



The Impacts of Onshore Wind Farms on Tourism and the Visitor Economy

Northumberland - a typical case?

The call



A study to evaluate the effect of existing and planned onshore wind turbines on the tourism industry within the county of Northumberland

- **Robust policies** needed for planning decisions.
- Study to **determine** the **evidence** that already exists and **assess** the **robustness** of studies and research undertaken
- Study also to contact local tourism **businesses** to obtain **evidenced based** views on:
 - Whether there has already been an impact on tourism from the wind farms currently in Northumberland
 - Whether the presence and anticipated presence of wind farms will affect their investment decisions

Northumberland Tourism



- Worth £708 million - 11.8% of the Northumberland economy.
- Over 11,000 jobs direct from tourism expenditure and over 2,000 indirectly.
- Target of 6% growth in tourism by 2016, resulting in 795 extra jobs and £42 million.
- Meaning:
 - More visitors
 - Visitors to stay longer
 - Visitors across the whole year and not just in the summer
 - Visitors doing more while they are here
 - Visitors spending more in the county
 - Businesses to invest in more capacity and facilities
- The UK energy strategy stresses a need to radically increase the electricity being generated from renewable sources by 2020.
- Current WF development rates and applications in Northumberland are a concern to tourist interests

Issues

- Wind farms part of **national** policy (though not government ministers'!)
- **Local** interest groups' opposition(s) to wind farms
- Lack of good research on the issue but a lot of '**authoritative**' opinion
- **No extant research** in Northumberland so the need to extrapolate from evidence in other places
- Developers becoming more sophisticated and ambitious re planning applications
- Ditto local opposition
- Business, however, is relatively neutral overall

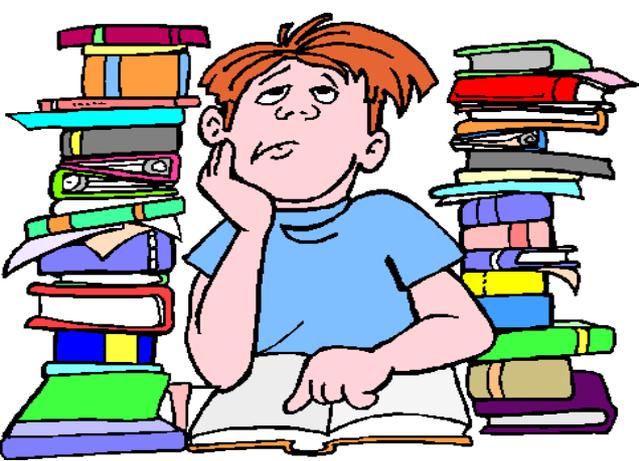
- **Stakes are:** if wind farms blight the landscape = loss of tourism revenue = cost to Northumberland economy and culture

'The' English Landscape

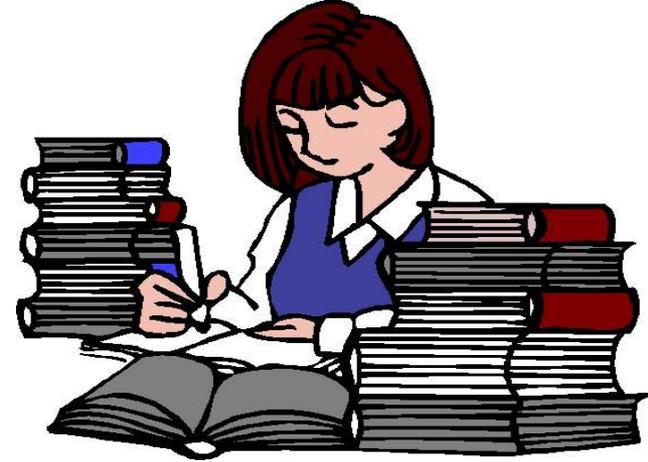
- The landscape idea is **a way of seeing...**, giving lordship to the eye of a **single [authoritative] observer**. In this **the landscape idea either denies collective experience... or mystifies it in an appeal to transcendental qualities of a particular area or region** (Cosgrove, 1984: 262).
- It is into this complex of territorial establishment that we must re-insert **the self-conscious development of landscape** and what is called 'the invention of scenery' (Williams, 1973: 124)







What was done



- A systematic desk-based review of research studies which assess the effects of onshore wind farms on tourism in the UK
- A survey of potential tourists' views on the effects of wind farms in Northumberland
- A survey of Northumberland tourism-related businesses on the impacts of wind farms in Northumberland
- A focus group with twelve representatives of groups or organisations that are interested in and/or concerned with the impacts of wind farms in Northumberland

Review of extant research

Issues

- Methodological inconsistencies
- Frequency of poor design
- Impartiality and Objectivity issues
- He who pays the piper...

