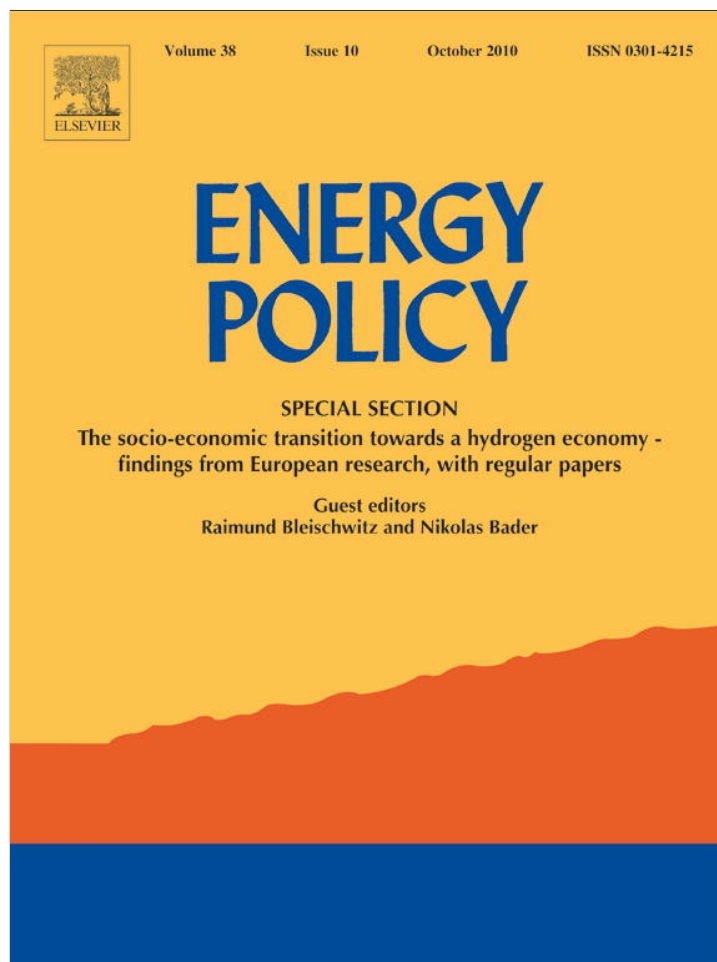


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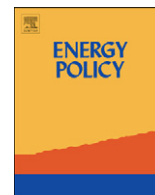


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Wind power and community benefits: Challenges and opportunities

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ABSTRACT

A challenge relating to the development of renewable energy in the UK concerns how large companies can foster positive relationships with local communities. The concepts of 'trust' and 'fairness' are central to debates around proposed renewable energy developments, however, these concepts are complex, ambiguous and interrelated. In the UK the provision of community benefits stemming from the development of renewable energy projects remains a voluntary activity. This paper presents the findings of a case study of one wind power development and how community benefits associated with this were perceived by the local community throughout various stages of the case study (notably during planning, construction and operation). The case study highlights the challenging nature of community benefits from wind power developments. Important decisions regarding who the relevant local community is or what form community benefits should take present opportunities for disagreement between conflicting interests. It is argued that institutionalised guidance would serve a number of worthwhile purposes. Firstly, they would provide greater clarity. Secondly, they would give developers greater confidence to discuss the community benefits package in the early planning stages, and thirdly, they would reduce the likelihood of community benefits being perceived as bribes.

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1. Introduction

Within the literature relating to public attitudes and responses to renewable energy developments, and wind power in particular, there is a significant and growing emphasis on the importance of generating trust (see Aitken, 2010; Ricci et al., 2010; Walker et al., 2010; Wolsink, 2007). In the UK the development of renewable energy projects is dominated by large commercial energy companies. Thus, whilst in other European countries (notably Germany or Denmark) trust may be facilitated through cooperative or community ownership of energy projects (Toke, 2005), in the current UK context, a key challenge relating to the development of renewable energy concerns how large companies can foster positive relationships with local communities. Issues of 'trust' and 'fairness' are central to debates around proposed renewable energy developments, however, as will be illustrated through this paper, these concepts are complex, ambiguous and interrelated.

