

Whither the wind?

In October 2006, the first sod was cut for what will be the biggest wind farm in Europe - a 140-turbine development on Eaglesham Moor, south of Glasgow. This monster is just the latest in an ever increasing roll-call of wind farm developments that are encroaching onto the British countryside - from the Cairngorms to Cornwall, giant wind turbines are on the march. Wherever these turbines spring up or are proposed they divide opinion between the 'pro' and the 'anti' wind brigades.

For the pro-wind lobby, the turbines are a bright new dawn of, in their opinion, green and clean renewable energy - the front line in the government's fight against global warming and our dependence on fossil fuels. However, for those people who are against this technology - and that includes many in the parks industry - the shadow of the UK's dash for wind looms large and foreboding over their shoulders. *As a representative of the holiday parks industry I am receiving concerns over the effects of wind farms on the tourism industry and in particular, on the regular visitors to any one area.* Says Michael McCann, BH&HPA National Vice Chairman and Yorkshire Coast Branch Director, *'These effects are only slowly coming to light as wind farms in tourist areas are only just starting to come on-line.'*

These concerns are echoed by David Bellamy, the Association's President and long-time campaigner against the industrialisation of the British countryside by wind turbines.

'Park owners and holiday makers across the country are coming to me with their concerns about the wind farm developments threatening their bits of the countryside,' says Bellamy, who argues that wind



farms are not only visually intrusive and environmentally destructive, but also will do next to nothing to solve the energy challenges facing the country. *'The fact that the British countryside is being sacrificed on the altar of a technology that simply isn't effective is one of the biggest environmental disaster stories of the past 15 years,'* he says.

The anxiety of many BH&HPA park operators hinges on the concern that wind farms will make customers think twice about visiting an area. Given the harsh economic realities facing many park owners, even a small down-turn in visitor numbers could have a dramatic impact on business financial sustainability. The problem is exacerbated by the fact that many wind farms are being planned for areas of unspoilt countryside - because it's generally windier - just the areas that attract holiday makers looking for rural tranquility and a bit of peace and quiet. And just the kind of places where many BH&HPA members have their parks. It's for this reason that more and more BH&HPA members are asking for advice on how to campaign against wind farms.

In this article Rufus Bellamy, BH&HPA environmental adviser, looks at the latest research on the impact that wind farms have on tourism and highlights the reasons why the answers may not be blowing in the wind. This is followed by a special report from Jon Boston, BH&HPA PR Advisor, on the best way to run a campaign against a local wind farm development.

An ill wind?

**Rufus Bellamy, BH&HPA National Adviser
on environmental management reviews the
arguments for and against**

Wind farms provoke some very strong emotions. Over the last few years thousands of concerned local people have, quite literally, taken to the hills to say 'No' to wind farms - angry that government policy could even consider selling out the unique character of the British countryside to the march of the turbines. On the other side of the fence, people have mobilised to back wind power arguing that those who are against the technology are 'nimbys' (not in my back yard) who are standing in the way of action on climate change and are friends of nuclear power.

The arguments both 'pro' and 'con' revolve around a whole raft of issues, from the particular - the impact they have on specific animals such as birds and bats - to the overarching - whether they actually help solve the challenges the nation faces in the areas of electricity supply, grid stability and climate change.

If you want to get a feel for the main areas where the arguments over wind power are being played out, take a look at the website of the YES2 WIND - the groups put together by WWF, Friends of the Earth and others to champion the cause of wind - www.yes2wind.com. On this site, the group states five 'myths' they say the anti-wind farm campaigners are putting around. These are: wind power isn't reliable; wind turbines are noisy; tourists hate wind farms; wind turbines kill lots of birds; and wind turbines spoil the landscape.

For those opposed to wind farms, these are, of course, not 'myths' but 'truths' - proved by the depressing reality of working wind farms, the experience of people who live near them and the track record of countries, such as Germany and Denmark, which have a much larger number of turbines than the UK. While the pros argue that wind is the future, the consensus among those who campaign against wind is that it simply doesn't make environmental sense. This stance was eloquently summed up by Country Guardian's Angela Kelly in the magazine Green Places: *'Good planning is about balance. The irreparable ecological damage, loss of amenity and distressing divisions within communities caused by commercial wind turbines far outweigh any benefit of their insignificant and unreliable contribution to our energy needs.'* (Country Guardian is the leading anti-wind farm campaign group www.countryguardian.net)

Kelly issues a call to arms that rings true for many people who live in the British countryside and depend upon it for their livelihoods. *'The tiny, intermittent output of electricity and the negligible CO₂ savings cannot possibly justify the huge sacrifice of that most finite resource - our unspoilt and irreplaceable countryside. It is*

our duty to protect our rural heritage for present and future generations from such gross and unnecessary industrialization. The alternative will be a national disaster - no less.'

