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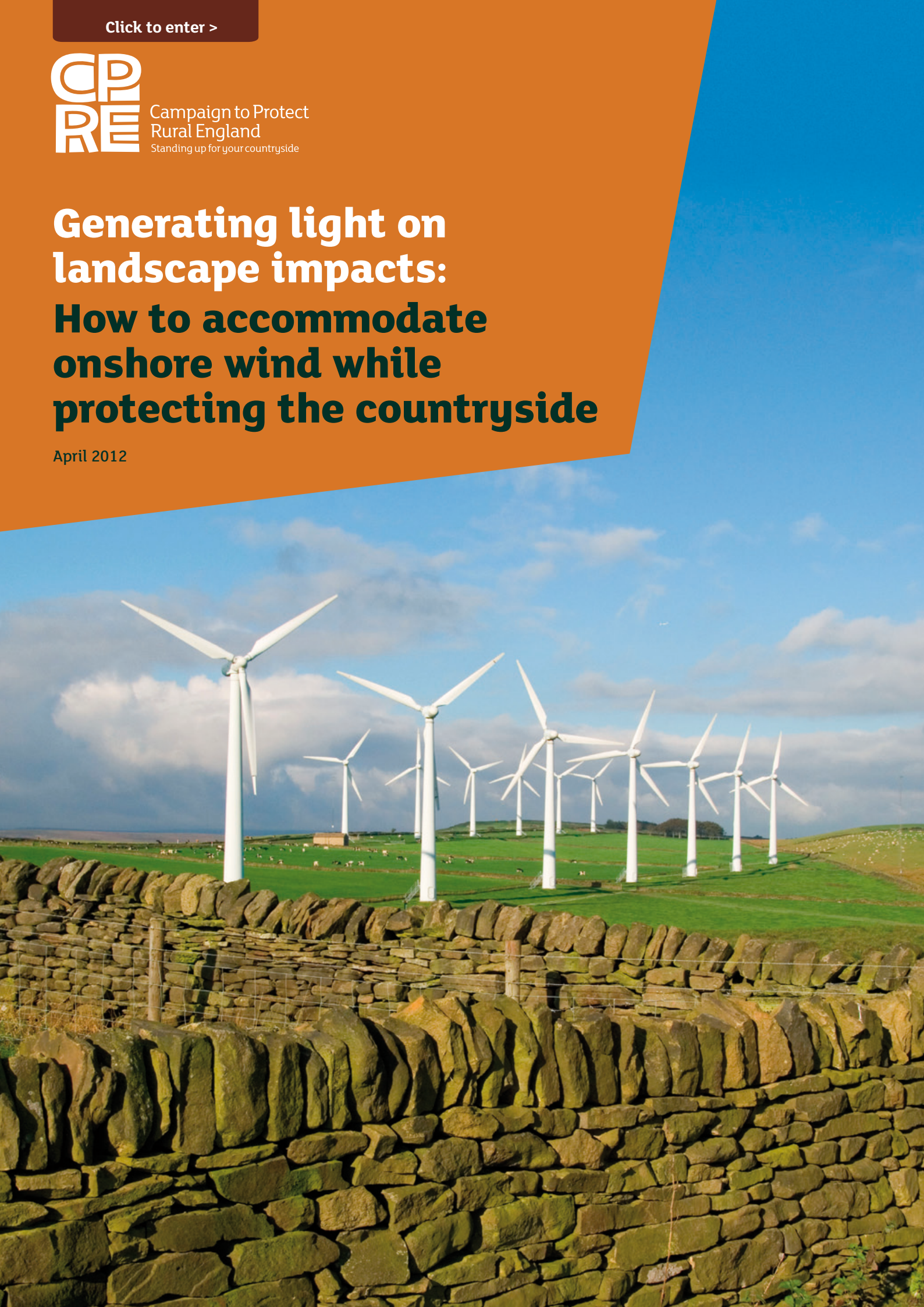
Campaign to Protect Rural England
Standing up for your countryside

Generating light on landscape impacts:

How to accommodate onshore wind while protecting the countryside

April 2012



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Foreword

The English countryside is, in the words of CPRE's President, Bill Bryson, 'one of this country's supreme achievements'.

He goes on to say: 'I know of no landscape anywhere that is more universally appreciated, more visited and walked across and gazed upon, more artfully worked, more lovely to behold, more comfortable to be in, than the countryside of England. The landscape almost everywhere is eminently accessible. People feel a closeness to it, an affinity, that I don't think they experience elsewhere.'

This countryside – 'incredibly beautiful, dangerously finite and infinitely precious' – will continue to change, as it always has. But the speed and scale of the change we are now seeing as a result of the proliferation of wind turbines is immense and threatens to damage the character of many landscapes for at least a generation. The Campaign to Protect Rural England is increasingly concerned that the wave of planning applications for wind turbines across the country risks unacceptable damage to the landscape; to localism and people's confidence in the planning system; and, ultimately, to the battle against climate change, which rests on public consent and participation.

As a landscape charity, CPRE has a particular concern to protect the character of the English countryside so that it can be enjoyed by future generations. But we also fully recognise the huge importance of mitigating climate change. The question of how to reconcile these two environmental ends – landscape protection and climate change mitigation – lies at the heart of this report.

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Summary

Climate change is one of the most pressing and complex issues we face today. It will have a serious impact on our countryside, landscapes and rural communities.

The decisions we make to mitigate climate change will have a lasting effect on the countryside. Alongside measures to address energy conservation and demand, CPRE believes we must choose an appropriate mix of renewable energy technologies and deploy them in a way which safeguards the countryside and protects valued landscapes. Onshore wind will undoubtedly play a role in any mix but questions remain over how much capacity we need from this source and where it should be located. Local communities increasingly feel that individual onshore wind applications, which are proliferating rapidly, are unconnected to any wider national renewable energy strategy. They would find it easier to engage with individual planning applications if the Government was clear about the national contribution it wanted onshore wind to make.

