

How to respond to onshore wind planning applications: an 8-step guide

This note sets out eight steps you could undertake when responding to an onshore wind planning application on landscape grounds. This note should be read in conjunction with CPRE's, How to respond to planning applications: an eight step guide,¹ CPRE's onshore wind policy guidance note,² and CPRE's planning campaign briefing on energy infrastructure.³

Step 1: Look at the planning application

Review and make copies of the application from your local planning authority's website or at their offices including copies of all relevant documents which support the application. This includes for example, an environmental statement or an environmental impact assessment (EIA). A proposal with two or more turbines with a hub height over 15 metres requires an EIA by law. Where there is no legal requirement for an EIA, good applications will still have environmental studies which look at visual impact of the proposal. If this information is not provided, ask the planning authority to request it as part of its control and decision-making process.

Step 2: Visit the site of the proposed development

Visit the site to compare the planning application to the physical reality. This also includes visiting those sites from which the proposal will be visible from; known as viewpoints (see below). Compare what you see, and will see, with what has been written in the application and supporting documents.

Step 3: Determine individual and cumulative impact on the landscape

As well as a site visit, use capacity studies and sensitivity studies (if provided by the local planning authority) of the area to assess the likely individual and cumulative (if relevant) impact of the proposal on the landscape. This should include an assessment of their simultaneous impact (within one field of vision) and sequential impact (as one travels through the landscape) as well as the impact of associated infrastructure (such as pylons).

Step 4: Assess visual impact assessments

Based on your site visit and examination of capacity and sensitivity studies, assess what impact the proposal is likely to have on the landscape based on landscape and visual impact assessments (LVIA) provided with the application. This includes an examination of visualisations that illustrate an observers view of the proposed development from a series of viewpoints identified using zones of theoretical visibility (ZTV) which are constructed from a digital terrain model (DTM). Wirelines (three dimensional, computer modelled, visual representations of a proposal in the landscape) and photomontages (photographic panorama images overlaid with wireline views to create realistic views of a proposal) are also used to create a realistic view of the proposed turbines involved.

¹ CPRE, How to respond to planning applications: an 8-step guide available on the planning help website (<http://www.planninghelp.org.uk/improve-where-you-live/how-to-comment-on-a-planning-application>).

² CPRE, Onshore wind policy guidance note is available on our website (<http://www.cpre.org.uk/resources/policy-guidance-notes/item/2475-policy-guidance-note-onshore-wind-turbines>).

³ CPRE, Planning campaign briefing 4 - Energy Infrastructure is available on our website (<http://www.cpre.co.uk/local-group-resources/campaigning/planning/item/3043-planning-campaign-briefing-4-energy-infrastructure>).

Step 5: Assess the site design

In addition to assessing the quality of visual impact assessments consider the site design as a whole. To what extent has the proposal considered the relationship between individual turbines and their position in the landscape. Are there, for example, isolated turbines that are remote from the rest of the group and does the design create 'tangles' of turbines. The location of turbines in relation to foreground and background should also be considered.

Step 6: Assess impacts on protected areas or areas of high amenity value

Assess whether the proposal will cause harm in relation to Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, National Parks and their settings, the green belt and its openness, heritage sites and locally important areas with high amenity value.

Step 7: Compare the proposal against relevant strategic planning documents issued by the local planning authority

Compare the application with the planning authority's local development plan. Determine whether the application is consistent with this plan and associated documents. Have all the alternatives been explored for example?

Step 8: Decide on your stance on the application and what action you intend to take

Decide whether you will support or oppose the proposal. This should be evidence-based and should focus on those issues which carry most weight with the relevant planning authority. Then decide on how you intend to respond.