

BWEA Briefing Sheet Public Attitudes to Wind Energy in the UK

The UK has a long history of wind energy – and as long a history in cataloguing public opinion of wind farms. The first surveys in the UK were carried out before the first commercial wind farm started operations, at Delabole in Cornwall in 1991.

With over 15 years' experience and more than 60 separate surveys, the results can be taken as conclusive, showing as they do a consistently high level of support for the development of wind farms, on average 70-80%, both in principle, as a good thing, and also in practice, among residents living near wind farms.

Some common features have been identified from the results of these surveys, notably that direct experience provokes a more positive attitude and that closer proximity results in a higher level of support. Similarly, where 'before and after' surveys have been conducted, there is typically a general shift in attitude towards the positive and that many fears of the potential impact of the development of the wind farm prove unfounded.



The Ecotech Centre, Swaffham © Alison Hill, BWEA

The fears commonly identified are that the wind farms will spoil the scenery, be a noise nuisance, adversely affect house prices and tourism, and have ill effects on people's health. Work conducted by BWEA and others in all these areas have shown no such associations.

For example, wind farms in many cases are tourist attractions in their own rights, evident from the 35,000 people who pass through the doors of the Scroby Sands Visitor Centre each year, or the 10,000 annual visitors who take the turbine tour at the Ecotech Centre in Swaffham, Norfolk.

Local residents often prove to be among the strongest advocates for their wind farm, as councillor Margaret Munn of Ardrossan in Scotland comments:

"The Ardrossan wind farm has been overwhelmingly accepted by local people - instead of spoiling the landscape we believe it has been enhanced.

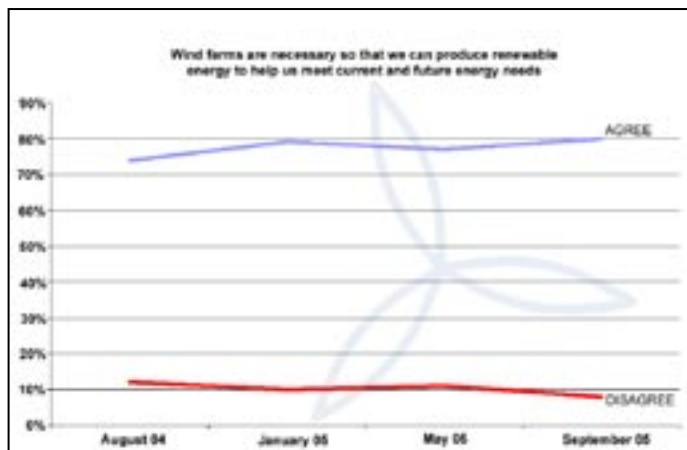
The turbines are impressive looking, bring a calming effect to the town and contrary to the belief that they would be noisy, we have found them to be silent workhorses."

Below is an overview of headline findings of recent surveys, amongst the population at large, and also amongst informed samples, including residents near existing wind farms. Full details of all public surveys are either available online at www.bwea.com/ref/surveys.html or on request from BWEA.

Latest survey findings

NOP World survey of 1,000 adults on behalf of BWEA undertaken 23-25 September 2005:

- 80% agree that wind farms are necessary so that we can produce renewable energy to help us meet current and future energy needs in the UK – only 8% disagree
- 62% agree wind farms are necessary to produce renewable energy – what they look like is unimportant



A trend of four NOP polls carried out for the Embrace the Revolution campaign between September 2004 and September 2005 © BWEA

Populus Survey for *The Times* on 1-6 July 2005 surveyed 1003 people and found that:

- Accepting that wind farms have to be built somewhere, 81% would consider objecting to a wind farm development near their local area as nimbyism and only 16% would object

MORI survey conducted in Devon on behalf of Regen SW, the renewable energy agency for the South West of England. MORI interviewed 218 people in face to face interviews in 13 locations across urban and rural Devon between 2-16 October 2004:

- 71% of rural residents questioned support the use of wind power in Devon
- 47% had no strong feelings about the way wind farms look
- More people liked the way wind turbines looked - 28% - than didn't - 24%

ICM Research of 1,000 adults on behalf of Greenpeace undertaken 25-26 August 2004:

- 80% support government plans to significantly increase the number of wind turbines in Britain, with just 8% opposed
- 70% would support the development of a wind farm in their area

Climate Concern Cymru: Attitudes to climate change and windfarms in Wales, published by Friends of the Earth Cymru and the Welsh Consumer Council, conducted in March 2004:

- Three times as many (45%) were more likely to be in favour of onshore wind turbines than to oppose them (15%) with 25%
- Five times as many (55%) were more likely to support offshore wind farms than oppose them (10%)