In this report CPRE argues that a locally accountable, strategically planned approach which takes account of landscape capacity and steers wind development to the right places, will enable us to promote renewable energy, including some onshore wind, while protecting cherished countryside. The report builds a case for such an approach by examining how onshore wind proposals are currently being treated in the planning system. It uses local examples provided by our branch network and Planning Inspectorate appeal decisions.

To enable local communities and the planning system to protect the environment both from damaging development and the impacts of climate change, we call on the Government to:

- provide more clarity about the total number of onshore wind turbines it expects to see built and where these might be located;
- develop a strategic plan-led approach which recognises landscape capacity, including cumulative impacts of onshore wind turbines;
- ensure local planning authorities seek to protect landscape character through their local plans and in planning decisions;
- instruct the Planning Inspectorate to give significant weight when making decisions on development proposals to any local plans which have attempted to identify appropriate and inappropriate areas for onshore wind development; and
- require the onshore wind industry to take legal and financial responsibility for decommissioning onshore wind turbines and restoring the landscape once they stop working or when they reach the end of their useful life.

Introduction

1. Climate change poses a major threat to the character, quality and diversity of England's countryside. CPRE supports the Government's target, enshrined in the *Climate Change Act 2008*, to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 80% by 2050 and source 15% of UK energy from renewable sources by 2020. Renewable energy, including onshore wind, will play an important role in helping to achieve our carbon reduction targets. But because all forms of energy generation have a harmful impact on the landscape, and the environment more generally, the top priority should be to focus on reducing the need for more infrastructure by setting and meeting ambitious energy efficiency and overall energy demand reduction targets.

2. Decisions made today will have a lasting effect on the countryside. In pursuing our national carbon reduction and renewable energy targets we must not ignore other important and established environmental objectives, particularly the protection of valued landscapes from damaging development. CPRE has done a considerable amount of work to analyse what impact different kinds of development have on the countryside in terms of their intrusion and impact on beautiful places.[1] Experiencing tranquillity in beautiful landscapes is beneficial to human health and well-being, which is one reason why millions of people visit the countryside every year. The quality of this experience is threatened by poorly conceived and located development of whatever kind. It is clear that onshore wind development, unless appropriately sited, can have a significant detrimental impact on the quality of the landscape.

3. The location and extent of onshore wind development therefore needs to be carefully controlled. Local communities, interested in ensuring that development in the countryside, including onshore wind, is appropriate and balanced, increasingly feel that individual onshore wind applications, which are proliferating rapidly, are unconnected to a wider national renewable energy strategy. By having a clear idea of the national contribution of onshore wind, communities would find it easier to engage with individual planning applications within the planning system. We should ensure that local communities feel genuinely able to have an influence through the planning system, steering onshore wind applications to the right places.

4. In 2011, the then Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change, Chris Huhne, reassured CPRE that efforts to tackle climate change did not mean the Government would 'wantonly plant wind farms across the country at random' or let 'market forces loose upon the countryside'.[2] CPRE has consistently argued that a planning system which is locally accountable, adopts a strategic approach and takes account of landscape capacity, should be able to promote renewable energy, including onshore wind, while protecting cherished countryside and improving well-being. A locally accountable planning system also helps to reassure communities that development is appropriate and necessary, rather than foisted on them through processes over which they have little control.

CPRE supports the Government's target, enshrined in the *Climate Change Act 2008*, to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 80% by 2050 and source 15% of UK energy from renewable sources by 2020

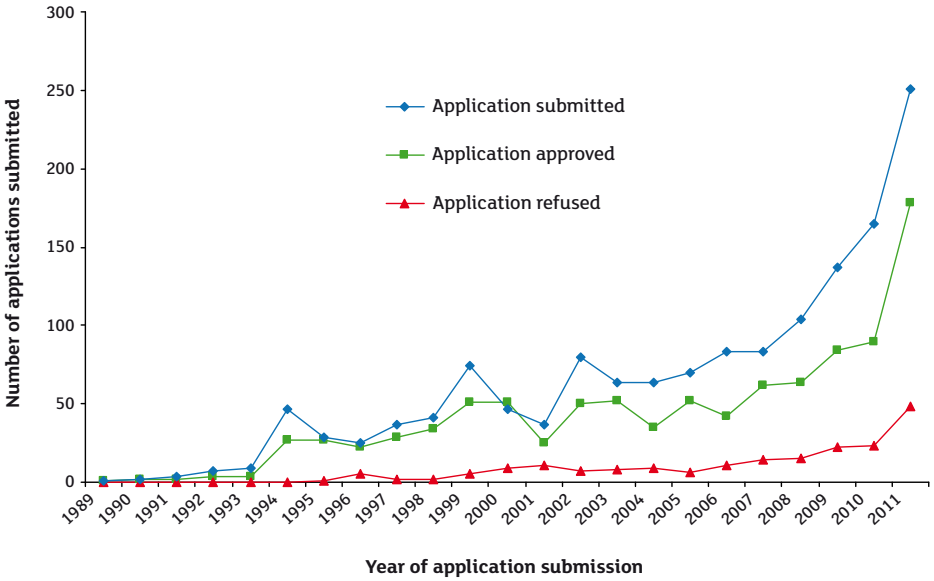
[1] Land Use Consultants, *Developing an Intrusion Map of England*, CPRE, 2007

[2] Secretary of State for DECC, Chris Huhne's speech to CPRE entitled 'Beauty, Tranquillity, and Power Stations?', 2011

Maintaining confidence in the planning system

5. The contribution of all renewables to UK electricity generation was 6.8 per cent in 2010.[3] In order to meet our national carbon reduction and renewable energy targets we need strong energy efficiency and demand reduction policies, as well as a significant increase in renewable energy over the coming decade. As one of the cheapest and most established renewable energy technologies currently, onshore wind plays an important role in this regard. The UK's industry-led Renewable Energy Roadmap[4] sets out a pathway towards achieving this ambition but stops short of addressing specifically how many onshore wind turbines will be built and where.

