



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 will therefore campaign for urgent reductions in energy consumption, especially through improved transport policies and better planning and design of new development. We recognise, too, the need for improved energy efficiency and the need to exploit the potential of a range of renewable energy sources, including wind power, to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

However, the visual impact of large wind turbines can be a form of pollution which damages the landscape. Decisions on the scale and location of wind power development and other forms of energy generation should therefore avoid damaging valued rural landscapes – not only those that are designated as National Parks or AONBs. Landscape character assessment should be used to identify broad locations which may be appropriate for renewable energy development, and those where unacceptable harm would be done to the landscape.

While CPRE will support renewable energy development in certain cases, such schemes should not come at the expense of the countryside. So we believe that each wind power proposal should be assessed

for its potential impact on the landscape. And we will strongly resist those, which damage the beauty, tranquillity and diversity of the English countryside.

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. But while they are a welcome renewable energy source, they can have significant adverse impacts on the landscape and wider countryside.

In the UK, technological advance and Government subsidies have brought down the cost of producing electricity from the wind. This has made it economical for wind turbine development on land, sometimes in the form of small single turbines (usually providing power to individual properties or operations) but mostly as large single or clustered turbines (windfarms) supplying the national grid network.

At least a thousand wind turbines are operating across the UK, almost all in open countryside, but these currently produce less than one-quarter of a percent of the nation's total electricity. 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 we are

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to replace conventional fossil fuel electricity generation.

If our consumption of electricity continues to increase, we will need more and more electricity from renewables to keep down carbon emissions and successfully tackle climate change. Even with improved technology, our growing reliance on wind would require vast extra numbers of turbines. One assessment by the Department of Trade and Industry calculates an eleven-fold increase in onshore wind turbines would be required to meet the Government's aspirational target of producing 20% of the UK's electricity from renewables by 2020. This would have very significant implications for the countryside.

While wind energy is widely advocated as a solution to delivering the UK's international and domestic commitments to tackle climate change (*Our Energy Future*, 2003), CPRE believes its contribution need not come at the expense of the beauty, character and tranquillity of rural England.

What are the issues for the countryside?

The English countryside will not be immune to the damage done by global climate change caused by excess greenhouse gases such as carbon dioxide in the atmosphere. Its character and beauty could change substantially. Unlike conventional fossil fuel power stations, wind turbines can generate electricity without producing carbon dioxide.

But while the UK has a considerable wind resource compared with other European countries, our windiest places are often in the most remote and beautiful landscapes.

Turbines have become larger with technological advances and could soon exceed 100 metres in height – taller than the clock tower of Big Ben. While some people may find them symbolic and aesthetically pleasing, they stand prominent in any landscape. Some landscapes, especially highly industrialised areas, may be better able to accommodate such visual impacts. But when insensitively located, onshore wind turbines harm the beauty and unique character of the English countryside.

CPRE believes there is a role for wind energy in providing electricity in the UK, but its intermittency and major visual impact limit the potential contribution of onshore turbines. Their location and extent need to be carefully controlled. The infrastructure associated with onshore wind development – such as power cables and access roads – have further impacts on the countryside. 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.

Increasing our use of wind energy without harming the English countryside could be achieved by the development of wind farms offshore. These should be sited beyond where they may affect sensitive coastlines and seascapes, and only after their impact on the marine environment and coastal communities has been carefully assessed. At sea, wind turbines can operate at higher efficiency and will have reduced impact on cherished scenery.

But we cannot rely on wind power alone to provide for our energy needs. There needs to be much more investment in harnessing a range of more predictable and reliable

sources of renewable energy, such as the tides. As new technologies become cheaper and more advanced, the role of onshore turbines may diminish.

CPRE's approach

CPRE believes onshore wind development has a role to play in reducing greenhouse gas emissions in the UK, but only as one of a range of renewable energy technologies. We welcome the Government's commitment to increasing electricity generation from renewable sources and its aspirational target for achieving this. To deliver these without detriment to the English countryside renewable energy policy should:

- > **be undertaken in conjunction with a much greater focus on improving energy conservation and efficiency.** We cannot build our way out of climate change with new non-fossil fuel energy sources alone. The cheapest, cleanest and safest way to reduce the UK's impact on global warming would be to use less energy – and thereby less fossil fuel. We need to make our homes and workplaces more energy-efficient and reduce our need to travel. Reducing greenhouse gas emissions through energy conservation and improved efficiency now would allow the UK to develop a more sustainable energy supply from renewable sources in the long term. Strategic planning for energy should promote energy conservation, energy efficiency and small-scale renewables technologies before relying on large-scale wind power schemes;
- > **be planned strategically following the 'plan, monitor and manage' approach.** Planning for renewables should not be

based purely on the setting of targets to meet a perceived demand and the provision of development to meet them (the 'predict and provide' approach). The 'plan, monitor and manage' approach requires consideration of the capacity there is to produce energy locally, not just in terms of different renewable resources, but also according to local environmental, social and economic constraints. The search for appropriate sites for onshore wind turbines should be guided by criteria that ensure the protection of the character of the countryside, its landscape, tranquillity, ecology, heritage and amenity. A sequential approach should be adopted, to steer wind development to the least environmentally sensitive areas and encourage development on brownfield sites where appropriate. Strategic plans for renewables development should benefit from Strategic Environmental Assessment, a process used to identify and resolve conflicting policies, investigate alternative scenarios of development and ensure all relevant environmental issues are properly considered;

