



## **South West Public Engagement Protocol for Wind Energy**

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# The South West Public Engagement Protocol for Wind Energy: **THE PROTOCOL**

## Background to the Protocol

This protocol outlines a series of responsibilities aimed at local planning authorities and wind energy developers for promoting more effective public engagement within the development of wind energy projects. It also outlines a series of reciprocal responsibilities that will need to be met by other stakeholders if the protocol is to work effectively. The protocol and supporting guidance<sup>1</sup> build upon good practice established within the sector as well as other areas of planning.

Developing a more consistent approach to public engagement is becoming increasingly important, as many areas of the South West with

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<sup>1</sup> Supporting guidance available from [www.regensw.co.uk](http://www.regensw.co.uk)

little or no experience of wind energy, are being faced with increasing numbers of planning applications from wind energy developers with differing approaches to public engagement. As such there is the potential for confusion, misunderstanding and a loss of trust between stakeholders.

The protocol is not designed, nor is it expected to influence individual planning decisions. Signing up to the protocol for local planning authorities does not imply support for wind energy. It does however provide both local planning authorities and wind energy developers the opportunity to clearly state their commitment to developing a robust process of engagement that is inclusive, transparent, accessible and accountable, in line with government policy and for the benefit of all stakeholders. Delivering effective public engagement in these terms will help clarify stakeholders' expectations of how and when to get involved and will develop their confidence that their views and opinions will be heard.

Establishing a set of generic principles for wind energy development provides a basic foundation on which practice around any proposed development can be built. This allows the flexibility necessary for practice to reflect the needs of local situations. For example, the scale of any project will have a significant impact on the extent of any public engagement process undertaken.

The protocol has been endorsed by the South West branch of the Local Government Association, the South West branch of the Royal Town Planning Institute and the British Wind Energy Association. Wind energy developers and local planning authorities throughout the South West are invited to sign up in support of the approach outlined by the protocol.

## Defining Public Engagement

For the purposes of this protocol, public engagement refers to the dialogue undertaken by stakeholders during the development of onshore wind energy projects. Stakeholders include the wind energy developer, the local planning authority, local communities and their representatives, statutory consultees and special interest groups. The process may involve discussion of the site, the wind development itself, how local impacts may be mitigated, as well as the provision of benefits to the local area.

# Principles for Effective Public Engagement

In line with government guidance and good practice from many areas of planning, a quality approach to public engagement can be summarised by four key principles:

- **Demonstrating support for the process of public engagement** – to emphasise the importance placed on public engagement by key stakeholders.
- **Demonstrating an inclusive approach to public engagement** – to ensure that anyone who is interested has the opportunity to contribute.
- **Demonstrating a transparent and accessible approach to public engagement**— to ensure that the process will be understandable, open and easy to get involved with.
- **Demonstrating an accountable approach to public engagement**— to ensure that there is an appropriate flow of information amongst all stakeholders regarding the progress and outcomes of the process.

# The Protocol

This protocol outlines a series of responsibilities that need to be adopted by stakeholders in order to ensure that the principles of effective public engagement are adhered to.

References to local benefits should be understood in the light of the comments on the relationship between local benefits and the planning system as outlined within the supporting guidance.

## **In signing up to the protocol, Wind Energy Developers agree to:**

- Prepare and apply a coherent engagement plan in discussion with the local planning authority, which will include:
  - *Identification of relevant stakeholders*
  - *Agreed timescales for turning around key phases of the planning process and responding to information requests*
  - *Identification of a clear point of contact that will enable a two way flow of information regarding the project*
  - *Identification of the range of methods appropriate for engaging the relevant stakeholders*
  - *Clarifying the approach to establishing local and wider benefits*
- Promote at an early stage the scope of the consultation, the outline plans for the development, company policy on local benefits and opportunities for public participation.
- Identify at an early stage and consult on the potential for local benefits.
- Ensure any changes in the engagement plan, in particular changes in timescales, are communicated to other stakeholders in good time.
- Ensure participants are kept up to date on progress and feedback is made available on the results of engagement and how it is being used within the development of the project.

**In signing up to this protocol, Local Planning Authorities agree to:**

- Prepare and apply clear planning policy and guidance on wind energy in accord with national and regional policy and guidance, and in consultation with neighbouring local planning authorities.
- Support the evolution of the developer's engagement plan by:
  - *Establishing a clear point of contact that will enable a two way flow of information regarding the project*
  - *Agreeing timescales for turning around key phases of the planning process and responding to information requests (any variation from statutory timescales should be clearly justified)*
  - *Supporting the identification of key stakeholders and the methods appropriate for engaging them*
  - *Contributing to discussions on the approach to establishing local and wider benefits*
- Provide support<sup>1</sup> in communicating with key stakeholders and help identifying the full range of community views.
- Ensure the sourcing of objective information on disputed areas of debate that is reliable and independent.
- Ensure elected Members are fully up to date on general issues relating to wind energy technology and the implications for planning.
- Provide a high quality flow of information within the authority on proposed developments, including regular briefings for Members<sup>2</sup> and other relevant local authority officers.

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<sup>1</sup> This may require the involvement of non planning officers within the local authority

<sup>2</sup> Contact with Members should be in line with the local planning authority's procedures for Member involvement

**In order for these responsibilities to be fully met within individual project developments, other key stakeholders will be expected to:**

- Enter into constructive dialogue with a view to working towards agreed positions on issues up for negotiation.
- Acknowledge developer and/or local planning authority responses to questions and criticisms raised by other stakeholders.
- Assist, where possible, in identifying other key stakeholders within the community.
- Assist, where appropriate, in identifying the full range of local opinion about the development of local benefits.
- Encourage the identification of points of contact that will facilitate a high quality flow of information within the community.

## Making the Protocol Work

In order for the protocol to be effective in promoting good practice, local planning authorities and wind energy developers will need to embed the commitments that they are signing up to within their own organisational practice. This should involve:

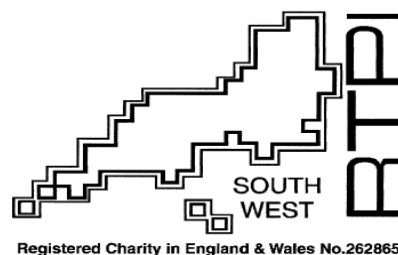
- Identifying a contact within the organisation responsible for the effective implementation of the protocol
- Reviewing the organisation's operations with respect to the responsibilities outlined within the protocol
- Adapting practice where necessary
- Monitoring any changes to ensure they are embedded within organisational practice

The protocol is based on a series of reciprocal responsibilities. Some of the responsibilities outlined could be adopted regardless of the position taken by other stakeholders in an area. However, some responsibilities will only be able to be adopted if both developer and local planning authority sign up to the protocol.

The protocol represents a statement of commitment by the signatories. The necessary trust implicit within the shared responsibilities outlined within the protocol will take time to develop through the successful operation of the process.

Whilst it is not possible for communities to sign up to the protocol in a strategic sense, it is hoped that the responsibilities outlined for other key stakeholders are taken on board by those concerned within individual projects. It is hoped that the responsibilities of other stakeholders will be respected by those involved in any individual development. The successful operation of the protocol will depend on all parties taking this approach to public engagement seriously.

This protocol has been endorsed by the following organisations:



To register as a signatory and obtain support in implementing the  
South West Public Engagement Protocol for Wind Energy  
contact

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or

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