It is Kelly's approach - looking at the balance between what wind farms achieve and what they destroy that gives a good starting off point for a review of where the wind debate currently stands in the UK - and on which side of the wind fence you find yourself.

The key issues for those involved in the tourism industry relate to the impact that turbines have on tourism. Because it's so important to BH&HPA members, this is dealt with separately below. But the impact of wind farms on tourism is implicitly linked with their impact on the environment: most holidaymakers to the UK's countryside value un-spoilt natural beauty. So how do turbines stand up on this count?

The first place to look for confirmation that wind farms do have a negative impact on the environment, is to drive out and look at one - whether you think they are an eyesore or not is a subjective decision only you can make. The second stop should be the Inspector's report for the enquiry into the proposed development of 24 turbines on Whinash Common just outside the Lake District National Park. *'I have reached the conclusion that the harm to this particular landscape outweighs the benefits of securing renewable energy at Whinash,'* states the report, which led to the proposal being turned down - a real feather in the cap of the local people who protested against the turbines which would have loomed over the western edge of the Lakes. Protestors highlighted the visual intrusion that the proposed 115m-tall turbines would have on the surround-

ing countryside and the strength of their argument was vindicated in the official reckoning. The impact of wind farms on the countryside is also highlighted by many campaigners and organisations, including the Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE). *'Decisions based on flaws in the current wind farm planning regime could spoil fine upland landscapes and leave areas of 'ordinary' lowland countryside marred by multitudes of turbines,'* warned Andrea Davies, CPRE's energy campaigner.

Visual intrusion is not the end of the environmental impact story as can be seen if you visit the website of the campaigners who stood against the development of Cefn Croes in Wales. They were not as successful as their colleagues in the Lakes - the 39 turbine development was completed in 2005, but their experiences are just as instructive and valuable. The campaigners have been keeping a watchful eye on developments and have come away with a horrifying diary **continued...**



of environmental destruction and vandalism including the destruction of large amounts of peat bog, the disruption of water courses, and significant quarrying and other disruptive activity to put in the necessary roads and concrete turbine bases.

The impact of wind farms on birds is another key area of contention - however, here it is clear that the scientific consensus is coming round to admitting that turbines do pose a threat to birds. The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds Scotland has recently published a map that identifies those areas where wind farms would pose a high to medium risk for important bird populations. It has also come out strongly against the proposed 230+ turbine development on the Isle of Lewis stating that, *'Because of the disastrous implications for rare birds and wildlife, the RSPB is objecting in the strongest terms possible to the Lewis proposal.'*

The RSPB states that location is critical in determining the harm that turbines do, but it is clear that it is convinced that turbines can kill and maim birds.

For people living near wind farms, there are probably two main concerns - noise and the impact turbines have on house prices. The most recent research from The Noise Association puts the problem into stark relief stating that, *'There is no doubt that some existing wind farms are causing real noise problems. This report has stopped short of arguing that those turbines should be shut down, though that possibility should never be ruled out. However, it would be quite unacceptable to our fellow citizens for this situation to be replicated in other parts of the country as new turbines come on stream.'* Again location is key and the Association recommends that, because of the noise they create, turbines should not be sited within a mile of where people live. As for property prices, a study by the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors (RICS 2004) concluded that *'60% of the sample suggested that wind farms decrease the value of residential properties where the development is within view...'* Bad news, when so many people's livelihoods - and often their retirement plans - are tied up in the equity value of their homes.

So far, so depressing - it's clear that wind farms do have an impact on the environment and that they have a significant social impact as well. However, any impacts must be balanced against an assessment of how they work and if they are the best way to reduce carbon dioxide emissions and the UK's dependence on fossil fuels.

The overall thrust of the argument against wind farms is that individual turbines produce remarkably little electricity. A big turbine is rated at about 2 MW power output and because the wind is insufficient for full generation for much of the time, wind turbines only produce a small percentage of the power they would if they worked at their maximum potential output all the time. DTI statistics put this 'load factor' at between 25% and 30% - so the 2.0 MW machine yields between 0.5 MW and 0.6 MW. Thus it would need about 2000 wind turbines to replace a large power station! The amount of carbon dioxide (the green house gas everyone is so worried about) they 'save' is equivalently small.



