



10 DOWNING STREET
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THE PRIME MINISTER

Monday, 13 February 2012

Dear Chris,

Thank you for your letter of 30 January, sent jointly with a number of colleagues, and which I have read with interest.

I well appreciate the concerns from local residents about any large planning application. That is why we want to make the planning process more accessible to local residents, because planning works best when communities themselves have the opportunity to influence the decisions that make a difference in their lives. And that must include local communities having their full say on on-shore wind farm planning decisions.

Our planning reforms will put local communities in the driving seat by giving new powers to neighbourhoods to write their own plans and by removing the previous Government's unwanted and unloved Regional Strategies. This will mean that there will be more freedom to respond to the concerns and aspirations of local residents when local plans are made (by neighbourhoods or local authorities). It will also mean that top-down regional targets will not trump local concerns in planning decisions. But localism is not just about giving local communities a greater say over planning proposals, they should also receive more local benefits as a result of development that does go ahead. So we are committed to ensuring local communities capture the full economic benefit from hosting renewable energy projects, including retention of all of the business rates they pay.

We share your views about the need to review support for on-shore wind under the Renewables Obligation. The costs of on-shore wind are falling and subsidies must fall appropriately. We are proposing to reduce the Renewables Obligation subsidy for on-shore wind by 10 per cent, impacting projects that are being built this year.

But I do believe that on-shore wind energy plays a role in a balanced UK electricity mix alongside gas, nuclear, cleaner coal and other forms of renewable energy. A portfolio of different supplies enhances energy security and prevents the UK from becoming over reliant on gas imports, as North Sea supplies continue to decline and new nuclear makes ready to come forward towards the end of this decade. I am also determined that we seize the economic opportunities in renewable energy supply chains as the global race for capital in low-carbon sectors intensifies. Since April 2011 around £4 billion of new investments in UK renewable energy projects have been announced, with the potential to support up to 14,000 new jobs in this country.

In other words, there are perfectly hard headed reasons for allowing some on-shore wind energy to be a part of our energy mix, irrespective of the EU's 2020 renewable energy target signed up to by the previous Government – but if, and only if, local people have a proper say in planning decisions. I hope you find this reassuring of our approach.

Ym.

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Chris Heaton-Harris MP