Graph 1 – progress of renewable technologies, including wind, through the planning system



Original source: Department of Energy and Climate Change planning statistics[12]

6. As local communities feel the pressure from the increasing number of onshore wind applications (see graph 1), there is widespread concern that many proposals are highly speculative and directed towards inappropriate locations. Maps 1 and 2 show that onshore wind sites are increasingly being directed towards more remote, tranquil areas, sometimes adjacent to and inside national planning designations. Developers are also targeting undesignated but locally valued countryside in less windy parts of the country. Research suggests that wind energy developers often enter the planning process with a dismissive mindset towards public concerns, seeking to disparage arguments against new development as baseless and emotional rather than well-reasoned and legitimate.[5] CPRE has compiled a large body of evidence that suggests a cavalier approach by some wind energy developers to the planning system[6] which undermines the integrity of the planning process. While this has started to be addressed by the industry[7] there is a long way to go before it shows due respect to the views of local communities. The lack of concern shown by developers drives local opposition and is reflected in the low level of applications, currently only 41% of projects, being consented and the relatively high level of onshore wind applications going to appeal.[8]

[3] DECC, *Digest of United Kingdom Energy Statistics*, TSO, 2011

[4] DECC, *UK Renewable Energy Roadmap*, 2011

[5] University of Manchester et al, *Beyond Nimbyism* project summary report, 2009. Accessed from **www.sed.manchester.ac.uk/research/beyond_nimbyism/deliverables/reports_Project_summary_Final.pdf**

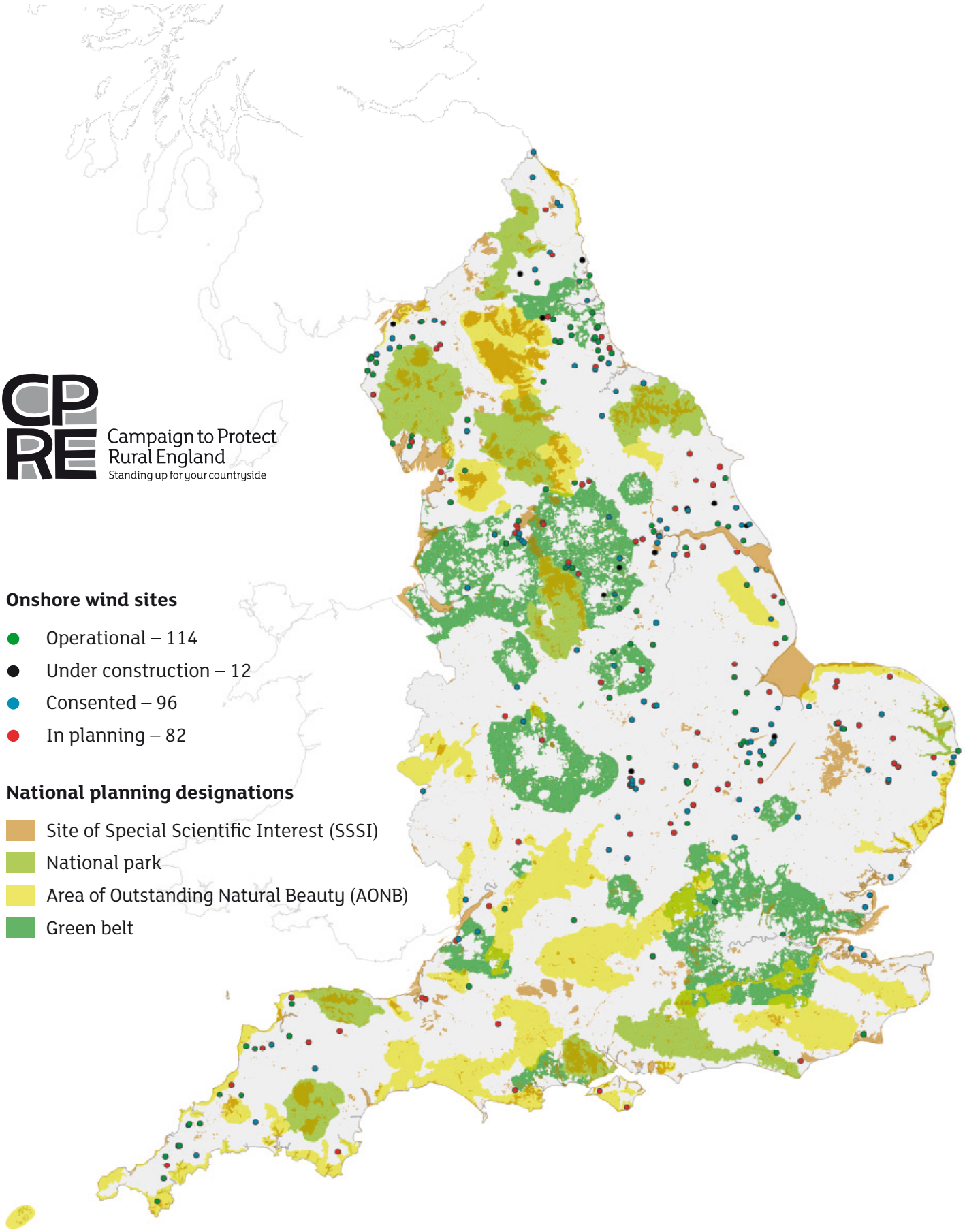
[6] CPRE, *Goodwill payments: Do they benefit communities or bring planning into disrepute?*, 2008

