

Appendix 4

Assessment of the effects of wind farms on tourism

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1. **Introduction**

- 1.1 It is important that the aspects of an area which are significant in attracting visitors are not seriously undermined by insensitive developments. The landscape is clearly an important element in what attracts visitors to this area, but there is no evidence at all from other parts of the country that the presence of wind farms in open countryside, often with at least local landscape designations, has resulted in harm to the tourist industry of that area. In addressing the issue of the potential for wind energy developments to impact on tourism in the area of the proposed development, I start out with an assessment of the nature of the tourism industry in the County, and specifically with reference to the districts of Alnwick and Berwick which are most likely to experience effects. I will then deal with the experiences elsewhere of wind farms that have been built in different parts of the country.

2.0 **Tourism in Northumberland**

- 2.1 The tourism industry has been the subject of various studies over the last few years including “Blue Skies – the Northumberland Cultural Strategy: Tourism Objectives and Implementation Plan 2003”; “The Northumberland Area Tourism management Plan 2006-2009”; and the “North-East Visitor Attractions Survey 2005”. The tourism industry in the County contains a high number of small companies, with some 1400 attractions and accommodation providers, the majority of which employ less than 5 people. The economy of the County suffered in the Foot and Mouth outbreak of 2001, although other parts of the country heavily

reliant on tourism such as Devon and Cumbria had similar experiences from the closure of open countryside to visitors. Overall, visitor numbers have ranged from 1.33 million staying at least one night in 2001 to 1.92 million in 2005, falling back to 1.76 million in 2006. For day visitors the numbers are much higher, ranging from 7.42 million in 2001 to 8.35 million in 2003 and 2004, again dropping back to 7.98 million in 2006. In terms of the UK as a whole, that staying visitor number can be compared to the 4.8 million in Cornwall and 4.5 million in Cumbria shown up in research in 2003; both those Counties have significant wind farm developments in place. West Sussex at 9.5 million staying visitors dwarfs these figures.

2.2 Various studies have highlighted the emphasis on the history of the County, its coast and countryside as features that attract people to visit. For example the number of castles, towers and fortified houses in the County has been given as high as 51, of which a little under half are likely to be considered as main visitor attractions. English Heritage alone has 11 featured sites in the County, the National Trust has a number of important properties quite apart from its ownership of open land, and there are numerous properties in private hands that are open to the public, ranging from Chillingham Castle and Howick Hall to Hexham Abbey, Bamburgh Castle, Vindolanda and Alnwick Castle and Garden.

2.3 In terms of accommodation provides there are clear concentrations of provision in different parts of the County. One main area is the coastal strip, which is also where a large number of the historic features are to be found, from Berwick through Lindisfarne, Bamburgh, Seahouses, Embleton and Craster to Alnmouth, Warkworth and Amble. Alnwick, although a short distance inland has a very high level of provision of accommodation in both services and self-catering properties. The majority of the caravan and camping sites in the County are also concentrated within a few miles of the coast. Other concentrations of both attractions and accommodation providers can be identified in the Rothbury and Coquetdale area, in Wooler, and in the Ford/Etal area in the north of the

County. Individual developments can provide significant numbers of units on just one site such as Shilbottle, Longhorsley and Powburn all of which have sites with more than ten units of self-catering in a single development. Apart from these settlements, there is a scatter of accommodation providers across the rural areas, with for example a group advertising of Northumberland farm holidays providing 19 separate locations, and several companies solely concerned with self-catering holiday lets operating within the County.

2.4 Similarly, in addition to the main cultural heritage features that attract large numbers of visitors, there are numerous other activities for passive and active recreation in the countryside and the towns and villages, as well as attractions such as bird-of-prey centres, boat trips to the islands, and the second hand bookshop in Alnwick that has an estimated visitor level of 200,000 a year.

2.5 If one is looking primarily at the concentration of attractions and accommodation providers then these tend to lie along the coastal strip including Alnwick, and along and inside the fringes of the National Park. While the main route through the County remains the A1, tourists are encouraged to leave it to use the coastal route and there is a secondary tourism route to Scotland via the A697 to the west. Middlemoor lies between the two main areas of concentration of both attractions and accommodation providers, and indeed it is one of the features of the assessments of the areas of least constraints that the areas closest to the National Park and the AONB were actively discouraged in the assessment process.

