



Department for Communities and Local Government

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LOCAL PLANNING AND ONSHORE WIND

I am writing to draw your attention to the written ministerial statement I made today on local planning and onshore wind. A copy of the statement is attached. This sets out my intentions for planning practice guidance on onshore wind and compulsory pre-application consultation for the more significant onshore wind applications.

As you know, wind farm proposals can be unwelcome to local communities and many are being hard fought through the planning system. There is obvious frustration locally when a local decision is taken to appeal. I appreciate the challenge for your inspectors in reaching decisions which turn on whether a wind farm's impact is acceptable in planning terms when the local community is quite clear that it is not. We can all understand how a local community must feel when the go-ahead is given to a proposal they have opposed because they consider the impact is unacceptable. To address this concern, we intend to issue new planning practice guidance as part of the work we have underway to take forward the Taylor review.

We have set out clearly in the National Planning Policy Framework the importance of early and meaningful engagement with local communities. We will also amend secondary legislation to make pre-application consultation with local communities compulsory for the more significant onshore wind applications. This will ensure that community engagement takes place at an earlier stage in more cases and may assist in improving the quality of proposed onshore wind development. This will also complement the community benefits proposals announced by the Department of Energy and Climate Change today.

It is clearly important that planning inspectors are aware of my intentions. I would therefore be grateful if you could ensure they see the written statement.

RT HON ERIC PICKLES MP

WRITTEN MINISTERIAL STATEMENT: LOCAL PLANNING AND ONSHORE WIND

The Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (Mr. Eric Pickles)

The Coalition Agreement pledged to decentralise power to local people and give local people far more ability to shape the places in which they live.

Through a series of reforms, this Coalition Government is making the planning process more accessible to local communities, because planning works best when communities themselves have the opportunity to influence the decisions that affect their lives.

However, current planning decisions on onshore wind are not always reflecting a locally-led planning system. Much of this stems from planning changes made by the last Administration, which is why we introduced the National Planning Policy Framework and abolished the last Government's top-down Regional Strategies through the Localism Act.

Following a wide range of representations, including the letter of January 2012 to the Prime Minister from one hundred Hon Members, and in light of the Department of Energy and Climate Change's Call for Evidence, it has become clear that action is needed to deliver the balance expected by the National Planning Policy Framework on onshore wind. We need to ensure that protecting the local environment is properly considered alongside the broader issues of protecting the global environment.

Greater community consultation

We have set out clearly in the National Planning Policy Framework the importance of early and meaningful engagement with local communities. The submissions to the Call for Evidence have highlighted the benefits of good quality pre-application discussion for onshore wind development and the improved outcomes it can have for local communities.

We will amend secondary legislation to make pre-application consultation with local communities compulsory for the more significant onshore wind applications. This will ensure that community engagement takes place at an earlier stage in more cases and may assist in improving the quality of proposed onshore wind development.

This will also complement the community benefits proposals announced by the Department of Energy and Climate Change today.

New planning practice guidance

The National Planning Policy Framework includes strong protections for the natural and historic environment. Yet, some local communities have genuine concerns that when it comes to wind farms insufficient weight is being given to environmental considerations like landscape, heritage and local amenity. We need to ensure decisions do get the environmental balance right in line with the Framework and, as expected by the Framework, any adverse impact from a wind farm development is addressed satisfactorily.

We have been equally clear that this means facilitating sustainable development in suitable locations. Meeting our energy goals should not be used to justify the wrong development in the wrong location.

We are looking to local councils to include in their Local Plans policies which ensure that adverse impacts from wind farms developments, including cumulative landscape and visual impact, are addressed satisfactorily. Where councils have identified areas suitable

for onshore wind, they should not feel they have to give permission for speculative applications outside those areas when they judge the impact to be unacceptable.

To help ensure planning decisions reflect the balance in the Framework, my Department will issue new planning practice guidance shortly to assist local councils, and planning inspectors in their consideration of local plans and individual planning applications. This will set out clearly that:

- the need for renewable energy does not automatically override environmental protections and the planning concerns of local communities;
- decisions should take into account the cumulative impact of wind turbines and properly reflect the increasing impact on (a) the landscape and (b) local amenity as the number of turbines in the area increases;
- local topography should be a factor in assessing whether wind turbines have a damaging impact on the landscape (i.e. recognise that the impact on predominantly flat landscapes can be as great or greater than as on hilly or mountainous ones);
and
- great care should be taken to ensure heritage assets are conserved in a manner appropriate to their significance, including the impact of proposals on views important to their setting.

I am writing to Sir Michael Pitt, Chief Executive of the Planning Inspectorate to ask him to draw this statement to the attention of planning inspectors in their current and future appeals. I will inform colleagues in local government to assist them in their forthcoming decision-making.