



Report title:

Wind Energy Regional Assessment for the High Weald AONB

Commissioned by: High Weald AONB Joint Advisory Committee (JAC)
Commissioned from: The digital landscape cooperative
Funded by: Natural England and the High Weald JAC
Status and date: Final report, May 2009

Research purpose: to provide a technical evidence base to inform AONB responses to climate change policies; district renewable strategies and renewable energy development proposals and in order to meet objective G3 of the AONB Management Plan.

Research aims:

- To understand the technical constraints on wind energy development in the High Weald;
- From the above to infer the potential contribution wind energy could make to renewable targets in the High Weald.

Research findings: The report concluded that the cumulative impacts of the range of constraints posed by this heavily populated rural landscape, criss-crossed by communication routes and within the zone of influence of the UK's second busiest airport suggest that the High Weald is unlikely to be suitable for large scale wind energy projects. It may be more suitable for single turbines or small clusters of up to 3 turbines in the .75 – 2 MW range but site selection and layout is likely to be extremely sensitive and problematic for the industry.

AONB Unit comment: The report conclusion suggests that policy makers in the High Weald face a significant challenge in meeting Government targets for 15% renewables by 2020 and in meeting the aspirations of the statutory AONB Management Plan which commit local authorities' to reduce locally arising greenhouse gas emissions in order to help minimise changes to the climate that might damage this nationally important landscape. Whilst there may be alternative renewable solutions such as off shore wind or waves, biomass and micro-generation it is clear that only a step change in renewable installations and a comprehensive, effective energy saving programme will meet the challenges ahead.

This piece of work provides the AONB Unit with background information on wind energy development and identifies the current technical constraints acting upon it. The Unit is aware that technical improvements or changes could influence the outcome of this exercise if it were repeated in the future; as such it does not make any assumptions of feasibility based upon these results.

Note: The peak instantaneous electricity demand of the AONB's 50,000 households is approximately 500MW (electricity alone is around 1/5 of total UK energy consumption). A target of 15% renewables requires the area to generate at least 75 MW, equivalent to 27 single 2MW turbines or around 1 turbine for every 3 villages in the High Weald.

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