

NORTHAMPTONSHIRE CONSERVATIVES WELCOME WIND FARM PLANNING ANNOUNCEMENT

Conservative Members of Parliament in Northamptonshire and the Party's Parliamentary Candidate for Corby & East Northamptonshire, Thomas Pursglove, have today welcomed the changes to planning law which will ensure local residents affected by wind farm proposals will actually have a proper say in whether wind turbines are sited in or near their communities.

New planning guidance supporting the planning framework from DCLG will make clear that the need for renewable energy does not automatically override environmental protections and the planning concerns of local communities. It will also give greater weight to landscape and visual impact concerns.

In welcoming the announcement Chris Heaton-Harris MP (Daventry), said: *"If you have been involved in any local campaign to fight an inappropriately sited onshore wind farm, you will know that on every occasion local opinion is trumped at the planning appeal by national energy policy/targets. The changes announced mean that this is reversed and more weight has to be given to local opinion. From what I can gather, subsidies will also be reviewed on an annual basis."*

This is superb news for those fighting unwanted wind turbines across Daventry and across the whole of England. I truly believe that this announcement brings about the beginning of the end of new onshore wind turbines across England. It is extraordinarily excellent news!"

Peter Bone MP (Wellingborough), said: *"Conservative ministers are to be congratulated for pushing through a reform to planning regulations which will mean that when local councils turn down wind farm proposals, they will not be overturned on appeal. No will mean no. This change will be welcomed by my constituents who have concerns about the spread of unsightly, unwanted and uneconomic wind farms."*

Thomas Pursglove (Conservative Parliamentary Candidate for Corby & East Northamptonshire), said: *"Having knocked on many doors in the last few months in Corby and East Northamptonshire, I am very aware of how concerned local people are about the wind farm issue. 'No' really should mean 'No' and this is exactly what this announcement should ensure – true localism in action."*

This policy change has come about through the vigorous campaigning of local communities up and down the country who for too long have been ridden roughshod over and I am delighted that Conservative Ministers have listened to their concerns. Like many local people, I am against wind farms, full stop."

Brian Binley MP (Northampton South), said: *"The Northamptonshire MP's lobby has been pressing for this sort of measure for some time, and I am delighted that the Government has listened and acted. The new measures mean that the local voice is now predominant in terms of the decisions relating to the siting of these appalling windmills, when before it was a very*

dubious concept called the ‘national interest’ that held sway. I am proud of the work we have done in this respect.”

Philip Hollobone MP (Kettering), said: *“The Borough of Kettering has a very successful windfarm at Burton Wold, but local people don’t want wind turbines everywhere. The new planning powers should better enable Kettering Borough Council to protect the rest of the Borough from more windfarms.”*

Andrea Leadsom MP (South Northamptonshire), said: *“Today’s announcement is a massive step forward for localism and whilst this is not the end for onshore wind farms, I am hopeful it will be the end for unwanted developments and finally the views of local communities should win the day.”*

New figures also released today show there is currently approximately 6.3GW (4074 turbines) of onshore wind in operation, 6.7GW (2857 turbines) under construction or awaiting construction and 5.7GW (2995 turbines) in planning system. Our 2020 target was to have 13GW capacity. This target has already been hit – seven years early.

Notes to Editors:

Written statement to Parliament by the Rt. Hon Eric Pickles MP, Secretary of State for Communities & Local Government, ‘Local planning and onshore wind’.

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 100 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)
- 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.