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Mr Anthony Powell
45 Russet Road
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Our ref: WV2268
11 June 2013

Dear Mr Powell

I am writing to you regarding the announcement this-week about onshore wind and community input. I have enclosed a copy of the letter from the Rt Hon Eric Pickles and the Rt Hon Michael Fallon setting out the new policy.

I welcome the announcement of this change in policy - but I am concerned that this is too late for many projects.

The community around Frodsham was engaged and vocal in their opposition, but these concerns were overruled. I worked closely with the members of RAW who campaigned tirelessly to present the very real concerns about the impact of this windfarm. I know that residents of the area feel disenfranchised when the legislation specifically designed to give them power over their own area had so clearly let them down.

The Government risks letting down the very people that it intends to protect with this new announcement if it does not review recently approved wind farms, like those in my constituency, in light of this change of policy. I have written to the Ministers concerned regarding my concerns, and asking them to look at Frodsham Marshes as an example of where a retrospective scrutiny of these plans would be of vital importance.

Yours sincerely
Graham Evans MP
Member of Parliament for Weaver Vale

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

To: Conservative MPs

6 June 2013

Dear Colleagues

ONSHORE WIND

Two Written Ministerial Statements have been laid before Parliament today by DCLG and DECC, outlining a new deal for communities regarding onshore wind. Taken together these announcements demonstrate a cross-government approach to increasing localism: shifting the balance of power decisively to local communities in deciding whether to agree to onshore wind proposals.

This Government's planning reforms in England are decentralising power – the Localism Act has abolished Labour's top-down Regional Strategies, and our streamlined national planning guidance has placed Local Plans in pole position to shape the level and character of development.

But we recognise that the planning approach left by Labour and Ed Miliband (when he was Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change) is unsatisfactory, leading to building the wrong wind farms in the wrong places. Too many wind farm decisions are being decided by distant Planning Inspectors on appeal, sidelining local people and local councils.

Our package of reforms will end speculative proposals: communities will be consulted much earlier in the process; community benefit will be greatly increased and unacceptable practices by developers will not be tolerated. Improved planning practice guidance will assist local councils and planning inspectors across England. The new guidance will state clearly that:

- The need for renewable energy does not by definition override environmental protections and the planning concerns of local communities.
- Decisions should take into account the cumulative impact of wind turbines and properly reflect the impact on (a) the landscape and (b) local amenity.
- Local topography should be a factor in assessing whether wind turbines have a damaging impact on the landscape. For example, it should be recognised that the impact on predominantly flat landscapes can be as great or greater than on hilly or mountainous ones.
- Great care should be taken to ensure heritage assets are conserved in a manner appropriate to their significance, including the impact on proposals on views important to their setting.

We are looking to local councils through their Local Plans to implement policies which ensure that adverse impacts from wind farms developments, including cumulative landscape and visual impact, are addressed satisfactorily. Councils should not feel they have to give permission for applications outside those areas where they judge the impact to be acceptable.

Sometimes local communities are not made aware of a planning application until it reached the local planning committee and wind farm developers make little or no effort to canvas or take account of the views of local people. So we will be amending secondary legislation to make pre-application consultation with local communities compulsory in England for the more significant onshore wind applications (this is already the case for national infrastructure applications). This will ensure that community engagement takes place at an earlier stage in more cases and may assist in improving the quality of proposed onshore wind development. We are also announcing a package of measures to improve community engagement. Renewables UK will now recommend to their members that developers provide financial benefits to communities of £5,000/MW of capacity per year for the lifetime of a development a five-fold increase on the current figure.

Best practice guidance will make it clear that high standards are expected and a new register will monitor best practice. We will also support local planning offices to gain the skills they need to engage more confidently with developers. The support for onshore wind has already been reduced this April to 0.9 ROC/MWh and this rate will be subject to yearly review.

We hope that you will welcome these proposals: they restore to communities powers taken away by the Labour Government and ensure that those turbines that are agreed are better sited. Local people and their councils should not feel bullied into accepting proposals they do not want. CCHQ are preparing a template press release available for colleagues to maximise local coverage of this significant change in policy.

Yours truly

Rt Hon Eric Pickles MP
Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government

Rt Hon Michael Fallon MP
Minister of State, Department for Business, Innovation and Skills and Department for Energy and Climate Change