[7] RenewableUK, *A Community Commitment: The Benefits of Onshore Wind*, 2011

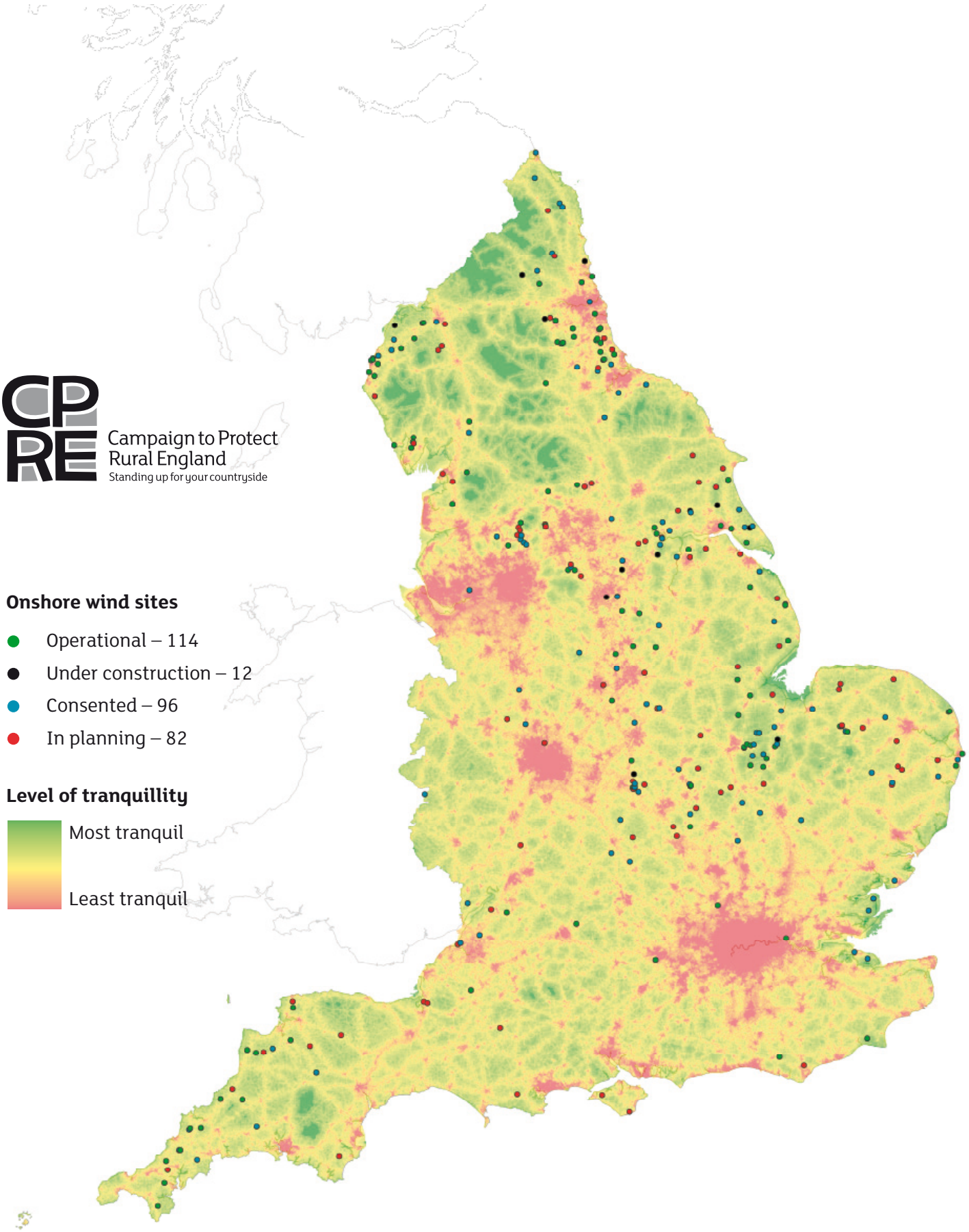
[8] RenewableUK, *State of the Industry Report. Onshore and Offshore Wind: A Progress Update*, 2011

[12] DECC planning database

Map 1



Map 2



Kilometres
0 30 60 90 120 150

7. One possible way of increasing community engagement in renewable energy would be to move away from the notion of 'community benefit' towards community ownership. Community benefits can include varying degrees of financial, environmental and social benefits.[9] Community ownership, however, ensures these benefits are more likely to be felt directly by the community because they have more autonomy over how benefits are distributed and shared. CPRE has been involved in promoting community ownership of renewable energy as part of the Community Energy Coalition[10] which seeks to increase the level of communities owning, generating and saving energy. While it is clear that community ownership will not resolve all concerns about wind turbines – if landscape impacts are unacceptable, it does not matter who owns the turbines or benefits from them financially – these projects tend to enjoy greater levels of public support.[11] Ownership of a project is therefore an important consideration which needs to be taken seriously. More work is needed to inform communities about how to get involved in this approach.

8. Opposition to onshore wind is intensified by the perception that the wider national renewable energy strategy is to encourage the wind industry to deploy as much capacity as possible by removing barriers, including checks within the planning system, which might stand in the way. This undermines confidence in the planning system and creates uncertainty for local communities, many of whom are keen to contribute to tackling climate change but unwilling to sacrifice the beauty of our precious valued landscapes. It also creates uncertainty and costs for the onshore wind industry where applications are held up by opposition to what is seen as increasingly speculative development.