The comparison with other sources of CO₂ is even less encouraging. According to the independent energy expert John Etherington, each operational jumbo jet annually releases more CO₂ than is saved by a very big wind 'farm' of 30 or more turbines. He notes: *'A dozen or two jumbo jets indeed emit more CO₂ annually than the whole British wind power fleet saves!'*

Even if government's renewable electricity target is met by 2010, the 9.2 Mt of carbon dioxide that will be saved, mostly by windpower, will be less than four ten-thousandths (0.0004) of global total CO₂ emission. Wind therefore stands no chance of altering atmospheric CO₂ concentration.

Things get stacked against wind even more when the realities of incorporating it into the national energy supply picture are taken into account. Because wind is intermittent, conventional generating plant cannot simply be turned off. A significant percentage must be kept on stream as what is called 'spinning reserve' - ready to be 'ramped up' when the wind stops blowing. This puts another dent in the amount of carbon dioxide that wind can save and also means that wind, rather than being a replacement energy source, is actually merely an additional energy source.

The German company E.ON Netz, (which controls an area the size of the UK, serves 20 million people, and controls some 7,000 MW of wind turbines) in its Wind Report 2005 said that *'Wind energy is only able to replace traditional power stations to a limited extent. Their dependence on the prevailing wind conditions means that wind power has a limited load factor even when technically available. It is not possible to guarantee its use for the continual cover of electricity consumption. Consequently, traditional power stations with capacities equal to 90% of the installed wind power capacity must be permanently online in order to*



guarantee power supply at all times.'

This statement implies that, once we have a substantial percentage of wind generation in the UK, the security of supply will be reduced unless dedicated online power stations are made available as backup. Because of the low load factor the amount of backup is related to about four times the capacity of wind-power actually fed to the grid. As the Irish Grid operator ESB said in 2004 *'As wind contribution increases, the effectiveness of adding additional wind to reduce emissions diminishes... The cost will be very substantial because of the back up need.'*

What is also clear is that wind cannot, in any circumstances, allow us to dispense with nuclear power or coal as some politicians and environmentalists are fond of saying. It is an engineering characteristic of nuclear power that it runs continuously at peak output between service intervals - it cannot be 'turned up' or 'turned down'. It is thus the 'ideal' (if you care to ignore its other problems) generator to provide the unchanging base-load power to supply the country's minimum electricity needs year round. It is impossible for wind to do this and thus wind, however much we have, would not in itself eliminate nuclear power.

The sad fact is that wind - which is highly subsidized - is diverting money from other more effective energy solutions, such as energy efficiency, solar, un-constrained tidal and efficiency improvements in conventional plant. Carbon sequestration technology is another option that will move the UK towards its global warming targets, without sacrificing the countryside. Calculations by Country Guardian show that the energy output of a 750 KW turbine could be saved by insulating the roofs of less than 500 houses.

Overall studies show that energy saving could feasibly and

cost-effectively cut the amount of energy used in the UK by 30%. Ploughing the subsidies given to wind power into promoting this scale of energy conservation would also create many thousands of local jobs - and wouldn't threaten the major job creator in the countryside: tourism.

The impact on tourism

Whether we like it or not - and as BH&HPA members we probably do - the British countryside now depends on tourism to keep it alive. That tourism depends, to a large degree, on Britain's rural character being kept intact. For example, the National Trust estimates that in rural areas, between 60-70% of tourism related jobs rely on a high quality environment. This means that the impact of wind farms on rural tourism is key - not just for individual tourism operators, but also for the sustainability of rural life. The wind industry, not surprisingly, paints an optimistic picture. Groups such as the BWEA argue that rather than deter tourists, wind farms can actually be tourist destinations in their own right. For those opposed to wind, the situation is not as rosy: *'Unfortunately, just as the wind industry has tended to encourage a rose-tinted view of wind as a generator, it talks down its severe local impact, and seems determined to deny that it can have any negative effect on house prices let alone rural tourism,'* says David Bellamy. *'Its stance beggars belief. Surely, if you have an industry based on the value of wilderness experience, or the beauty and calm of the rural environment, then 125m high, rapidly moving, industrial structures are extremely unlikely to enhance those attractions.'*

Bellamy, like many others who think that wind doesn't work, feels that the wind industry's findings are biased - for the simple reason that people do not have the full story on wind. There is also the strong sense that the tourism industry has not been adequately consulted. However, recent research presented in a report by the Small Business Council has provided valuable information that has gone some way to filling in the gaps. The report, UK Energy Policy: The Small Business Perspective & The Impact on the Rural Economy, looks at a number of recent surveys from around the country that give the perspective of the tourism industry on the wind farm challenge. For example, it highlights a survey carried out by the Cumbria Tourist Board (where tourism is worth £1 billion a year and supports 47,000 jobs) that asked businesses for their views on wind farms. Nearly two thirds of those responding agreed that turbines are visually intrusive, while 27% believed they would have a negative impact on the tourism industry by reducing visitor numbers.

