



Campaigning for the beauty, tranquillity and diversity of the countryside

Goodwill Payments - Do they Benefit Communities or Bring Planning into Disrepute?

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A growing number of local communities across England are being drawn in to accepting offers of 'goodwill payments' from wind farm developers. Countryside campaigners CPRE [1] are today calling on the Government to take action to stop this practice from bringing the planning system into disrepute.

This call is backed by a new survey of this growing practice issued today. CPRE has found that:

- the sums involved are a fraction of the amount that the developers are making from the public, as electricity consumers, in subsidies;
- the payments are often used for purposes such as lunch clubs and sports pitches, which bear no relation to providing much-needed renewable energy; and
- local authority planners have little or no oversight of these payments.

Paul Miner, CPRE's Senior Planning Campaigner, said: 'These offers of community benefit do not go through the proper procedures of the planning system, unlike similar offers from most other developers.'

By accepting them, communities may also be getting a worse deal than they would if wind farm developers were made to offer them through the planning system.'

CPRE's investigation [2] has found:

- at least 35 cases, including at least one in every English region, of 'goodwill payments' being either offered to, or accepted by, local communities;
- three major wind farm developers – E.ON, npower renewables, and RES Limited, are routinely offering 'goodwill payments' in connection with every new development;
- in some cases 'goodwill payments' are being used for things that, however worthy in themselves, bear no relationship to renewable energy, such as children's play areas and senior citizens' lunch clubs;
- parish councils, whose involvement in planning applications is enshrined in law, have been directly approached with offers of payments or have been prevented from coming to a view on a proposed wind farm because offers have been made to individual members; and
- the rate of payment typically being offered is less than half than what two councils in Scotland are already insisting on from new wind farms in their area.

CPRE will be working with members of the House of Lords to press for amendments to the Planning Bill [3] to:

- outlaw the offering of goodwill payments in connection with any new development;
- make wind farm developers liable for the Government's proposed new Community Infrastructure Levy; and

- earmark proceeds of the levy from new wind farms to go towards small-scale renewable energy, district heating and/or countryside improvement schemes in local communities.

CPRE is also calling on the Government to resist calls from the industry to take decision-making on most wind farm schemes away from local councils and give them to an unelected Infrastructure Planning Commission [4].

Paul Miner concluded:

‘CPRE supports the need to increase investment in renewable energy, including wind energy. But “goodwill payments” threaten to bring the planning system into disrepute and are questionable even on the grounds of the need for more renewable energy. We believe that the solution is to outlaw these payments completely. Energy companies should be required to work through the planning process in the same way as any other developer.’

– END –

NOTES FOR EDITORS

1. CPRE, the Campaign to Protect Rural England, is a charity which promotes the beauty, tranquillity and diversity of rural England. We advocate positive solutions for the long-term future of the countryside. Founded in 1926, we have 60,000 supporters and a branch in every county. President: Bill Bryson. Patron: Her Majesty The Queen. www.cpre.org.uk
2. CPRE’s briefing *Goodwill Payments – Do they benefit communities or bring planning into disrepute?* provides full details of our investigation of the issue. The appendix to the briefing gives full details of local cases that we are aware of. Figures 1-4 in the briefing respectively give more details of statements by leading developers; the issue of unrelated benefits; the involvement of parish councils; and the policies of councils in Scotland.
3. The Planning Bill was considered by the House of Commons during the 2007-8 Parliamentary session. It is now being considered by the House of Lords. Committee sessions in the House of Lords began on 6 October. It is expected that the House will consider the Government’s proposals for a new Community Infrastructure Levy in the week beginning 13 October or thereafter. At present the clauses in the Bill relating to the Levy do not directly address the issues of ‘goodwill payments’ or how the Levy might be applied to renewable energy development more generally. CPRE is supporting amendments to address these points.
4. Clauses 14, 15 and 30 of the Planning Bill allow for planning decisions on energy generating stations with a capacity of over 50 megawatts (MW) to be taken by an Infrastructure Planning Commission (IPC) rather than the Secretary of State as they are at present. In addition, Clause 34 also allows the Secretary of State to refer a proposal for any energy generating scheme below 50 MW to the IPC, thereby taking the decision out of the hands of the relevant local authority. CPRE, as part of the Better Planning coalition of environmental organisations, opposes the provisions in the Bill that give the IPC decision-making powers, as we believe that democratically accountable Ministers or local councils should be responsible for planning decisions.