

Wind Watch: Industrial Wind Energy News



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Bribe – or just a goodwill offer?

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There are properly regulated ways for communities to benefit when developers win planning permission for money-making projects. And there are goodwill gestures that can come dangerously close to looking like bribes.

The official schemes, sanctioned as part of the planning process, ensure for example that house builders put up school buildings, shops and community facilities when they get the go-ahead for new housing estates. They make sure that road schemes to service new developments do not have to be paid for from the public purse.

And they cannot and must not be used to win planning approval against the public interest.

Some goodwill gestures, on the other hand, are nothing more than inducements to persuade potential objectors to hold their tongues when developers put forward controversial plans like onshore wind farms. And it is these inducements which, as the Western Morning News reports today, the Council for the Protection of Rural England wants to see outlawed.

The CPRE has a very good case. It is often tempting for small communities which always seem to miss out on publicly funded projects to say “yes please” when they are offered a new sports pitch or a community hall at no cost. But if the hidden price is their acceptance of a giant wind farm that will spoil the landscape, what’s the community to say; yes or no?

Forcing them to make such a call is patently unfair. It skews the planning process and can prevent a proper judgment being made on purely planning grounds. It can also cause divisions within a community, where one half wants the sports pitch or village hall and the other half remains adamantly opposed to the wind turbines that come as part of the deal.

There is no simple way around these problems except to say, as the CPRE demands, that these so-called goodwill gestures should be removed from the planning process altogether.

The Department of Communities and Local Government insisted yesterday that planning permissions could not be “bought or sold”. But local views matter, and if they can be influenced by inducements that have no direct link to the development but which help to buy off opposition, then they should be banned.

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