North of the border, the report highlighted a review carried out by Wilderness Scotland, the award-winning tourist operator. This group asked their customers whether they would be returning to the Highlands and Islands if wind turbines were built on a significant scale. Of the 1,653 replies, 91% stated that they would seek unspoiled landscapes elsewhere.

Meanwhile in Wales, a National Tourist *continued...*



Board survey of businesses found that *'Just over half of the respondents thought wind farms have already and will continue to have an adverse effect on visitors coming to the area.'*

According to the Small Business Council's report, *'No one is predicting a mass exodus of the countryside. Nevertheless, the research clearly indicates that an average 11% of visitors would not return to a destination should wind turbines be built.'* It warns that the potential impact to local economies could be dramatic, calculating that the North West economy could lose some £150m a year, while the South West region could lose £400m a year and around 15,000 jobs. *'The current trend towards high levels of wind energy development onshore presents an unacceptable threat to rural businesses and runs counter to almost all other aspects of Government policy relating to the rural economy,'* the report concludes. *'This has important implications when assessing the overall cost-benefit equation of the current renewable energy policy.'*

Protesting through the planning process

The planning process is the main route you should take to protest about any local wind farm developments. For all turbine developments under 50 MW, the local planning authority (LPA) will handle the planning application. (Energy projects above 50MW in Great Britain are automatically referred to the relevant national authority for a decision under Section 36 of the Electricity Act 1989). Once an application has been lodged, a decision must be given in eight weeks, or 16 weeks for projects accompanied by an Environmental Statement. It's at this stage that there is a period of statutory consultation. Members of the community are also able to make representations once the application is put before the planning committee, who make the final decision.

Although the government's recent Energy Review looks as if it has paved the way for weakening the planning process, the good news is that some wind farms do get turned down at the planning stage - and it is often the force of public opinion that makes the difference. In short, it really is worth protesting.

An effective protest involves pooling as many community resources as possible. However, your other main weapon will be information. Park owner/managers are likely to have good links and working relationships with the local planning department and with local councillors - use them! Get as much information as you can from the local planning officer about what's being planned. Country Guardian, the leading anti-wind farm group advises that campaigners *'ask the planning officer to explain the Local Plan, County Structure Plan etc. so that you can see how the development contravenes the sections on landscape protection.'*

The next step is to look carefully at the proposed wind farm location and at the supporting documentation that the developer has put together to argue their case - the most

important being the Environmental Statement. This can run to many hundreds of closely worded pages, so put aside a good bit of time for it, or get a group together and divide up the work. It's possible to get the services of sympathetic experts - planners, archeologists, hydrology specialists and the like - and concerned local groups (such as archaeological societies, ornithological and wildlife clubs etc.) and prepare a detailed critique of it. Many campaigners have found that Environmental Statements are often inaccurate and misleading and therefore open to criticism that can swing a planning decision.

This process should give you a lot of points to highlight to the planners - and it is important that you protest on proper planning grounds. According to Country Guardian, these can include:

- Conflict with specified paragraphs of the Local Development Framework or Regional Spatial Strategy (formerly called Local Plan or County Structure Plan)
- Conflict with Designated Area status/visibility from Designated Area
- Intervisibility with other wind farms
- Conflict with Council's statutory duty (Countryside Act 1968) to preserve and enhance the countryside
- The ecological/habitat/archaeological/historical importance of site
- Unacceptable noise levels at properties within 1.5 km
- Safety considerations - proximity of roads, footpaths, bridleways - inadequacy of existing roads for construction traffic
- The tiny amount of clean electricity generated in relation to the huge landscape damage.

These issues can be drawn together into a report document that can be your protest group's main submission.

However, it is also vital that you generate the maximum number of protest letters as well - these can underline the main issues you have highlighted. Letters from prominent members of the community and local groups, associations and businesses help, but the more people you can get to put pen to paper, the better. Get everyone to send copies of their letters to local councillors and to the local MP.

'Generate the maximum possible number of letters of objection,' advises Country Guardian. *'They must be individually written if possible, and not round robins. Petitions are useless - one with ten thousand signatures may be treated as a single letter of objection - except as publicity material.'*

Once your group has made their thoughts known, the job isn't over. Be prepared to accompany the committee members on site meetings, and to attend the planning committee on the actual day with as many opponents as you can muster.

For more information on how to protest see the website of Country Guardian www.countryguardian.net which gives advice on securing an Article 14 (which forces a planning committee to pass an application on to the Secretary of State) and on how to fight an appeal. ●