2.6 In assessing the potential for there to be effects on the level of tourism in the County, there are two separate issues to be addressed. One is whether there are going to be wind farm developments in the County – and primarily in the countryside of the County; the other is whether in the light of the planning policy position of support in principle for such developments, the Middlemoor site is acceptable for this type and scale of

development, when examined in the context of the tourism industry as a whole. To take as a starting point an assumption that wind farms harm tourism, and that no wind farms should be allowed in the County is an untenable proposition.

3. **Public perception studies**

3.1 The overwhelming majority of tourists are of course also UK residents and it is instructive to note the views of the general public that have been canvassed. A number of these studies have been included elsewhere in my appendices, and I have reviewed the material under my evidence on public perception are attached to this report. Some of these have been specifically aimed at tourism and amongst these were the studies on Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland based on visitors to five wind farms.

3.2 By contrast to studies that have looked at the actual effects of wind farms on tourist areas, opponents of wind farms have been quick to seize on the Visit Scotland survey (2002) (CD144) as proving the threat to the tourism industry if wind farms are allowed to proceed. In fact it does nothing of the sort. The findings of the study were that to date there had been no evidence of adverse effects. However, since opponents have sought to criticise other studies , there are several general observations that can be made about the Visit Scotland work. The whole document is very lengthy indeed, and it includes the survey forms that were used and more interestingly the way in which the interviewers were instructed to carry out the work. They only interviewed 180 people over six centres. The interviewers were instructed to "deselect" certain of potential respondents if they failed to give the right answers to some of the questions and one of the key ones was whether they described the natural landscape and natural scenery as "not at all important" to their stay. If they came up with the answer that neither were at all important, then they were eliminated from the survey! That is hardly an objective way of finding the 180 people you want to give straight answers. It presupposes that all the tourists you want

must have a positive answer to the issue of finding the landscape of some significance before you treat them as tourists. A further elimination test was to remove anyone visiting the area on business and visiting friends and relatives "out of duty" rather than because they were on holiday. It may meet the survey criteria of what is a tourist, but surely people who are there carrying out these activities are there to be impressed by what they see when they are not there out of pure choice and are more likely to decide on whether to come back on holiday on the basis of what they did see in that area. Another elimination technique was to remove from interview anyone who did not fulfil their criteria of activities they undertook while on their visit. Thus while they included hill-walking, long and short countryside walks, cycling, mountaineering and orienteering as well as sightseeing from a car or coach, they eliminated those doing other "active countryside pursuits". Presumably therefore someone going on a golfing holiday or for fishing is not counted as a tourist, and it is plain to see that there is a very grave danger of skewing the results in favour of certain types of holiday activity rather than others. It is especially the case when one considers that as far as benefits to the economy are concerned (and that is primarily what tourism is all about) one might expect a golfer to be spending more in the community and the local economy than a fell-walker or sightseer. The logic of the approach is not explained but quite apart from the small sample size it does call into question the findings that have been derived from such an exclusive approach. Further criticism of the study can easily be made through the way in which the later parts of the interviews developed. Having established that when asked to identify aspects of the current Scottish countryside that they particularly disliked there was just 1 out of the 180 who mentioned windfarms, they went on to prompt a list of possible certain aspects of potential likes and dislikes in the countryside to each interviewee. At that stage, 29% stated that windfarms detracted from the experience of the countryside, although this figure was dwarfed by the 51% who mentioned electricity pylons and wires. On the positive side, 18% of the respondents said that wind farms enhanced their experience of the countryside. Overall the study still concluded three quarters of all

respondents were positive or at least neutral towards wind farm development and only 21% clearly negative. From a study that is cited as being proof of the potentially serious threat of wind farms to tourism, that is a very positive outcome.