The public are often highly suspicious of commercial developers and hence engendering trust in such actors can present a significant challenge (Bell et al., 2005; Hadwin, 2009). Yet, whilst it is frequently asserted that public opposition to renewable energy (and particularly wind power) developments represents a major obstacle to the deployment of this technology (see; Barry et al., 2008; Bell et al., 2005; Devine-Wright, 2007; Ellis et al.,

2007; Peel and Lloyd, 2007), and subsequently the meeting of national targets for renewable energy capacity, an institutionalised or standardised approach to community engagement is lacking. In particular, in the UK the provision of community benefits stemming from the development of renewable energy projects remains a voluntary activity (DTI, 2005). Developers are under no obligation to provide such benefits and there does not exist a set of national guidelines to set out what form these benefits should take or how they should be administered if/when developers do decide to provide them. As will be discussed below, this lack of an institutionalised approach to the provision of community benefits, and the lack of guidance or rules as to how such benefits should be delivered or what form they should take has resulted in a situation where developers are hesitant to discuss the details of potential benefits packages until they are ready to be delivered. Whilst local communities may be aware that the developers are likely to put in place a community benefits package should a proposed renewable energy project be built in the vicinity, they are unlikely to have access to information about what this entails or how it might benefit them. As such far from serving as a mechanism to engender trust in developers, the community benefits package can instead become another aspect of renewable energy development which arouses public suspicions and has negative impacts on perceptions of 'fairness'.

The paper presents the findings of a case study of the development of a wind farm in Scotland. The case study was conducted over a period of five years and examined relationships between the developers (a major commercial energy company)

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and the local community. The research follows the case through the original planning application process, the subsequent appeal (public inquiry), the construction and commissioning of the wind farm and finally the first year of its operation. The paper focuses on how the community benefits package provided by the developers was perceived within the various stages of the case study, and highlights how the lack of early discussions relating to community benefits may have had negative implications for how these were perceived within the local community.

2. Background

The literature relating to public attitudes and responses to wind power developments suggests that in order to ensure acceptance – or avoid opposition – of wind power projects prospective developers must earn the public's trust (see Aitken, 2010). As such creating a sense of fairness around proposed developments is considered essential to positive public opinion (Barry et al., 2008; Breukers and Wolsink, 2007; Upreti and Van der Horst, 2004; Wolsink, 2007). However, the concepts of 'trust' and 'fairness' are not straightforward and the ways in which these might be facilitated are not unambiguous. For example, as Gross (2007) has observed, fairness can be perceived in relation to either process or outcomes. Indeed, perceptions of procedural fairness will be influenced by perceptions of outcome fairness and vice versa.

Bellaby (2010) has noted the complexities and multiple interpretations of the concept of 'trust'. He observes that trust can be experienced either as 'a conscious, reflective belief [...] or an unconscious, taken-for-granted feeling', but he summarises that 'trust is a feeling or belief that someone (or some institution) will act in your best interest' (Bellaby, 2010: 2615). Trust and fairness are interrelated concepts with perceptions of either affecting the other. For example, trust in a wind power developer may lead an individual to view the development they propose to be 'fair'. Equally, a perception that the process through which a planning application for a wind farm has been determined was 'fair' may generate or increase trust in the planning authority and institutions.

As noted above, perceptions of 'fairness' can relate to both material outcomes (i.e. the development of a wind farm) and to processes (i.e. consultation about the design of the development or the decision-making process through which a planning application was determined). Within the planning literature (and the literature relating specifically to renewable energy development), significant attention has been paid to procedural fairness (e.g. Breukers and Wolsink, 2007; Ellis et al., 2007; Walker et al., 2010; Wolsink, 2007). It has frequently been argued that where an outcome is not beneficial to all parties this will be more readily accepted if it has been reached through a decision-making process which was perceived to be fair (e.g. Frey et al., 2004; Gallagher et al., 2008). Such arguments highlight the importance of participatory decision-making processes, for example Frey et al. (2004: 381) contend that:

"Procedures which are seen as fair are, for example, those that give individuals "voice". Being given a say in issues concerning oneself generates procedural utility because it addresses innate needs for aspects of self-determination such as autonomy and competence; and, because it is an important signal about one's standing in a group, it affects innate needs of relatedness."

The literature has begun to pay considerable attention to procedural fairness in the planning and development of wind power projects (see: Breukers and Wolsink, 2007; Ellis et al.,

2007; Wolsink, 2007). In particular, this has resulted in much consideration of the role and/or scope of public participation in planning processes regarding renewable energy developments (Aitken, in press; Breukers and Wolsink, 2007; Ellis et al., 2009; Upreti and Van der Horst, 2004). In line with the discussions of procedural fairness set out above, it is frequently concluded that public participation may represent a mechanism for facilitating greater public acceptance (e.g. Strachan and Lal, 2004; Wolsink, 2007; Wolsink, 2000). This emphasis on participation and its potential to create a sense of 'fairness' around renewable energy developments further highlights the importance of trust, since participants must trust that the participatory processes will be meaningful and that the organisation facilitating the process will act in their best interests. The ideal situation is described by Walker et al. (2010: 2657) in the following quote:

"Trusting social relationships support and enable cooperation, communication and commitment such that projects can be developed and technologies installed in ways which are locally appropriate, consensual rather than divisive, and with collective benefits to the fore."