Moel Moelogan wind farm © Tegni Cymru Cyf



Local residents' surveys

TNS (2003), Attitudes and Knowledge of Renewable Energy amongst the General Public, On behalf of Department of Trade and Industry, Scottish Executive, National Assembly for Wales and Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment Northern Ireland:

- 94% of people who live near wind farms are in favour of them
- 85% of the general public support both onshore and offshore wind energy

Mori (2003), Public Attitudes to Windfarms a Survey of Local Residents in Scotland, Scottish Executive Social Research:

- 82% support a general increase of wind energy
- 54% of people living within 20 kilometres (km) of a wind farm would support a 50% expansion of the farm, while support is higher (65%) amongst those living within 5 km of a wind farm

RBA (2002), Lambrigg Wind Farm – Public Attitudes Survey:

- After a year of operation, 74% of local residents supported the Lambrigg wind farm, with only 8% indicating dissatisfaction

'Before and after'

Mori (2003), Public Attitudes to Windfarms a Survey of Local Residents in Scotland, Scottish Executive Social Research:

- Before the construction, people thought problems may arise from wind farm impact on the landscape (27%), traffic during construction (19%) and noise during construction (15%). Since the development, only 12% say the landscape has been spoiled, 6% commented on problems with additional traffic while 4% say there was noise or disturbance from construction traffic



Ladygrove Primary School, Telford © Mike Webb



Out Newton wind farm © E. ON UK Renewables

MRA (1992/93) Cemmaes Wind Farm - Sociological Impact Study, Market Research Associates for DTI. To establish attitudes of local residents to the wind farm at Cemmaes immediately after construction (phase one), and one year after (phase two) the wind farm became operational:

- At both phase one and phase two 86% of respondents were in favour of Cemmaes wind farm. At stage one, safety, lack of pollution, prestige and economic gain were the main benefits cited
- At phase two, the number of perceived benefits had increased and included: environmentally friendly, renewable energy, natural and a way forward, pollution free, clean, healthier, safe energy, and better than nuclear
- Most of the minority who were not positive at phase one were neutral at phase two

Attitudes Towards Wind Power: A survey of opinion in Cornwall and Devon, Renewable Energy/DTI/ETSU. Survey on attitudes before (1990) and after (1992) the construction of a ten-turbine wind farm. Two groups were interviewed, one in Exeter and one in Cornwall:

- Before: 70% of the Exeter group and 40% of the Cornwall group said they approved of a wind turbine being built near their homes; there was a higher number (31%) of objections to wind farms in Cornwall than Exeter (3%) prior to the wind farm being built
- After: In Cornwall (with six months experience of living with a wind farm near them) respondents were more positive than the Exeter group. Of the Cornish respondents 81% said the turbines made no difference, and only 16% said they made some difference. Furthermore, the number of Cornish respondents who approved or strongly approved of wind power had increased to 85%
- Before the wind farm was built, 86% were concerned about noise nuisance, whereas this was down to 20% post commissioning



Embrace the Revolution billboard © BWEA

Summary

What is evident in the UK is that it is the minority 10% or so who do not like wind energy who too often lead the debate over wind's future. This has given rise to the misconception that wind energy is unpopular and unwelcome.

'**Embrace the Revolution**', a major campaign by BWEA, gives these people a voice. Embrace was launched in September 2004 with the results of an opinion poll which showed that the majority of the population - 74% - agree that wind farms are necessary to help meet current and future energy needs in the UK. Quarterly opinion polls since the launch have all shown increasing support for wind energy, with the latest one conducted in September 2005 showing 80% support. During the first year of the campaign, 34 celebrity champions and over 17,000 members of the general public have signed up to Embrace the Revolution. On August Bank Holiday 2005 BWEA organised Wind Weekend, the first ever national celebration of wind energy, during which 15 wind farms across the UK attracted over 6,000 visitors.



embrace the revolution

www.embracewind.com

Embrace the Revolution does not only ask people to show their support but it also challenges the myths that surround wind energy. For that is what the nay saying of wind energy in all too many cases is, a myth, Chinese whispers which over time have been distorted into what many now unwittingly consider as fact. To redress the balance, BWEA's campaign does some straight talking about the myths and facts of wind energy, the subject also of

a new publication from the Sustainable Development Commission, *Wind Power in the UK*. Combined with the profile-raising celebrity champions, media personalities, parliamentarians, environmentalists, designers and architects who have all pledged their support, along with everyday people who are happy to stand up and be counted as champions of their local wind farm, the voice of wind power supporters will be heard in the debate about our future energy supplies.

References

- ¹ Public Opinion Surveys are available online at www.bwea.com/ref/surveys.html
- ² SDC Report *Wind Power in the UK* is available from www.sd-commission.org.uk/wind
- ³ For other BWEA Briefing Sheets, go to www.bwea.com/energy/briefing-sheets.html

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