sited in our most valued countryside.

Since that original policy was formed, new evidence suggests that the generation of electricity from wind is not effective in reducing carbon emissions. As a result the balance of the argument has changed and we believe it is now appropriate that CPRE should re-evaluate its support for onshore windfarms. In view of the rapid proliferation of onshore windfarm proposals across the country the need for that re-evaluation is urgent.

CPRE Northamptonshire has agreed a Report on the environmental, economic and social impact of onshore wind power in the UK. The Conclusions and Recommendations of the Report are presented here as an Executive Summary.

Executive Summary

We believe that it is becoming increasingly evident that wind power generation onshore in the UK is failing to live up to its promise. Any environmental good from carbon savings is a fraction of that suggested by the wind industry and the very modest quantities of electricity produced are of limited use. Furthermore it imposes a disproportionate economic and operational burden on the rest of the electricity generation network. Windfarms and the power networks required to connect them into the grid are also very destructive in terms of the landscape, lasting environmental damage and intrusion.

To justify these impacts wind power would have to be able to make an incontrovertible contribution to the de-carbonisation of the economy and the security of energy supply in this country. It is clear to us that wind power can do neither of these things in the UK.

The UK must soon replace a significant proportion of its electricity generation capacity. Almost all conventional, coal-fired capacity will be forced by EU law to close in the mid-term, and much nuclear is approaching obsolescence. Because wind power is inherently and unavoidably an intermittent and unpredictable power source it has to be backed up almost entirely by conventional generation. As a result wind can offer almost no contribution to the replacement process. On the contrary, because wind power is given priority in the grid, it introduces uncertainty in levels of demand for the output of new conventional power stations which threatens to compromise their economics.

In the UK the onshore wind power load factors – the amount of power produced in a year from a unit of capacity – rarely exceed 20%. (Modern gas-fired plant will expect to exceed 90%, and most of the shortfall is predictable maintenance). To approach the output targets (as opposed to installed capacity) currently projected by government this country would have to be carpeted with windfarms from end to end – and the availability of the output would still be unpredictable. Furthermore, the erratic pattern of electrical supply from wind power would still bear no relationship to the pattern of demand.

The current government policy for the encouragement of renewable energy, in the form of selective grants and, more importantly, the ROC scheme is, we believe, inappropriate for wind power onshore in the UK. The ROC scheme, guaranteeing that an artificially high price for electricity is paid to the operators, ensures that windfarms are extremely profitable for developers and operators – even at very

low levels of productivity. This profitability is inhibiting diversity into other renewable technologies. Furthermore, the additional costs pass through to all electricity consumers and these will increase as the proportion of renewable electricity increases. This is, in effect, an involuntary and regressive form of taxation. Yet it is one which, in the case of onshore wind power, serves no purpose in the public interest. The increased costs could also become a disproportionate burden on British industry and threaten its competitiveness in world markets.

We believe that wind power is not the panacea that will deliver us from the effects of climate change and it brings costs, economic, social and environmental, which heavily outweigh any direct or indirect benefit.

We recommend that CPRE as an organisation should now withdraw its qualified support for onshore wind, and should lobby the government for:

- a) an independent cost/benefit analysis of onshore wind energy production and the present system of subsidisation by the ROC mechanism, taking into account the impact of that production on base load efficiency, carbon emissions and the full environmental and economic impact of wind turbines and grid reinforcement;
- b) the imposition of an immediate, temporary moratorium on new onshore windfarm construction within 2km of residential dwellings;
- c) an immediate review of the subsidies for onshore wind projects to address their disproportionate profit levels compared to other renewables;
- d) measures requiring developers to provide adequate financial and licence guarantees to ensure that redundant wind turbines are decommissioned and the land restored without cost to the public; and
- e) action to prevent redundant or inoperative windfarms from being classed as brownfield sites, available for housing and other development.

The government should also be urged to:

- f) improve the protection of residents from noise;
- g) commission independent studies into the issue of blight;
- h) commission independent studies into possible health effects of living near windfarms; and
- i) allow communities to have a say in where windfarms would be appropriate, rather than have opportunistic developments imposed upon them.

In terms of addressing the challenges of decarbonising the economy, we believe that the government's focus should turn towards reducing the carbon emissions from conventional power generation; the encouragement of renewable technologies which do not have a destructive environmental impact; and bringing about a real and substantial reduction in overall energy consumption.

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The Campaign to Protect Rural England (Northamptonshire branch) exists to promote the beauty, tranquillity and diversity of rural England by encouraging the sustainable use of land and other natural resources in town and country.