The role of public participation within decision-making processes relating to wind power developments has been discussed in some depth elsewhere (see: Aitken, in press; Aitken et al., 2008; Breukers and Wolsink, 2007; Ebert, 1999; Ellis et al., 2009). For example, it has been suggested that prospective wind power developers ought to engage earlier and more openly with local community members (Breukers and Wolsink, 2007; Ebert, 1999; Ellis et al., 2007; Wolsink, 2007).

Of course care must be taken not to place undue emphasis on processes and overlook the importance of achieving just – or socially acceptable – outcomes. Within the planning theory literature it has been argued that the increasing attention being paid to processes has 'direct[ed] attention away from the justice and sustainability of the material outcomes of planning interventions' (Healey, 2003: 110). The focus of this paper is therefore primarily efforts made by developers to engender ongoing positive relations with local communities *after* renewable energy projects have been given planning permission and/or are built. As such, this paper is centrally focussed on perceptions of outcome fairness. Inevitably, this also requires a consideration of the processes from which these outcomes emerged. Yet, whilst it is acknowledged that perceptions of outcome fairness or of the fairness of post-construction procedures will inevitably be influenced by and connected to perceptions of fairness within planning and development processes, this paper is centrally concerned with perceptions of fairness in relation to post-construction relations between local communities and renewable energy projects and developers.

3. Community benefits in the UK

In England and Wales planning authorities can set Planning Obligations as conditions of planning permission so that developers must contribute to costs relating to community infrastructure and/or mitigation of impacts of new developments upon existing facilities or infrastructure (Town and Country Planning Act, 1990: s106). Similarly, in Scotland (which has a devolved planning system) there is a system of Planning Gain which is used by local authorities to secure income from approved developments to cover costs for necessary infrastructure improvements. Planning Gain is designed to be used only in cases where it is considered 'essential to enable the development to proceed' (Scottish Executive, 2007: 2). As such this is directed at necessary infrastructure improvements related to particular developments

and cannot be used flexibly in response to emerging local community needs or interests.

In practice, Planning Obligations/Planning Gain have come to be used for a wide variety of projects and 'the reasons underlying their use vary considerably from authority to authority and in some cases from site to site within a specific authority' (Campbell et al., 2000: 766). Campbell et al. (2000) argue that Planning Obligations have increasingly been used to fund a wide variety of local authority projects and that this has had the effect of 'marketising' the planning process and has radically altered the nature of planning which 'has long been assumed to be justified and legitimised by the capacity to judge the appropriateness of development on nonfinancial grounds' (p. 774). There has been much criticism of the ways in which Planning Obligations have been used or the purposes they have served, for example, Crow (1998: 357) contended that: 'at least some local planning authorities are effectively selling approvals by demanding payments or the provision of facilities under what are popularly, though anachronistically, known as 'Section 106 agreements'.

Recently, the Planning Obligations system has been supplemented by the introduction of the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) which 'empowers' local authorities in England and Wales to charge the levy on most types of new development in their area (Department for Communities and Local Government, 2008). Although CIL does not replace Planning Obligations (Section 106 agreements) it is presented as addressing concerns and problems with the existing Planning Obligations system. For example, it is said that the CIL's system of standard charging is a remedy to the flexibility and inconsistency of Planning Obligations. This flexibility and inconsistency has been blamed for creating a situation where; 'on the one hand planning permission was being bought and sold, and on the other developers were being held to ransom by local authorities' (Department for Communities and Local Government, 2008: 17).

The income from CIL is spent on local infrastructure to support development in the area. The CIL is said to be appropriate since: 'Almost all development has some impact on the need for infrastructure, services and amenities, or benefits from it, so it is only fair that such development pays a share of the cost' (Department for Communities and Local Government, 2008: 15). However, the CIL does not apply to development of 'buildings into which people do not normally go, and buildings into which people go only intermittently for the purpose of inspecting or maintaining fixed plant or machinery' (Department for Communities and Local Government, 2010: 10). As such wind power developments will not be subject to the CIL. This has been seen by some as a weakness, or shortcoming of the new CIL since, as Miner (2009) has contended, creating a more formalised system of community benefits from wind power might increase the level of benefit secured by local communities.

