

The Telegraph

'Bribes' for areas that accept a wind farm

Communities will be offered council tax discounts or cheaper electricity as part of plans to increase the number of wind farms in Britain, Charles Hendry, the Energy Minister will announce today.



Critics said it was naive to expect communities to give up their opposition to the 'inefficient technology' for a 'bribe' Photo: GETTY

By [Louise Gray](#), Environment Correspondent 6:30AM GMT 10 Feb 2011

Thousands of turbines will have to be built across the countryside over the next ten years in order to meet strict climate change targets.

But many of the best sites for onshore wind are also in beautiful landscapes and have been fiercely opposed by local communities.

Mr Hendry said the Labour Government's approach of "hectoring" people into accepting wind farms has not worked. For example by comparing 'Nimbies' who opposed the new technology to those against seat belts.

Instead, he said communities can be encouraged to accept wind farms by ensuring turbines are built in the right place and bring financial benefits to the local area.

But critics said it was naive to expect communities to give up their opposition to the “inefficient technology” for a “bribe”.

In the past the Tories have sided with those who oppose wind farms because of the visual impact of the 300ft turbines on the surrounding countryside.

But Mr Hendry insisted that the new approach will ensure communities back the wind farms.

“There needs to be a new relationship between wind farms and the communities which host them. At present, too often a community can see what it will lose by having a wind farm in its midst, but it cannot see what it gains,” he said.

A new code of practice for developers will ensure that communities are offered a share of income from the wind farm. Business rates paid by the owners of wind farms will be fed straight back into the local economy, rather than going to the Treasury as at present. And planning reform under the Localism Bill will give councils more powers to reject developers and build their own wind farms for profit.

The money could be used to improve services like schools or leisure centres or to cut council tax.

Communities that own their own turbines could also benefit from cheaper electricity tariffs under the plans.

The Government also plan to reform subsidies so wind farms are encouraged to build in isolated, windy places, rather than close to the grid where there are more likely to be houses.

And a review of the noise and flicker caused by wind farms will be fed into planning rules.

But a spokesman for the National Association of Wind farm Action Groups, said communities will not be “bribed”.

“It is utterly naive of the energy minister to imagine that local communities, who have shown the strength of their opposition throughout the UK to inappropriately sited wind farms, to imagine that community funds can buy off their opposition.”

The Coalition Government is committed to generating 15 per cent of energy from renewables by 2020.

As part of plans to meet the EU target the country will have to boost the number of wind turbines onshore from the current 3,000 to up to 9,000.

Dr John Constable, Chairman of the Renewable Energy Foundation, pointed out that turbines only generate a third of maximum capacity every year. For example during the recent cold snap most wind turbines were still because the high pressure also meant it was still.

Therefore the technology has to be backed up by other power stations like coal or nuclear. Also the grid has to be adapted to cope with the sudden surges in electricity caused by wind.

“We already have more wind than we know how to manage. Why is the Government trying to develop more? I think this is extremely foolish,” he said.

Mr Hendry accepted wind needs to be backed up, as does nuclear and coal in case the power stations shut down. He pointed out that the free resource will reduce dependency on foreign fossil fuels and technology and upgrades will enable the grid to cope.

“No one suggests that wind is the whole solution, but alongside nuclear, clean coal and gas it should continue to be part of the solution to the massive energy security and low carbon challenges we face as a nation,” he said.

“However, to do so, it needs more democratic legitimacy than it has today and it is our intention to ensure that happens.”