3.3 The effects of a wind farm development on tourism can also be gauged more objectively from what has actually happened in areas where there have been not just one but several such developments carried out already. It had become clear from recent evidence given to public inquiries into wind farms that the effect on tourism was perceived as a key issue by a number of parties opposed to the development. It had also become clear at the same time that there was little if any evidence being advanced to show that the alleged harm that would be caused to tourism had actually occurred in other areas where wind farms had been built. At the Jordanston public inquiry in Pembrokeshire there were no wind farms in the County involved, and it was alleged that the proposal would seriously harm the tourism industry in the area. It was indicated by the Council that this harm would be demonstrated by reference to other areas where such harm had been identified. The research that I carried out was in response to these claims, although in the event it transpired that no evidence was brought by the opposition to show any deleterious effects of wind farms anywhere else in the country as far as tourism was concerned.

3.4 The County was heavily dependent on tourism, and my evidence sought to address this issue by looking at the situation in general terms in three other areas of high reliance on tourism where there had been wind farms operating for a number of years, to see whether there was any evidence of a decline in numbers that might be attributed to the wind farms. Both Cumbria and Cornwall have experienced a rise in numbers since the first wind farms, while it transpires that Anglesey County Council do not have any separate figures from before the date of local government reorganisation, and cannot advise what has happened in the first eight years since Rhyd-y-Groes was built. However, there is clear evidence from their in-depth survey of visitors as to what attracts them to the island

and the extent of repeat business that is still going on several years after the building of the first wind farm on the island.

3.5 The research took two forms. One was an assessment of the recent trends in the tourism industry of Anglesey, Cornwall and Cumbria, these all being areas which had had wind farms for at least 8 years and which are heavily dependent on tourism. The other study took the form of a questionnaire sent to well over 100 business in these areas seeking their views on a number of topics relating to tourism and wind farms.

3.6 While it is difficult to draw precise conclusions without comparing the numbers of units on each site, the general picture is that 26 of the respondents reported increases since 1992, 16 generally static over the period or fluctuating, 6 were slightly down and 4 were stated as being down. The reasons for the downward trends were fairly consistent, the main ones being the high pound leading to greater competition from abroad, the weather, and the cost of fuel. In terms of reactions from guests, 39 gave no reactions at all, 13 indicated support/curiosity/interest, 1 had had mixed responses, while only 5 gave an adverse reaction, although in at least one case this was clearly a personal view of the respondent. Finally in terms of the possible deterrent factor, 60 of the 61 stated that they were not aware of any such occurrence, and one said that they believed it had happened. 3 people said that there might be a problem if there were more wind farms built in their area.

3.7 It was also notable that amongst the 61 responses there were no less than 9 (three from each area) from agencies which handled between them many hundreds of individual properties. Not one of these agencies considered that wind farms in their area had affected their business through deterring visitors from returning, and indeed not one reported a single adverse reaction to a wind farm from any of their clients.

3.8 One of the claims that has surfaced in recent years from objection groups in different parts of the country is that as a result of the development of

wind farms over the last 15 years, tourism numbers in Denmark have fallen catastrophically, with losses of about 50% in the numbers that used to visit the country. This is clearly a major issue if correct and we have taken advice direct from the office of the Danish Tourist Board in London, who have in turn discussed the claims with their head office in Denmark. They have advised that they have never heard of any such claims or of any studies that suggest there is any validity in the claims that have been made. One can reasonably assume that the Danish Tourist Board would have been aware of having lost half their country's visitors in such a short space of time. The reality in Denmark is that far from curtailing their wind energy programme it is continuing with higher targets for output being set and older machines being replaced with modern, more powerful versions. If there had been a catastrophic loss of visitors and there had been any linkage of this to the effect of wind turbines then it can reasonably be assumed that someone in the Danish Government and certainly within their tourist authority would have been aware of it and responded to it before now.

- 3.9 There has now been a further study produced on the effects of wind farms on tourism on the fringes of the Lake District National Park (CD145). This was undertaken by students at the Leeds Metropolitan University as part of their course work, but it was sponsored by Friends of the Lake District who take on the role of the CPRE in Cumbria. The survey results have been publicised by FOLD as showing that nearly a quarter of the current visitors might be put off returning to the Lake District if more wind farms are built on land around its edges, but in reality that is a distortion of the overall survey in which the one question about possible future developments was dwarfed by the responses to a wide range of other queries. It may be fair to criticise some of the survey methods, and in particular the fact that through practical necessity of when course work had to be undertaken the survey was conducted out of the main holiday season, but the overall conclusions are consistent with other findings and are worth summarising. It needs to be borne in mind that the views are specifically those of visitors, even if over two thirds of them actually were