In practice community benefits stemming from wind power developments tend to operate outside of formal Planning Gain or Planning Obligations arrangements and typically take a more informal – voluntary – approach. In this respect the UK takes a somewhat unusual approach compared to many other European countries – notably Spain, Denmark and Germany – where local communities routinely benefit from having wind power developments in their locality through ownership, involvement and economic incentives (DTI, 2005). Such benefits are routine and institutionalised however this is not the case in the UK where community benefits typically take the form of voluntary payments from developers. The lack of an institutionalised approach, and the voluntary nature of the community benefits in the UK has led to them becoming a problematic aspect of wind power development. There is no standard approach to the nature or scale of community benefits offered by wind power developers

(DTI, 2005). A major obstacle to the development of such a standard approach is the fear of being perceived as trying to 'buy' planning permission. As Bell et al. (2005: 473) have observed; 'A compensation strategy may run a particular risk of alienating people if either they are not offered what they consider to be enough or if their principles are not for sale'. Miner (2009: 537) has argued that 'goodwill payments' from wind power developers 'could easily be seen as akin to "buying" planning permission' and that 'the practice threatens to bring the planning system into disrepute'.

Whilst in other European countries community benefits are 'built into the fabric of wind power development' in the UK this remains a contentious issue (DTI, 2005). The issue is further problematised by the fact that community benefits are generally not discussed or taken into consideration within planning debates (DTI, 2005). Since community benefits are not material planning considerations they are positioned outside of planning debates and left as a voluntary option for developers, as such there is a risk that such benefits can appear as somehow illicit. The lack of explicit guidelines – or even discussion – of how community benefits are to be distributed perhaps encourages the view that they represent something dishonest and close to a bribe.

Yet, it has been contended that; 'Local financial gain is critical to the acceptance of new turbines' (Devlin, 2005: 507). Walker and Devine-Wright (2008: 499) contend that 'renewable energy projects can become more locally divisive and controversial if benefits are not generally shared among local people' and Ellis et al. (2009: 528) argue that 'Issues over perceived or actual ownership of wind power schemes and the distribution of benefits are influential in shaping the level and nature of local opposition or acceptance'.

Thus, community benefits represent a problematic aspect of wind power development. On the one hand they are presented as means of creating greater equity since whilst 'The benefits of wind power are felt by the masses in improved environmental quality, diversity of energy resources and compliance of international agreements [...] the costs are borne locally' (Devlin, 2005: 505). However, on the other hand they may be perceived as bribes. These conflicting views pose a dilemma for wind power developers aiming to foster positive community relations.

This paper therefore sets out to explore how community benefits packages are perceived by local community members both before planning permission is granted for a wind farm and later after the wind farm has been constructed. The paper will explore to what extent community benefits are perceived as generating greater fairness or equity or conversely whether they are perceived as representing bribes to appease local objectors.

4. Methods

The research was conducted over a period of five years and centres on a longitudinal case study of the planning and development of a wind farm in a rural area of central Scotland. The research began whilst the wind farm was going through the planning process and ran until it had been constructed, commissioned and was operational. As such the research presented below does not simply present a snapshot of local community perceptions of the benefits package at one moment in time but rather traces these perceptions through the planning and development process in order to highlight the 'flexible, transitory and adaptable' nature of public attitudes (Aitken, 2010: 1835).

In order to gain an accurate understanding of the multiple and divergent factors behind public responses to the wind farm a variety of methods were employed. As Gillham (2000: 2) notes, within case studies; 'No one kind or source of evidence is likely to

be sufficient (or sufficiently valid) on its own. This use of multiple sources of evidence, each with its strengths and weaknesses, is a key characteristic of case study research'. As such it was necessary to employ various methods and strategies and to allow a degree of flexibility in the research process so as to enable the research to pursue unforeseen areas of interest as they arose. The research was conducted in a number of stages. Firstly, the initial stage involved reviewing secondary material relating to the planning application. This was an important stage since it enabled a preliminary understanding of the case before entering the field. Inevitably, this preliminary understanding was very incomplete and the material reviewed contained biases and inaccuracies. As such the review of secondary material was conducted cautiously with an awareness that it would not provide the 'truth' but rather enabled insights into the different arguments that were being made and stories that were being told in relation to the case.

Different forms of documents provided very different perspectives on the planning process and proposed development. The documents reviewed included:

- Press releases from the developers' website.
- Two reports by the local council's Head of Development Control Committee.
- A report summarising the objection letters (prepared on behalf of the developers).
- Press reports (located both in print and online).
- The local MSP's newsletter.
- Literature disseminated by the local opposition group.

