

**New Wind Farm Planning
Guidance Promised**

DLP BRIEFING NOTE 127

Prepared by
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Introduction

The Government recently announced its intention to bring forward revised planning guidance for the provision of onshore wind farms in England. The proposed changes include **a review of the decision making process for schemes under 50 megawatts** and a formal requirement for pre-application consultation.

Background Information

The Climate Change Act 2008 sets out a requirement for an **80% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 2050**. The UK also has a statutory obligation to achieve the EU's target of meeting **15% of our energy demands from renewable sources by 2020**.

Renewable energy projects need to be framed as strategic, long term investments where practical gains can be made. Onshore wind has an important part to play alongside other forms of renewable energy and small scale micro-generation. Onshore wind currently provides **3%** of total electricity (6.3MW). It is anticipated that the UK will need **13GW by 2020**. The industry currently receives £1.6 billion of private sector investment and this has created 1,800 jobs.

The percentage of planning approvals for onshore wind has dropped significantly in the last 5 years from **70% in 2008/09 to 35% in 2012/13**. Issues cited by the industry include commercial viability and efficiency, connectivity, landscape and amenity impact and public perception.

Consultation

The Government proposes action in the following areas:

1. **Pre-application consultation** with the community will be essential. The Planning Act 2008 already provides a statutory obligation for compulsory pre-application discussions for nationally significant wind farm projects over 50 megawatts.
2. **National planning guidance on energy will not override local concerns** and greater weight will be attributed to social and environmental material considerations.
3. **There will be an increase in community payments from £1,000 per megawatt (MW) of installed capacity per year, to £5,000 per MW per year**, for the lifetime of the wind farm. Therefore, a 20 MW wind farm could potentially produce benefits to the local community worth £100,000 a year.
4. **Physical characteristics and heritage assets will be protected** including the cumulative impact of onshore wind farms on landscape topography, existing features, and unique historical settings.

The Coalition Government is seeking to initiate a 'cultural change' and assist in boosting the number of onshore wind farm planning approvals in England. It considers that more effective public consultation techniques will help to foster a greater sense of ownership and buy in from local communities. There are however concerns that the proposed increase in 'community payments' will both be seen as an attempt to buy consents, or will make some projects economically unviable. One of the key tests will be how the redistributive benefits are articulated throughout the community over the period of operation.

Conclusion

A transition to a low carbon economy is an incremental process which involves balancing of a wide range of interests. The proposed new guidance aims to balance a number of competing interests.

DLP have experience and a proven track record in the promotion of onshore wind farm applications and appeals, as well as providing expert guidance to community groups and stakeholders. If you wish to utilise DLP's considerable planning expertise to maximise your opportunity, please contact us. Senior staff within the practice would be very happy explain its potential implications for you.

If you require more information or would like to discuss the issues mentioned in further detail please contact:

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