9. The Government needs to have an honest and open dialogue with communities, providing more clarity about the total number of onshore wind turbines it expects to be built and where these might be located. This will provide more certainty to communities keen to help mitigate climate change and should reassure them that they will not have to face an unending stream of applications for onshore wind turbines. By setting out its views as to approximately what contribution each local authority needs to make to renewable energy provision, and informing communities about community owned renewable energy, the Government can facilitate the engagement of local communities in the planning process and increase local acceptability of renewable energy deployment in their area. Local authorities should also identify those areas which are best placed to accommodate onshore wind without unacceptable landscape impacts and those which are not.

One possible way of increasing community engagement in renewable energy would be to move away from the notion of 'community benefit' towards community ownership

Recommendation: The Government needs to provide more clarity about the total number of onshore wind turbines it expects to see built and where these might be located.

[9] Centre for Sustainable Energy, *Delivering community benefits from wind energy development: A Toolkit*, 2009

[10] Information on the Community Energy Coalition can be found online: **http://www.forumforthefuture.org/project/discover-community-energy/overview**. Last accessed: 27 March 2012

[11] RenewableUK, *State of the Industry Report. Onshore and Offshore Wind: A Progress Update*, 2011

Developing a strategic, plan-led approach

10. We all have to make a contribution to tackling climate change. Communities which are affected by renewable energy developments, including onshore wind, should have a choice about how their area contributes and which technologies should be used. This should be achieved through a planning system which is less confrontational and instead fosters engagement, co-operation and respect, something CPRE has previously advocated in respect to renewable energy.[13]

11. At the heart of the problem lies the question of how our landscapes can accommodate necessary changes while retaining the character we value. Not all landscapes have the same value, although many that are not classified as nationally important will nevertheless be of real importance to people living within and close to them. Determining landscape value objectively requires an understanding of a landscape's capacity and its sensitivity to change. These should be important considerations when determining where onshore wind turbines should be sited. Alongside community engagement, landscape character assessments are the most established way of determining capacity and sensitivity and therefore the relative ability of areas to accommodate wind energy development without unacceptable adverse impacts.[14]

12. Regional Spatial Strategies, which will be revoked through the Localism Act 2011, often used landscape character assessments when allocating sub-regional targets. These helped to outline a landscape-sensitive distribution of onshore wind across a region. This assisted local planning authorities in connecting the Government's national renewable energy strategy with local action, and required them to recognise landscape constraints. Following the removal of the regional planning tier, evidence on landscape capacity and its sensitivity to change is unlikely to be as comprehensive or up to date in future.

13. As a result, the Department of Energy and Climate Change (DECC) has attempted to develop new ways to determine the opportunities and constraints for the deployment of renewable energy at a regional and local level.[15] This methodology represents a step in the right direction but questions remain over whether the resulting reports are effectively informing local level strategies. In Yorkshire and Humber, for example, the aim of the 2011 regional study[16] was to provide evidence that could be taken further at the local level. This has not happened because it seems cash-strapped local authorities have been unable to conduct the necessary local research.

14. Without such a joined-up approach, some regions and counties are experiencing very large numbers of applications for onshore wind farms and single turbines. These are having adverse cumulative impacts without any evidence of what scale of development can reasonably be accommodated in the landscape. The volume of applications presents a real challenge to local communities keen to ensure that each application is scrutinised according to an overarching landscape assessment. While some landscapes are able to absorb onshore wind development, others are highly sensitive to one or multiple

Some regions and counties are experiencing very large numbers of applications for onshore wind farms and single turbines

[13] CPRE, National Trust and RSPB, *Joint Statement on the UK Renewable Energy Strategy*, 2009

[14] CPRE, *Unlocking the Landscape: Preparing a Community Landscape Character Assessment*, 2005

[15] SQW Energy and Land Use Consultants, *Renewable and Low-carbon Energy Capacity Methodology: Methodology for the English Regions*, DECC, 2010

[16] Arup, *North East Renewable Capacity Study*, One North East, 2011

developments. Without a clear strategic planning framework, landscape capacity can easily be exceeded.

15. Two areas in the country where landscape capacity issues are acutely felt are Cornwall and Durham. Cornwall, which relies heavily on tourism, currently has 94 operational turbines, 18 consented and 11 in planning. County Durham has 60 operational turbines, 27 under construction, 19 consented and six in planning.[17] In other areas the number of onshore wind turbine applications currently in the planning system, if built, could also mean that the landscape capacity of their area will be exceeded. Northamptonshire, for example, currently has 13 operational turbines and an additional 46 consented and 32 in planning. Northumberland has 29 operational turbines and an additional 24 under construction, 64 consented and one in planning.[18]

16. Through a strategic, plan-led approach which takes account of landscape capacity we will be better able to value and protect landscapes and connect local decisions to a coherent national renewable energy strategy. Communities will have more say in what renewable energy they want and where it should go. By fostering transparency, engagement and co-operation we will be better able to find workable solutions which increase the contribution of appropriate renewable energy while respecting valued landscapes. These solutions should also include encouraging appropriate community-level renewables, so that communities, not the energy companies, decide whether they want onshore wind and where it should best be located.

Recommendation: The Government should develop a strategic plan-led approach to the siting of onshore wind which recognises landscape capacity, including cumulative impacts.

Applying strategic planning at the local level

17. Planning decisions which involve assessing landscape implications are often complex and time-consuming. CPRE supports the development of renewable energy led by clear locational criteria in local development plans. There is support for this approach in paragraphs 97, 98 and 170 of the National Planning Policy Framework. If these are conceived properly, such policies will empower local planning authorities and communities to make informed decisions about the best place to site renewable energy including onshore wind.