Overcoming the 'noise' and poor research

- Grade work via the robustness of methods. How?
- Is there an ideal or best practice method as a control in the more robust research?
- Yes. Horses mouth approach: interviewing of tourists in situ. Why?
 - The geographical context is real and immediate
 - The tourist experience at the time of interview is therefore embodied and involves all the senses as well emotions and intellectual processes
 - It elicits situated knowledge and some dialogue in situ giving the data some contextual depth as well as good coverage of opinion
 - It assesses tourism in process from the first-hand point of view of the tourist
 - It is not overly technical or specialist and is therefore available to be replicated by all relevant empirical research

Academic Findings

- Only two, very different, academic studies of direct use
- Warren and McFayden (2010) conclude:

No evidence of impacts

- The other study is part of a GCU report reviewed later that concludes similarly

Findings from most robust empirical reports

- GCU (2008): **no significant impacts** for Scotland though some localities may be negatively affected though this will be offset by displacement.
- UWE (2004): **no overall negative impacts** on visitor numbers, no overall detrimental impact on the tourist experience, and there would be no overall decline in tourist expenditure at the Fullabrook development in North Devon.
- MORI (2004): wind farms are **not seen as having a detrimental effect** on tourists' visitation and would not deter tourists from visiting the Argyll and Bute in Scotland in future.
- The Centre for Sustainable Energy (2002): there would be **no significant difference** to the number of tourists visiting Brean and Sedgemoor in Somerset

Findings from less robust (even slanted)empirical studies

- Even though these studies are, often selectively, cited by those opposed to wind farm development as being an (anti-wind farm) authority on the issue, overall they do not support the view that wind farms negatively affect tourism in any significant way.

Other studies not specifically tourism related but about general public views on wind farms

- There is strong suggestion that first hand familiarity of wind farms brings greater public acceptance of them - including tourists.
- Impacts wind farms have on tourism are nominal at most.

Our main conclusion

To date there is no evidence that, overall, wind farm developments have had either a negative or positive impact upon tourism.

Potential visitors survey by 'Public Knowledge'

'the majority feel that wind farms are not having an influence on their likelihood to visit the area'

Tourism businesses survey in Northumberland

‘According to these responses the impact of wind turbines on business turnover over the last three years has been neutral. 34% of businesses saying turnover had increased and 36% saying turnover had stayed the same, this suggests that tourism in the county is at least stable overall.’

Dominant Northumberland voices

The focus group with representatives from 'special interest' groups

- Concern about **lack of good research** available, is this another example of 'cod research'
- Concern about **increasing size of wind farms and the turbines** themselves
- Concern about the **cumulative effect** of WF development
- **Planners accused of not understanding or appreciating the issues**
- **Mooted that Northumberland is special** and its uniqueness needs to be taken into account when wind farm development decisions are made.
- **Tourists in Northumberland** do not like wind farms and visitor numbers will suffer.
- Local level economic impacts quickly aggregate up to county level impacts and there will be **no 'substitution effect'**
- Opinion ranged from uncertainty about impacts to downright certainty that wind farm/turbine development in Northumberland could only be bad for tourism, the visitor economy and therefore bad for the county.

Planners' and Policy-makers' Response

- Questioned the **objectivity** of the report
- **Implications of the age of each of the studies** and the size/ scale of turbines that they relate and any other observations about the limitations/ robustness
- **The overall limitations of the findings should be acknowledged early in the report.**
- Although the conclusions of the desk based review are balanced **there are a few occasions in the report where the negative views, and potential impacts of them, could be given more consideration**
- It would be useful to include more description of the purpose of the **surveys** and what the **limitations of the approaches** are.
- Need to understand more about investment decisions of tourism businesses and whether these **had actually been impacted**. Survey responses suggest it had been but **is enough made of this in the summary presented?**

Where next?

- More research?