

Response by the Weald Action Group to the Levelling-up and Regeneration Bill consultation



This is the contribution of the Weald Action Group to the government's [consultation on the Levelling-up and Regeneration Bill reforms to national planning policy](#), Chapter 8.

An avalanche of reports in recent years make clear that we are reaching a series of climate tipping points that will launch us into unstoppable climate disaster¹. Our use of fossil fuels is a major cause of this and it is vital that we reduce our dependency on them as rapidly as possible. This is not happening at anything like the pace that is needed to keep our planet habitable. Energy is central to every aspect of our world and our well-being, so replacing fossil fuels with clean energy as quickly as possible is essential. This means expanding proven, reliable, forms of clean energy rapidly. At present we rely too much on nascent technologies that could yet prove not to reduce carbon emissions, such as “blue” hydrogen or carbon capture and storage². This is not to say that development into these is not important, but we have to act now using established technologies that can reliably reduce carbon emissions right now.

Onshore wind is one such reliable technology. Moreover, it is one of the cheapest forms of renewable energy, and the infrastructure can be installed quickly in comparison to most other forms of energy. Consequently, we support the proposals to remove the present blocks on onshore wind turbines but we strongly urge that the new policy goes further. Remaining blocks should be removed. Planning policy should include a “presumption in favour” of onshore wind, as long as vital environmental studies support any chosen location.

All new energy infrastructure will meet some opposition, but generally on-shore wind is viewed favourably by a large part of the population.³ Moreover, there is a huge opportunity for communities to install their own local energy turbines. These will provide a local income which can be used for other community projects and improvements, save local people's energy bills and provide local jobs. Plans should be introduced to maximise these benefits for local communities and in this way incentivise communities to invest in local energy projects. Present restrictions to benefit these local initiatives should be removed. This would enable the levelling up agenda, but from the ground up.

Our answers to the relevant questions in the consultation are as follows

Q.41: Do you agree with the changes proposed to Paragraph 155 of the existing National Planning Policy Framework?

¹ <https://www.science.org/doi/10.1126/science.abn7950>

² <https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2021/08/210812161902.htm>

³ <https://www.survation.com/polling-in-every-constituency-in-britain-shows-strong-support-for-building-wind-farms-to-drive-down-consumer-bills/>



We support ensuring that the NPPF facilitates repowering and encourages local authorities, developers and community energy groups to ensure that this happens. We would go further and would like to see a “presumption in favour” in the NPPF.

We are concerned that the timescale of Local Plans would act as a block and delay local authorities from implementing on-shore wind projects. Therefore it should not be a requirement that on-shore wind projects have to be included in Local Plans. The climate emergency does not allow for the delays this will cause.

We consider that the requirement to address impacts “satisfactorily” is not clear enough. We consider a proper Environment Impact Assessment should be a requirement.

Q.43: Do you agree with the changes proposed to footnote 54 of the existing National Planning Policy Framework?

Although we welcome that these footnotes reduce the bar to onshore wind developments, we do not think they go far enough. They continue to make it difficult to develop onshore wind projects and set a bar that is higher than exists for other forms of energy. In the light of our comments in our introduction, this is unacceptable. We are facing a wholesale collapse of our climate system in the lifetime of our children and possibly our own lifetime. Onshore wind is a relatively easy way to reduce carbon emissions and could be an economic benefit to local people. The planning system should make this process as smooth as possible, with proper environmental safeguards.

Do you have any views on specific wording for new footnote 62?

Our view is largely made clear in the previous answer. Should the footnote remain, then clarity is badly needed about what is meant by “appropriately addressed” and “satisfactorily addressed” and the level of community support which is required, and how this can be demonstrated in practice.

We consent to our response being acknowledged and included in the government’s response.

This briefing was written on behalf of the Weald Action Group, an umbrella group for local groups campaigning against all forms of extreme extraction of oil and gas across the Weald and Isle of Wight in the South East of England.

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