18. Dorset, which currently has no onshore wind farms has used regional level analysis[19] and consulted on a proposal to adopt an aspirational target to source 15% of its energy from renewable sources, the majority from onshore wind, by 2020.[20] CPRE Dorset believes that the consultation did not give adequate regard to landscape constraint criteria in its wind energy scenarios. It proposed an alternative strategy which identifies an appropriate level of ambition for onshore

[17] RenewableUK, UK Wind Energy Database

[18] ibid

[19] RegenSW, *The South West Renewable Energy Resource Assessment: results report*, 2010

[20] Sustainable Dorset, *Bournemouth, Dorset and Poole renewable energy strategy consultation*, 2011

wind alongside other forms of renewable energy, given landscape constraints. This plan-led approach to onshore wind development would ensure unacceptable damage to the landscape of rural Dorset is avoided.[21]

19. Torridge District Council in Devon has adopted a landscape sensitivity assessment in order to understand how best to accommodate wind and solar electricity generation installations in its area. The assessment is part of the evidence base to support the emerging Torridge District Local Plan and will enable the Council to make 'robust, well-informed decisions on the planning applications' received for wind and solar photovoltaic developments. The assessment includes landscape recommendations on the appropriate siting and scale of future developments including onshore wind, within each of the area's 15 landscape character types (LCTs). Landscape strategies for the deployment of different technologies in each LCT have been developed, to give an indication of how much development might be accommodated in different LCTs. We welcome this approach as an effective way of avoiding speculative onshore wind proposals.

20. In Doncaster, CPRE views were informed by a local planning authority assessment of landscape capacity for wind farm development. It describes areas with zero/low, medium or high capacity for wind technology. The capacity study was undertaken at the same time that Doncaster Metropolitan Borough Council revised its landscape character assessment and was published in March 2007. Much of the borough was assessed as having zero/low capacity for wind farm development, especially the very open flatlands (including the Humberhead Levels) to the east. This is where Tween Bridge wind farm is now situated; it was opposed by the Council, but before the capacity study was published (see above). No areas were judged to have high capacity but the sites that CPRE South Yorkshire supported fell into the medium capacity category. The capacity study helped when deciding to support sites at Marr and Hampole, situated in very large scale agricultural landscapes where hedges and field margins have been grubbed out, resulting in giant fields which matched the scale of the development. The landscape capacity study is still considered robust and forms the evidence base for new policies currently being adopted as part of the prospective Core Strategy.

21. Without this local level strategic planning, CPRE fears more decisions will be made on the judgement of Planning Inspectors at the appeal stage, rather than at the local level. Increasingly, such decisions are made according to national level policy drivers to the detriment of local considerations. There has been, for example, a noticeable increase in the number of projects that have been subject to a planning appeal, from 12 schemes in September 2010 to 20 schemes in June 2011.[22] Local communities then feel less empowered, creating conflict rather than co-operation in the planning system.

22. CPRE has been tracking decisions made by the Planning Inspectorate and monitoring how Inspectors are taking account of different considerations in making decisions. We present a number of case studies below, which we believe highlight some poor decisions made

[21] Peacock, D, *A Critique of the Proposed Maximum and Medium Scenarios for the Contribution of Wind Energy from Land Based Industrial Turbines*, CPRE Dorset, 2011

[22] RenewableUK, *State of the Industry Report. Onshore and Offshore Wind: A Progress Update*, 2011

by the Inspectorate. These case studies may not necessarily be representative of wider trends. They highlight specific instances where Inspectors have, in CPRE's view, mistakenly favoured national targets over the protection of damage caused to important landscapes.

23. National planning designations such as National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty have, on the whole, been protected from wind turbines within their borders although a recent application in, for example, the Forest of Bowland Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty in Lancashire suggests they are beginning to come under increasing pressure.[23] Unfortunately, some sites adjacent to protected areas have come under more pressure. While these sites are not within the boundary of the protected area, developments on them have the potential to harm landscape character and visual amenity and therefore the setting of the protected area. This can have a significant impact on the natural beauty and tranquillity of protected areas, the main reasons they are visited and valued so highly. It also presents a challenge for planners looking to assess the need for more renewable energy against the objective of protecting particularly beautiful landscapes. Case studies 1 and 2 demonstrate that even with clear negative impacts resulting from wind farm development, the Planning Inspectors decided that national targets outweighed any harm caused. They represent a clear example of where decisions on wind energy are damaging the country's most precious landscapes.

Even with clear negative impacts resulting from wind farm development, the Planning Inspectors decided that national targets outweighed any harm caused

[23] Open Spaces Society news release, Wind-factory threat to Bowland beauty spot, 2012

Case study 1: National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB)

Hill Farm in Cumbria demonstrates how turbines can affect National Parks and AONB landscapes. Permission for six wind turbines and associated infrastructure was granted on appeal in 2011 (see Annex 1). When built, the wind turbines will be sited in undesignated landscape but sandwiched between the Lake District National Park and the Solway Coast AONB. The application was originally rejected by the local planning authority on the grounds that 'individually and cumulatively' it would have a 'harmful effect on the landscape' to the detriment of the visual amenity of the area. Friends of the Lake District, which represents CPRE in Cumbria, raised concerns about the application. In the elevated position it occupied, they argued, the wind turbines would have an unacceptable impact on a significant proportion of the AONB. It would also conflict with the local plan's recommendation on the number of turbines that the landscape could support.

The Planning Inspector agreed, recognising that there would be severe visual impacts within 4-5km of the site – well within the visual range of the AONB and the National Park. Where visible, the Inspector concluded, the development will 'reduce the sense of wildness and remoteness' of the designated areas. The Inspector asserted that there would be harm to views from the National Park and the AONB and within the vicinity of the development. On public rights of way there would be adverse landscape impacts and it would conflict with local landscape capacity as set out in the local plan. Disturbingly, the Inspector concluded that the harm and policy conflict was outweighed by the national and regional need for developments to contribute to national targets.

