



Wind Farms and Tourism

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In any area where tourism plays an important role in the local economy a wind farm application raises questions about the possible negative impact on tourism. However, studies have consistently shown that fears about the possible impact on tourism are unfounded.

Independent UK studies have shown that effects of wind farms on tourism are negligible, and there is a growing body of evidence to suggest that wind farms can become tourist attractions in their own right.

Lake District

A 2003 survey by Leeds Metropolitan University found that the vast majority of tourism organisations reported no effect on their business from the presence of an existing wind farm in their vicinity, nor did they expect any effect associated with a proposal for a new wind farm.

- 87% of visitors/tourists and 88% of tourism organisations felt positive towards wind farms.
- 75% said that increases in the number of turbines in the next few years would not have any effect on them visiting in the future.

Cumbria and North West

The following results came from a survey of local residents carried out for Lambrigg Wind Farm, Cumbria: Seven in ten (71%) thought that the Lambrigg Wind Farm has had no effect on the number of people visiting the area. A significant number (14%) said they don't know what the impact has been. More than one in ten (11%) believed that the number of visitors to the area has increased, while fewer than one in twenty (just 3%) thought that visitor numbers have decreased.

- 74% said they support the wind farm.
- Only 8% are in opposition to the wind farm.

Wales

In a visitor survey undertaken on behalf of the Wales Tourist Board, 68% of respondents said that if the number of wind farms increased in Wales it would make no difference to the likelihood they would take holidays in the Welsh countryside. A further 9% said any impact would be negligible and only 2% said they would be 'less likely to come back'.



Scotland

A Scottish Government -commissioned report in 2008 showed that wind farm developments have a minimal impact on tourism provided they are not visible from important tourism corridors.

- 93/99% said wind farms would have no impact on their decision to return to Scotland.
- 68% said they felt positive that a 'well-sited wind farm does not ruin the landscape' with a further 12% neutral about that statement.

In a MORI poll in Scotland:

- 43% of respondents said a wind farm meant they were more likely to visit the Argyll area, an area of high landscape value. About the same proportion of respondents said it would make no difference.
- Less than 8% thought they would be less likely to visit.
- Nine out of ten tourists visiting some of Scotland's top beauty spots said the presence of wind farms makes no difference to the enjoyment of their holiday.
- Twice as many respondents would return to an area because of the presence of a wind farm than the number that would stay away.

The survey also showed:

- 91% of visitors interviewed said that the presence of a wind farm would not influence their decision to return to the area.
- 55% of those who had seen a wind farm felt their impact was either generally or completely positive. Only 8% felt it was negative.

Devon

A 2004 study by researchers at the University of the West of England showed:

- The vast majority of tourists surveyed in North Devon (87%) stated that the presence of a wind farm would neither encourage nor discourage them from visiting.
- Of the remaining 13%, slightly more would be encouraged to visit because of the presence of a wind farm.
- 93.9% of those surveyed said that they would not be discouraged from visiting the area by the presence of a wind farm.

Whitelee wind farm and visitor centre

Europe's largest wind farm, Whitelee, opened its visitor centre in September 2009, receiving 25,000 visitors in just nine weeks before it closed for the winter in November. Situated in a fairly remote area of Scotland, the visitor centre is unlikely to attract passing tourists, meaning that visitors would have made a special trip to see the wind farm. The area has not previously attracted much tourist attention, so the visitor figures for Whitelee are particularly impressive.

Whitelee currently has 140 turbines, with planning permission for a further 75 to be built by 2012.

Delabole, North Cornwall

The UK's first commercial wind farm at Delabole, Cornwall received 350,000 visitors in its first ten years of operation. The Gaia visitor centre was opened in 2001 in response to demand from visitors. Despite healthy visitor figures, the centre, which offered free entry, was forced to close when promised funding failed to materialise.

'When the wind turbines were erected at Deli Farm, Delabole in 1991, we had reservations in connection with visitors to our caravan park... We also found that far from putting visitors off, the opposite happened – tourists were intrigued and liked them. With regard to the Riding School, which has been established just over a year, we have never experienced any problems with riding in close proximity to the wind turbines.'

Lakefield Caravan Park and Equestrian Centre, Camelford, Cornwall, July 1998

A survey of local residents showed that at least 90% would be in favour of having another turbine 'in their back yard', and a second turbine was erected near the town in July 2003.

Delabole wind farm is still in operation. Built in 1991, it has 10 x 400kW turbines which still power around 2200 homes.



EcoTech Centre, Swaffham, Norfolk

The EcoTech Centre focuses on sustainability and holds a number of exhibitions and displays as well as having an organic garden, cafe, heritage orchard and a wind turbine. Around 17,000 people visited the centre in 2009. A large percentage of these took the turbine tour. The busiest periods for tourists are over the Easter and summer holidays, and around 4,500 children visit on official school trips each year, including a number of French students who visit as part of their study abroad.

'The vast majority of our visitors express a positive attitude to wind turbines. Many are already "pro wind" but many are curious at the start of their visit and form a positive impression whilst they are here. In particular people are surprised at how quiet the turbine is.'

Stuart Weaver, EcoTech Centre Manager.

A survey of local residents in Swaffham showed that at least 90% would be in favour of having another turbine 'in their back yard', and when a second turbine was erected near the town in July 2003, there was little opposition.

Scroby Sands, Great Yarmouth,

The Scroby Sands visitor centre attracts over 35,000 visitors each year who come to learn more about wind farms and other renewable energy using the interactive activities and displays. It is regarded as an additional attraction to what is already a popular tourist area. Dave Atherton, Scroby Sands wind farm operations manager, said: 'We're delighted with the number of visitors we've had so far... We've even had visitors from as far away as Azerbaijan, the United States and Canada dropping in to the centre.'

Rheidol, Wales

At Rheidol, the visitor centre for the hydroelectric power station and wind farm attracts approximately 10,000 visitors per year.

Wind farms outside of the UK

There are 6,000 wind turbines in Denmark, which are commonly used for tourism marketing. Hotels, guesthouses, and campsites often use wind turbines to promote 'green tourism'. These adverts are particularly targeted towards the German market, where the public has a high level of interest in both environmental issues and in new technology.

Scotland, Australia, California, Denmark, and Sweden have found that the installation of wind turbines increases tourism, providing evidence that most people see them as attractive additions to land and seascapes. From Scotland to New Zealand, and from California to the Greek Isles, tourists pay to visit wind turbines and be photographed with them. Some of the tourists are casual observers who stop at roadside displays or interpretive centres; others pay to participate in organised tours.

National polls in Australia have shown:

- 94% of respondents described wind turbines as 'interesting' and 74% as 'graceful'.
- 95% of respondents supported the use of wind power.
- 36% of respondents were more likely to visit a coastal area if it had a wind farm, while 55% said it would make no difference.
- Only 8% of respondents said it would deter them from visiting.

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Cumbria and North West

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