- > **not set technology-specific targets for renewables.** Setting targets for the increased use of specific technologies such as wind turbines could restrict the development of other more efficient, but currently less commercially viable alternatives. This would result in an over-reliance on onshore wind despite its comparably lower efficiency and major impact on the countryside. In recognition of the variety and increasing cost effectiveness of renewables technologies and energy efficiency solutions, official targets for reducing our carbon emissions need to allow flexibility in how

we achieve them. The emphasis should be placed on finding the most sustainable ways of reaching those targets and not be constrained by the performance of current technologies;

- > **protect the character of the countryside – its landscape, tranquillity, ecology, heritage and amenity.** Renewable technologies should be sensitively located with regard to 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) impact and the impact of associated infrastructure. The implications of wind development should be assessed using the Countryside Agency's Countryside Character methodology. The erection of wind turbines which affect nationally designated areas of landscape value are unlikely to be acceptable, save in exceptional circumstances where the scale of development is small and appropriate to the local environment. CPRE will vigorously oppose proposals for major wind turbine development in and adjacent to Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and National Parks where these would have a detrimental effect on the landscape;
- > **require proposals for wind turbines to be assessed on their individual merits.** There should be no presumption in favour of renewable energy development. All development will have impacts on local environments, communities and economies, which need to be taken into account. CPRE will support wind development proposals where they are appropriately located, particularly where they offset or meet local energy needs.

CPRE believes that an Environmental Impact Assessment should normally be required and should consider all aspects of development. This should include cumulative impacts on the landscape, potential noise impacts, design, construction and associated development such as access roads, overhead wires, pylons and poles, and issues surrounding decommissioning;

- > **require the removal of wind turbines once they have become redundant.** As better renewable technologies become available, wind turbines should not be allowed to stand dormant in the landscape. 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 planning conditions or obligations;
- > **encourage small-scale community and household energy schemes.** Such schemes can incorporate renewables technologies (including single or small wind turbines) that supply electricity directly to homes and community buildings, sometimes exporting electricity to the national grid when they are generating more power than is required locally. They supply energy efficiently and reduce the demand for fossil fuel, minimising the need for large-scale electricity generation and grid infrastructure that can damage the landscape. Such development needs to be encouraged through the planning system. CPRE supports the objectives of the Countryside Agency's Community Renewables Initiative, which aims to help groups and individuals realise such schemes; and

Further reading

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

Landscape Character Assessment: Guidance for England and Scotland, Countryside Agency, 2002.

Our Energy Future – Creating a Low Carbon Economy, Department of Trade and Industry, 2003.

Our Energy Future – Creating a Low Carbon Economy: A CPRE Briefing, CPRE, 2003. Available from CPRE Publications.

Renewable Energy: A CPRE Campaign Briefing, CPRE, 2003. Available from CPRE Publications.

Responding to Planning Applications, CPRE, 2001. Available from CPRE Publications.

> **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 conflicts. Engaging the public at earlier stages in planning for renewables could also help spread awareness of the consequences of current decisions and the need for energy efficiency.

Land-use planning policy will be key to securing improved energy efficiency and a greater proportion of electricity generation from renewable sources while safeguarding the countryside. CPRE is campaigning for the Government's revised Planning Policy Statement on renewable energy to recognise the importance of encouraging energy conservation, protect the countryside 'for its own sake' and address the threat posed by the insensitive development of wind power.

What can you do?

You can:

- > scrutinise the policies in the Development Plan(s) for your area (Structure Plan and Local Plan or Unitary Development Plan) to ensure they maximise the opportunity for energy conservation and efficiency, including through reducing the need to travel;
- > support policies in your Development Plan(s) 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 planning for renewable energy and assessing proposals for new turbines;

> 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 your concerns (see CPRE's guide *Responding to Planning Applications*). If you think a development has been promoted sensitively, send a letter of support;

> demand 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 and encourage them to influence the Government's forthcoming Planning Policy Statement on renewables. Urge them to ask the Government to demonstrate its commitment to safeguard protected landscapes and the wider countryside 'for its own sake' (as outlined in the Rural White Paper, 2000) and address the threat that insensitive wind power development poses to it.

For more information about the Community Renewables Initiative, contact the Countryside Agency on 01242 521381 or visit www.countryside.gov.uk

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