Case study 2: Protected areas

Thorne Moors in South Yorkshire demonstrates how turbines affect nationally important designations. A major development of 22 turbines sited adjacent to the Thorne Moors National Nature Reserve and Site of Special Scientific Interest was granted by the Secretary of State in 2008 (see Annex 1). At 1,900 hectares Thorne Moors is considered the largest lowland raised bog in Europe. Seen as a landscape type in its own right, it was a borough-designated Area of Special Landscape Value and also recognised as a district Local Landscape Character Area. CPRE South Yorkshire opposed the application along with other environmental groups because it was deemed the wind turbines would have 'significant, adverse and unacceptable impact' on the unique wilderness quality of the raised bog landscape. It was also shown to have a significant impact on the tranquillity of the protected area. Nonetheless, the Inspector concluded that he found 'no convincing case for the refusal of consent on grounds of landscape and visual impact'.

24. Protection afforded to the Green Belt poses a similar problem. The defining characteristic of Green Belt protection is retaining the 'openness' of areas surrounding major towns and cities.[24] The National Planning Policy Framework states that local planning authorities should look to retain and enhance landscapes and that many renewable energy projects will comprise inappropriate development within the Green Belt. Any developments would therefore need to demonstrate 'very special circumstances' that clearly outweigh any harm caused, including landscape impact. Very special circumstances, however, may include production of energy from renewable sources (see case study 3) highlighting a clear contradiction in policy objectives.

Case study 3: Green Belts

Land at Hook Moor, Leeds, had permission for five wind turbines and associated infrastructure granted on appeal in 2011 (see Annex 1). The local planning authority rejected the original application. An appeal was subsequently dismissed because the Inspector considered that the development would unacceptably harm the openness of the Green Belt. It was considered that the application conflicted with advice given on protection of the Green Belt in Planning Policy Guidance Note 2 and its general presumption against 'inappropriate development'. A High Court ruling, however, granted the developer a second appeal because the Inspector at the time gave no weight to the then recently revoked Regional Spatial Strategies – a revocation which was subsequently found to be unlawful.

At the second appeal the new Inspector agreed with the previous Inspector that the development constitutes inappropriate development in the Green Belt attracting 'substantial weight'. The Inspector also agreed that the loss of openness in the area would be 'considerable' because it would cause harm to the character of the landscape. The Inspector, however, approved the appeal. In reaching his decision he highlighted the recent and growing set of national policies on renewable energy and the strong national support for them. In the Inspector's judgement, the new policy context justified reaching a different conclusion to the previous Inspector because the other considerations amounted to the 'very special circumstances' necessary to justify the development. It is not clear how judgements of this sort can be reconciled with the very strong localist emphasis in the National Planning Policy Framework.

25. Locally designated areas, while not enjoying national level protection, are also particularly sensitive to inappropriate development. These areas are often designated because they represent a unique character within a local area. CPRE recognises that the national need for more renewable energy will sometimes outweigh local level landscape designations, but we are concerned that it is too often the Planning

[24] Department for Communities and Local Government, *National Planning Policy Framework*, 2012

Inspectorate which decides this with little regard to the views of local communities. We believe that if landscape character assessments are incorporated into local plans then the chance that unacceptable sites will be selected will be greatly reduced. Case study 4 demonstrates that despite an onshore wind application affecting the setting of important local landscapes valued by local communities, these considerations were overruled.

We believe that if landscape character assessments are incorporated into local plans then the chance that unacceptable sites will be selected will be greatly reduced

Case study 4: local landscapes

Northamptonshire has no national designations but does have several areas of special local landscape which are highly valued by local communities. The development of onshore wind turbines at Nun Wood was permitted on appeal despite being situated close to areas of special local landscape and across the Three Shires Way bridleway which passes through the proposed site. The application was originally rejected by the local planning authority on the basis that the development would be contrary to 'saved' local plan policies, and its scale and the number of turbines would cause unacceptable impacts on the landscape and national footpaths.

The Inspector stated that it 'would have a significant effect on the character of the landscape of the area that would cause a degree of harm. It is unlikely that turbines of this size would do otherwise. Objectively, it cannot be argued that the character of the landscape would be enhanced by such large man-made structures. The effect on the character could be described as adverse and long-term.' Despite this, the Inspector determined that the harm was outweighed by the 'urgent need for renewable energy as promoted in national and regional policies and the wider environmental and economic benefits'. Moreover, he stated that the landscape impacts were not 'sufficient to overcome the considerations [he] deemed to be paramount'.

26. Some of England's historic areas are also at risk. This year a proposal for six wind turbines was granted on appeal at a site overlooking Kelmarsh Hall and the site of the Battle of Naseby (see Annex 1). In the decision letter the Inspector stated that 'the wind turbines would introduce another modern element into views into and across the battlefield'. He recognised that 'their presence would act as a further distraction that would make interpretation more difficult. This would detract from the significance of the battlefield and harm its setting'. He concluded that 'while it would introduce movement, the turbines would occupy a limited part of the field of view'. Local communities disagreed arguing that the development would have a devastating effect on the heritage area (see also case study 5).

Case study 5: historic significance

Four wind turbines were granted permission at a site overlooking Lyveden New Bield a Grade I listed building in 2012 (see Annex 1) following a planning inquiry. The Inspector concluded that the renewable energy the development would produce outweighed the 'less than substantial harm it would cause to the setting of designated heritage assets'. English Heritage and the National Trust, however, believe the decision will have serious implications for the future of heritage sites and the landmark case could undermine the protection of heritage sites in the future.