from the north-west of England. The survey found that 87% of the respondents were positive or very positive towards renewable energy developments and almost all were aware of wind farms and knew what they looked like. 38% strongly approved, and 49% approved, of windfarms as a source of energy. The report notes that people visiting the area for the natural landscape and sightseeing might have been expected to disapprove of wind farms as they might see them as destroying the beauty of the area. The survey did not support this contention. In terms of the perception of the windfarms, the highest response was that people found them interesting, which outscored those finding them intrusive by more than two to one. The majority felt that an increase in the number of turbines would not change their opinion. In terms of location, 108 out of 143 would prefer them offshore and 40 out of 143 would prefer them in areas with little beauty (these being multiple choice options), but these general comments did not appear to have any marked effect on the overall views as to what would happen if many more were built onshore. The final point to draw from the survey is the issue of further plans for windfarms which was the real purpose of the survey being undertaken. This found that 75% of those responding said that significantly more wind farms would have no effect on how often they visited. 2% said they would visit more often and 22% said less often. The question was related to there being a significant number of windfarms being built in addition to the ones already there as part of the Government's 10% target, which gives no sense of scale at all, other than implying a marked increase in the number built. It does not suggest that the Lake District could lose 22% of its tourists, which is one gloss placed on the findings. It only suggests that with significantly more wind farms than the current 11 less than a quarter of all the visitors might go there less often. We know that about half of all those questioned visited on no more than two occasions a year, but there is no correlation in the report between those who were less likely to visit as often and how often they went already.

- 3.10 It is also useful to see how the potential for effects on tourists has been handled in past appeal cases in areas that were regarded as having fragile

tourism industries. One such case is the decision on a wind cluster of three turbines at Bradworthy in Devon, which resulted in the first permission being granted for such a development in the whole of Devon, provided in CD32c. Evidence on tourism was presented not just from the Council and third parties opposed to the scheme, but from the South West Tourist Board. The conclusions of the Inspector can be noted:

“37. It cannot be disputed that in recent years the countryside has been badly hit by a variety of factors, such as the foot and mouth outbreak, which have had severe consequences for rural economies and businesses and in this the Bradworthy area is no less vulnerable than other locations.

38. I appreciate that some of the nearest houses to the appeal site provide holiday accommodation and other businesses are dependent on tourism. I heard that there are very real fears that the erection of the turbines would terminally affect business prospects. Even though I consider it inevitable that some holiday makers would be deterred from staying in the immediate locality because of the turbines, it seems to me that the facilities offered in both Bradworthy itself and by the holiday accommodation individually amount to significantly more than a view in one direction. This is amply demonstrated in the Ruby Country Initiative which seeks to promote local excellence, accessibility and other developments. Moreover because of the nature of the landscape and the links between settlements it is quite likely that visitors to most parts of the Ruby Country would be unaware of the turbines, unless actively promoted as a local asset.

39. Whilst similar concerns were expressed by South West Tourism, the evidence in this respect remains, of necessity, largely conjecture. I have seen no empirical evidence which substantiates the views that tourism in the Bradworthy area would be either significantly harmed or significantly enhanced by the turbines. I am aware that in 1999 a survey for the National Trust in the south West Region found that over 75% of visitors surveyed said that the conserved

landscape had been a motivating factor in their decision to holiday in the South west, but there is no evidence to suggest that those tourists would not have visited the area of wind turbines were present. Given the relatively small scale of the development proposed I consider its impact would be unlikely to have far-reaching consequences for tourism and the local economy around Bradworthy, the wider Ruby Country or North Devon generally.

3.11 A similar stance was taken by the Inspector in the Higher Darracott appeal in 2004 (CD32d) where the Council introduced detailed evidence from their tourism officers and from the South West Tourist Board about the potential fragility of the local economy and the marginality of some of the concerns. The Inspector did not accept that a mere concern about the future aspirations of visitors was evidence that discounted the detailed research that had already been undertaken elsewhere.

