



Campaign to Protect  
Rural England

# Press Release

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## **WIND FARM FREE-FOR-ALL THREATENS COUNTRYSIDE**

Wind farm developers are gaining a foothold in beautiful landscapes where past applications have been repeatedly refused, countryside campaigners CPRE<sup>1</sup> warn today (Wednesday).

‘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.

This message comes hot on the heels of CPRE’s seminal report *Your Countryside, Your Choice*<sup>2</sup> which highlights the multiple threats facing the countryside.

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The Campaign to Protect Rural England 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.

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### **NOTES TO EDITORS**

CPRE has looked at three recent planning cases of controversial wind farm proposals which illustrate the kind of problems now arising. Details and local contacts are attached to this press release.

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In **Devon**, despite repeated planning refusals backed by the High Court and Court of Appeal, North Devon District Council may yet have to concede to 22 wind turbines being sited at Fullabrook Down near Barnstaple. The Council's objections are based on the impact of the proposal on the rolling hills bordering the North Devon Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).

North Devon Wind Power has now proposed a wind farm which is large enough to bypass the local council. Controversially, because its power capacity is beyond 50 megawatts (MW), the application will go straight to Energy Minister Malcolm Wicks for comment and then to the Secretary of State, Alan Johnson.<sup>3</sup> If Fullabrook Down goes ahead after so many refusals, there is a serious prospect of more wind turbines in many untouched scenic parts of England.

Elsewhere, local councils are facing repeated applications to build wind farms on the same site. In 2004, at Fen Farm in Conisholme, **Lincolnshire**, East Lindsey District Council refused planning permission for 20 wind turbines by Ecotricity on the grounds of visual intrusion. The Lincolnshire Wolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty is four miles from the site and the turbines would be visible from large areas within it.

A public inquiry is expected early in 2006. But in July this year, Ecotricity made a second similar application on the same site. This could give rise to a second appeal, possibly costing the council legal costs escalating to thousands of pounds.

Meanwhile, applications for eight separate wind farms have to date been submitted on and around the **Humberhead Levels** near

Scunthorpe. Most of the eight are near Thorne and Hatfield Moors – highly valued nature reserves which are both Sites of Special Scientific Interest. Further applications are likely.

CPRE fears the Levels, with their unique raised peat bogs, would become home to one of England's new 'windscares' dominated by more than 150 turbines near the two moors.<sup>4</sup>

Furthermore, the multitude of applications here highlights problems resulting from the system of regional renewable energy targets brought in by the Government. Each English region is required to install set levels of renewable electricity-generating energy capacity in order to meet national targets for boosting renewable power.<sup>5</sup>

But the targets are only set as a minimum. For the Humberhead Levels, the total amount of wind power energy now being proposed in planning applications already submitted far exceeds the contribution set for the Humber sub-region – and is close to the target for the Yorkshire and Humber region as a whole. Under the current system, there is no ceiling to the number of turbines in a given region or sub-region.

CPRE is also concerned that there is no satisfactory established method in England to assess the overall landscape effects of so many closely bunched proposals.<sup>6</sup>

CPRE is calling for:

- better ways of assessing the combined landscape and visual effects of multiple wind applications in England, based on the methodology developed in Scotland;<sup>7</sup>
- the Government to set a ceiling on the contributions of wind power to current renewable energy targets and establish regional and national limits in order to avoid wind turbine overcrowding in some areas; and
- applications for wind farms to be assessed on the *full* range of their environmental impacts, rather than the potential reductions in carbon dioxide emissions heavily outweighing other environmental and landscape considerations in making planning decisions.

Andrea Davies concludes:

‘Disturbingly, the Energy Minister has said that developers are “best-placed” to judge where wind farms should be located.<sup>8</sup> We disagree: such judgements are the proper role of the planning system.

‘But the framework for planning decisions on renewable energy projects needs substantial improvement. If this doesn’t happen, there is a real risk of many fine landscapes being seriously damaged by wind farm development.’

- END -

## NOTES FOR EDITORS

1 CPRE 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. We promote positive solutions for the long-term future of the countryside to ensure change values its natural and built environment. Our Patron is Her Majesty The Queen. We have 60,000 supporters, a branch in every county, nine regional groups, over 200 local groups and a national office in London. CPRE is a powerful combination of effective local action and strong national campaigning. Our President is Sir Max Hastings.

2 *Your Countryside, Your Choice* was published last week and received widespread national television, radio and newspaper coverage. Copies are available from the Press Office (020 9871 2880).

3 A Section 36 planning application for a wind farm is one where the permitted capacity of the 'generating station' is over 50MW and is covered by Section 36 of the *Electricity Act 1989*. The decision to consent these applications lies with the Secretary of State. However, in practice, the application is first seen by the Energy Minister for detailed comment before it is passed on to the Secretary of State, Alan Johnson, who takes the decision. The *Electricity Act 1989* had not been intended for renewable energy generation.

4 There are a total of 155 turbines in the eight planning applications submitted to date and more are in the pipeline.

5 Renewable energy targets are proposed following detailed technical assessments often co-ordinated by a regional renewable energy partnership. They are then included in the Regional Spatial Strategies.

6 Planning Policy Statement 22: *Renewable Energy* states in paragraph 21 that 'planning authorities should also take into account the cumulative impacts of wind generation projects in certain areas. Authorities should not set arbitrary limits in local development documents on the numbers of turbines that will be acceptable in particular locations'. *Planning for Renewable Energy: A Companion Guide to PPS22* recommends the use of the *Landscape Institute Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment* which do not deal specifically with wind power development. In CPRE's view, current planning policy for England fails to properly address the issue of cumulative effects of multiple wind farm applications.

7 *SNH Guidance Cumulative effect of wind farms* published in April 2005 deals specifically with landscape and visual effects of wind farms. The guidance recommends taking into account cumulative landscape and visual effects for strategic planning and development control. In England, the guidance was produced by ETSU in 2000 under the title of *Cumulative Effects of Wind Turbines: A guide to assessing the cumulative effects of wind turbines*.

8 The Energy Minister presented on 21 July the *Government Statement – Energy Infrastructure Upgrades for New Renewable Generation*. He said: 'UK government believes that the private sector is best placed to decide exactly what energy infrastructure is needed and how, subject to planning and environmental requirements, to deliver policy objectives most effectively. It therefore falls to the developer to demonstrate the desirability of a particular scheme in a particular location.'