



Earth's physical resources: renewable energy.

Wind power in England

Narrator:

In North East England, for example, wind power is already a component of the regional renewables target. This wind farm at Kirkheaton is making it's contribution.

Sandy Painter:

The wind farm is owned by Kirkheaton Wind Farm which consists of Northern Electric and AMEC Border Wind.

The landowner himself actually approached us about 5 years ago with the proposal to put wind turbines on his land.

Dalton Linkletter

At that time they were only able to put up a relatively large number of windmills, it was 25 they suggested on the land here which meant that a lot of the land was going to be used up with windmills. So my farming son decided that that was too many so that was the end of it then. And about three years later they came back and said that new technology had come out and they could reduce the number of windmills.

Sandy Painter:

The electricity comes from the wind turbine into the transformer and then into the grid and is sold to Northern Electric.

On average the three wind turbines would produce enough electricity for eleven hundred homes.

Narrator:

The towers are 45 metres high, and the rotor is forty two metres in diameter.

Not surprisingly, there were a lot of planning issues to address before putting these large structures into the landscape.

Hugh Edmondson:

We took the line that this was a small development in the sense of three turbines only, albeit with a significant local impact, but not having more than that which would necessitate a formal environmental impact assessment.

Set against a general policy background, we obviously have to consider local constraints, and I think the first consideration without a doubt here was the local population

Residents in the area probably in the very close proximity don't number many more than I would think thirty or forty, in scattered farm-steadings, and obviously in the village of Kirkheaton.

We did appreciate that the application was in an area of considerable interest in terms of the natural landscape, but not exceptional interest. So that was a very important local consideration.

Narrator:

The main issues were visual impact, noise, and effects on the local ecology.

Sandy Painter:

Once we'd submitted the planning application to the planning authority we had a local exhibition in the village of Kirkheaton. It was attended by local people sort of in Kirkheaton and the surrounding villages.

Hugh Clearhill:

At that first public meeting, I think people were unclear as to what was involved but the issues that emerged were particularly the landscape impact, because that was an area shown in the local plan as of landscape importance, noise for the residents in Kirkheaton, and low flying because we're in an area here where aircraft do come quite low.

Narrator:

In terms of noise, residents were more concerned about the continuous sound of the spinning turbines.

Sandy Painter:

Noise; we actually undertook noise monitoring from the village green prior to the wind turbines being installed. That enabled us to determine what the existing background noise levels were and to superimpose onto that predicted noise levels which would be incurred once the wind turbines had been installed. This showed that noise levels at the nearest properties from the village were actually below any levels that are considered to be of concern.

Narrator:

After four months of analysis and consultation, the planning officers recommended that the wind farm should be approved.

But the Castle Morpeth council voted against it, on grounds of visual impact and disturbance from construction traffic.

AMEC Border Wind appealed against the decision.

After reviewing the evidence, the independent inspector agreed with the planning officers' original recommendation.

Hugh Edmondson:

He felt that the wider public interest here would benefit from the turbines, set against the background of government and local policy.

Narrator:

Construction started soon after, and the three 600 kilowatt turbines produced their first contribution to Britain's renewable energy supplies in May 2000.

Two percent of the income generated by the windfarm goes to the owner of the land, but there are other local gains as well.

Dalton Linkletter:

The advantage to us was the road, that was the thing, we weren't so much worried about the income as the fact that they've put this wonderful track in for us and a lot of fences as well which have come in no harm.

Narrator:

And now the turbines are turning, many local people have changed their views about having a wind farm on their doorstep.

Hugh Clearhill:

The majority of people that I've spoken to in the area feel - what was all the fuss about? I know that some people in Kirkheaton do find the noise, even the low level noise just a bit annoying on sort of quieter evenings and it tends to be when the windspeed is lower that one notices it most. But in terms of the visual impact, a lot of people I've spoken to aren't that concerned. There are some people who remain very against the thing, feel that this is an

imposition of an industrial landscape on what was previously an open rural landscape. I think there will be some people who will never be convinced on that point.

I quite like to be able to look at those turbines and feel that a small contribution to clean energy is being produced and that it's in my patch. I don't mind that.