3.12 Similar conclusions have been reached elsewhere in the UK on possible effects on areas with vulnerable tourism industries. Two very recent cases from Scotland can be cited. The first was a Section 36 inquiry at Abercairny in Perth and Kinross which was actually refused on specific landscape grounds, but on tourism the findings of the Reporter are notable (CD32ei). On tourism, she had been given a great deal of evidence by objectors arguing that there would be significant adverse effects on the fragile tourism economy of the area, and the National Tourist Route from Crieff to Pitlochry that ran through the proposed wind farm site. In respect of the general effects and those on an Inn adjacent to that Tourist Route, she concluded at 14.61: “Given its intrinsic qualities and wide range of tourist attractions, I find any adverse effect on the tourist economy of Crieff or of the surrounding area unlikely to be significant. Suggestions that the percentage of respondents recorded in the VisitScotland survey as considering that wind farms detracted from the landscape would lead to the same percentage reduction in tourist income is unduly simplistic.”

3.13 The second appeal was at Drumderg also in Perth and Kinross (CD32fi). On tourism, he was presented with detailed evidence by third parties on potential effects on the fragile tourist economy, citing the responses to the VisitScotland study referred to at Abercairny, but again he found that while tourism was important to the local economy, he was not persuaded from all the evidence he heard that development of the wind farm would have anything but a relatively minor effect on that sector (342).

3.14 It is useful to note the conclusions of the Inspector who dealt with the Whinash public inquiry in 2005(CD32ze). Although he came to the conclusions that the proposed development would not be acceptable on grounds of its wider landscape effects, he came to a very clear finding on the tourism issue. He stated:

“15.45 ...I can fully appreciate the concerns of businesses which depend largely on tourism, given their importance in providing much needed employment in rural communities and their welcome contribution to the wider Cumbrian economy. It is also apparent that the loss of visitors could seriously undermine a generally fragile economy which is on the road to recovery following earlier set-backs.

15.46 The Cumbria Tourist Board’s survey of tourism business in Cumbria provides added testimony to local concerns, but a significant proportion of responses acknowledged that a wind farm could be an attraction in its own right with potential to attract new ‘green’ visitors. Surveys of visitors also indicates that some would be deterred from visiting the area. However, these surveys, and the one undertaken by Orton Farmers Ltd, are forward looking and largely hypothetical, and have to be considered in the context of other studies in areas of operational wind farms, and the views of the North West Regional Assembly, which counter these concerns.

On balance, I see no justification to contemplate adverse effects on tourism and the local economy.”

3.15 Coming right up to date, the decision on the Fullabrook Wind Farm was issued by BERR at the start of October 2007 (CD32di). Here the Inspector’s report starting from 8.184 assesses the detailed material presented to him on tourism from both sides. The North Devon Marketing Bureau argued that up to a third of the visitors to the area could be dissuaded from returning, using the same Visit Scotland material I have already referred to, and their own surveys. The appellants produced detailed survey material from both the North Devon area and other sites, prepared by the University of the West of England. The Inspector made the point that prospective concerns were almost impossible to predict accurately when no turbines had been built, but he was highly critical of the objectors’ attempts to portray wind farms as likely to decimate the local tourist economy. In his conclusions he came to the view that there was no evidence to suggest that tourist numbers would be significantly affected and that even for businesses close to the application site, there was not likely to be material long-term harm.

4.0 **Conclusions**

4.1 So much of what has been said about the effects on tourism appears to be based on the personal views of the writer or witness as to fears about what might happen. My own survey material was based on what had happened to accommodation providers in areas where wind farms had been built. The reality is that in both Cumbria and Cornwall where there are between them some 17 windfarms, tourism numbers have continued to rise from the 1990s. Not only that, but new wind farms have been approved at the local level – Bears Down in North Cornwall and Mabel Plantation in Allerdale, and on appeal at Roskrow in Kerrier.

4.2 The position in Northumberland is that there will inevitably be wind farms approved and built in the next few years, and the decisions that have to be made by local planning authorities and if necessary through the planning inquiry system are whether the sites put forward are acceptable in the context of the adopted policy position. Thus a generic objection to Middlemoor on the grounds that it will undermine the tourism economy of the County is not tenable as an approach. The disposition of the attractions and accommodation providers and the routes likely to be used to access them are such that Middlemoor is not in a location that is likely to cause harm to the tourism industry.