Briefing: Renewable energy
March 2023

Warm this Winter is a campaign demanding the government acts now to help tackle rising energy bills this winter and to ensure energy is affordable for everyone in the future. It is supported by over 40 leading anti-poverty and environmental organisations, including Save the Children, the Women's Institute, WWF UK, and the End Fuel Poverty Coalition.

*Unblocking the cheapest forms of energy, and delivering clean, affordable, homegrown energy for all*

**Summary**

- We need urgent action to tackle the energy cost crisis and ensure that people across the UK can access clean, affordable, homegrown energy. To achieve this, the government must:
  - Put in place an ambitious plan to increase onshore wind and solar power, quickly
  - Fully unblock onshore wind projects in England
  - Support community energy projects

**Onshore renewables: Popular, cheap - and quick to deliver**

- **Popular**: Wind is highly popular in the UK: two-thirds of people would be happy to have onshore wind projects built near where they live, with [fewer than one in five people](#) opposed.
- **Cheap**: Onshore wind and solar are two of the cheapest ways to generate the expansion in clean electricity needed to protect people from soaring energy costs caused by gas prices. Power from new onshore wind projects costs at least [four times less](#) than gas power plants (and as little as nine times less during peak gas prices).
- **Quick to deliver**: Onshore wind and solar projects can also be brought online quickly, far faster than new gas or nuclear power facilities, getting cheap, secure energy into the grid as soon as possible. The UK’s current wind capacity will need to [almost triple by 2030](#).
- **Beneficial to communities**: As well as cutting emissions, increasing onshore wind would bring huge economic benefits to communities across the UK, generating £45bn of additional value and [27,000 full time jobs](#). Yet the government remains hesitant on wind, largely due to ungrounded concerns about public acceptance.
● **Beneficial for national security:** If all of the 649 onshore wind and solar projects which already have planning permission were built they would provide enough new electricity onto the grid to [more than off-set our imports from Russian gas](#).

● **Better for nature:** Renewable energy must be built with nature in mind - and this means sharing the infrastructure between land and sea. Currently the delicate marine environment shoulders the majority of wind turbines, so we need onshore wind unblocked so that the land can take its share.

**The problem: policy blocks**

In 2020, the government made the welcome decision to allow new onshore wind and solar projects to get going again via Contracts for Difference auctions. Yet a number of serious barriers still remain, which will delay the UK in getting the clean power it needs to end reliance on gas and cut energy costs as quickly as possible.

● Strict limits have been placed on the amount of new onshore wind and solar projects permitted to come forwards in the auctions process. [Wind projects pay back to the taxpayer](#) when electricity prices are high, so this cap is costing consumers.

● The government has no target for how much additional onshore wind and solar are required on any timeframe, or any strategy to ensure that we get the amount needed.

● Planning blocks remain in place which make it [more difficult to get permission for a new onshore wind project in England](#) than for a new fossil fuel project. While the government’s announcement in late 2022 of a consultation on easing the planning barriers was a small step forwards, their proposed changes will still leave onshore wind facing a uniquely restrictive planning regime. This is disproportionate given wind’s high popularity across the UK and role as an essential technology to decarbonise power.

● There is no route to market for community benefit and locally owned renewables projects across the UK, including onshore wind. The government got rid of feed-in tariffs - which allowed projects to be paid a fair rate for energy they fed into the grid - and the smart export guarantee (SEG) which replaced them is too low and unreliable to allow projects to be viable.

● The charging system for the national grid financially penalises projects which are located far from demand, but the planning system for onshore wind does not allow it to be sited closer to demand.

**The solutions**

The following changes from the government are needed to allow clean energy projects and locally-owned renewables to flourish across the UK.

● **Allow sufficient capacity each year** in Contracts for Difference auctions to ensure the UK has enough onshore wind and solar coming on line to end reliance on expensive, volatile and insecure gas power.
- **Fully remove the planning blocks** on new onshore wind projects in England, and put onshore wind projects into the same planning regime as equivalent projects and proposals, and does not allow lone dissenting voices to veto projects which have wide community support and which can be built in harmony with nature.
- **Bring in a route to market for community energy projects**, such as a community CfDs pot and a viable SEG tariff.
- **Ensure Ofgem has a zero-carbon mandate** and the national grid supports renewable energy projects to access the grid across the UK.

**Want to stand up for wind?** You can add your name to the open letter at [www.wearepossible.org/windopenletter](http://www.wearepossible.org/windopenletter), by sending an email saying Yes to wind@wearepossible.org. The letter calls on the government to unblock wind power, and allow communities to choose whether they want wind.

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