Recommendation: The Government should ensure local planning authorities seek to protect landscape character in their local plans and in planning decisions to encourage more appropriate siting of onshore wind and assist in reducing the number of inappropriately sited proposals.

The Government should also instruct the Planning Inspectorate to give significant weight when making decisions on development proposals to any local plans which have attempted to identify appropriate and inappropriate areas for onshore wind development.

Avoiding lasting harm

27. When a wind turbine comes to the end of its useful life it should be removed from the landscape. While there are national measures in place to ensure offshore wind turbines are decommissioned there is no such measure in place for onshore turbines. The Energy Act 2004, for example, introduces a decommissioning scheme for offshore wind installations.[25] The scheme ensures that anyone who constructs or operates an installation should be responsible for ensuring that it is decommissioned at the end of its useful life and that they should also be fiscally responsible for meeting the costs of decommissioning.[26]

28. Onshore wind installations, by contrast, are not covered by the same national guidance. While in the Government's National Policy Statements for Energy there is a requirement for large onshore wind farms (over 50MW) and associated infrastructure to be removed at the end of their operational life, the actual terms can vary by application.[27] For smaller wind farms and individual turbines (under 50MW), conditions for decommissioning of the turbines are outlined in planning permissions, not by the Government.[28] While local planning authorities and indeed Planning Inspectors are often keen to ensure that adequate provisions for decommissioning are stipulated in the permissions given, we believe that a national requirement would avoid any ambiguity which might arise (see case study 6).

[25] DECC, *Decommissioning of offshore renewable energy installations under the Energy Act 2004: Guidance notes for industry*, 2011

[26] DECC, *Energy Infrastructure: A DECC service for England and Wales*, last accessed 2 March 2012

[27] DECC, *National Policy Statement for Renewable Energy Infrastructure (EN-3): Planning for new energy infrastructure*, 2011

[28] Department for Communities and Local Government, *Planning Policy Statement 22: Renewable Energy*, 2004

Case study 6: decommissioning

In 1991 a local planning authority in North Yorkshire granted planning permission to build four wind turbines at Chelker. Today only one wind turbine remains operational, but the local planning authority, which is keen to see the broken turbines removed, is facing legal barriers to achieving this. The local water company, which runs the turbines, is currently seeking planning permission to replace the existing turbines with two new turbines which will be taller, and are likely to have an unacceptable impact on the southern part of the Yorkshire Wolds National Park, the Nidderdale AONB and the Grade I listed Bolton Abbey.

29. Issues surrounding decommissioning are a particular concern because Planning Inspectors are now using the lifetime of onshore wind proposals as a justification for granting permissions. A Planning Inspector approved an application at Weston Longville in Norfolk, for example, because he determined that the 25 year permission made the structure temporary, at least in landscape terms (Annex 1). This is not a satisfactory approach. Onshore wind developers should adopt legally binding financial safeguards, such as bonds which are secured until the site or individual turbines reach the end of their life, to ensure that onshore wind turbines will be dismantled once they stop working or reach the end of their useful life and the landscape restored to its former state, even if the company subsequently ceases to exist.

When a wind turbine comes to the end of its useful life it should be removed from the landscape

Recommendation: The Government should require the onshore wind industry to take legal and financial responsibility for decommissioning onshore wind turbines and restoring the landscape once they stop working or when they reach the end of their useful life.

Conclusion

30. CPRE believes that the Government must set a clear framework which helps local communities reconcile the potentially conflicting environmental 'goods' of landscape protection and climate change mitigation. If this is done, unacceptable damage both to the landscape and to public support for the country's renewable energy targets can be avoided. With an open and transparent dialogue which effectively involves local communities we can choose the right mix of renewable energy technologies that can help tackle climate change and protect our precious landscapes. To enable local communities and the planning system to protect the environment from damaging development and climate change, we call on the Government to:

- **provide more clarity about the total number of onshore wind turbines it expects to see built and where these might be located;**
- **develop a strategic plan-led approach which recognises landscape capacity, including cumulative impacts of onshore wind turbines;**
- **ensure local planning authorities seek to protect landscape character through their local plans and in planning decisions;**
- **instruct the Planning Inspectorate to give significant weight when making decisions on development proposals to any local plans which have attempted to identify appropriate and inappropriate areas for onshore wind development; and**
- **require the onshore wind industry to take legal and financial responsibility for decommissioning onshore wind turbines and restoring the landscape once they stop working or when they reach the end of their useful life.**

Annex

Site	Location	Decision Date	Planning Inspectorate Case Number	Secretary of State and/or High Court ruling
Hill Farm	Cumbria	February 2011	APP/G0908/A/10/2131842	N/A
Thorne Moor	South Yorkshire	February 2008	(determined under Section 36 of the 1989 Electricity Act)	Secretary of State Decision
Hook Moor	Yorkshire	December 2011	APP/N4720/A/10/2121279	N/A
Nun Wood	Northamptonshire	November 2011	APP/Y0435/A/10/2140401	N/A
Kelmarsh (Battle of Naseby and Kelmarsh Hall)	Northamptonshire	December 2011	APP/Y2810/A/11/2154375	N/A
Sudborough (Lyveden New Bield)	Northamptonshire	March 2012	APP/G2815/A/11/2156757	N/A
Weston Longville	Norfolk	January 2012	APP/K2610/A/11/2156693	N/A

About the Campaign to Protect Rural England

We are people who care passionately about the countryside and campaign for it to be protected and enhanced for the benefit of everyone.

We promote the beauty, tranquillity and diversity of rural England by encouraging the sustainable use of land and other natural resources in town and country. Why not join us?

We have a branch in every county, over 200 district groups, eight regional groups and a national office in London, making us an effective combination of local and national campaigning, a powerful combination of effective local action and strong national campaigning.

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