As Macdonald (2001: 196) notes, all documents 'are produced in a socially acceptable form that seems to those involved to give a 'reasonable' account of their actions'. However, such accounts cannot be considered as 'objective' but rather are produced in line with norms and expectations: 'a text, taken in isolation from its social context, is deprived of its real meaning. This is provided by a socially situated author and audience who are necessary for the text to have any meaning at all' (Macdonald, 2001: 207). As such whilst the review of secondary material provided a background understanding of the case, it was not considered to provide straightforward 'facts' or 'truth'.

Additionally the preliminary stage also involved a qualitative thematic analysis of objection letters which had been sent to the local council in relation to the proposed development (for a discussion of this analysis see Aitken et al., 2008). This examined arguments made in objection letters and also considered the different forms that these letters took. As such, this stage in the research provided valuable insights into a range of different perspectives on the planning application, and an overview of the arguments which were made in relation to it.

The second stage of the case study began after the planning application had been refused by the local council. The developers appealed the refusal and an appeal was conducted by means of a public inquiry. This stage consisted of a period of observation at the public inquiry. Data was collected both from the evidence and cross-examination which played a significant part in the public inquiry process (see Aitken, 2009), and also through observations of, and discussions with local community members attending the inquiry, representatives of the developers and numerous 'expert' witnesses. Observation provided an invaluable tool for this research since it 'allow[ed] the observer to study first-hand the day-to-day experience and behaviour of subjects in particular situations, and, if necessary, to talk to them about their feelings and interpretations' (Waddington, 2004: 154). It provided the opportunity to gain an understanding of the realities of the case, which would not have been possible simply through interviews.

Once the inquiry concluded – but before the outcome was announced – a series of semi-structured interviews was conducted. The semi-structured nature of the interviews allowed a great deal of flexibility in responses, and enabled interviewees to discuss in some depth the issues which were most relevant to them personally and to express in their own words what their concerns, interests and opinions were. The design of the interviews was shaped in part through observations that had been made in the previous stages of the case study, as well as data collected through the review of secondary material and analysis of objection letters. The interviews explored individuals' experiences of the planning process and their reflections on the arguments that had been made for and against the proposed wind power project. They also examined individuals' perceptions of different actors involved in the planning process and their perceptions of to what extent the planning process had been fair. Eleven interviews were conducted in total (with ten interviewees). A snowball sampling technique was employed. Initially several potential interviewees who had been identified as key actors during observation at the public inquiry were contacted and then contact was made with other relevant parties suggested by these interviewees. It is acknowledged that this approach cannot lead to a representative sample, however, this is not deemed to be a major consideration within this research. Indeed, as Arber (2001: 62) notes: 'Using a probability sample is often unrealistic for small-scale or qualitative research'. The approach taken is close to that of Theoretical Sampling advocated by Glaser and Strauss (1967) whereby the aim is not to establish a representative sample, but rather to select respondents who will be most beneficial to developing theories:

"To say that one samples theoretically means that sampling, rather than being predetermined before beginning the research, evolves during the process. It is based on concepts that emerged from analysis and that appear to have relevance to the evolving theory" (Strauss and Corbin, 1998: 202).

It was important to interview a variety of people involved with, or affected by, the proposed development so as to capture the multiplicity of viewpoints, concerns and interests that were experienced and expressed. Therefore, the sample included interviewees who were both in favour of and in opposition to the proposed wind farm and whose interests were both professional and personal. Interviewees included local objectors, local supporters, representatives of the prospective developers and individuals who had become involved with the planning application in a professional capacity (for example, representing the opposition group or developers at the public inquiry).

After the outcome of the inquiry had been published a qualitative thematic analysis was conducted of the resulting inquiry report (see Aitken et al., 2008). This report provided a summary of the inquiry process and set out the decision-maker's verdict and the justifications for this. Ultimately, the outcome was that the appeal was upheld meaning that planning permission was granted. The analysis carried out at this stage aimed to highlight which issues were prioritised within the decision-making process. By measuring the length of discussion dedicated to different topics or issues it was possible to gain a sense of the relative consideration which was given to each subject. However, it must be noted that such measurements alone cannot straightforwardly be taken as representations of which issues were seen as more important, for example they cannot illustrate the reporters' reasons for considering certain topics in more depth than others. Nevertheless, when considered alongside the analysis of the objection letters they provide insights into the different

priorities found within the planning process (as discussed in Aitken et al., 2008).

The final stage of the research then took place three years later after the wind farm had been constructed. This stage consisted of a series of semi-structured interviews with individuals who had previously been involved with the planning application process (i.e. as objectors, supporters or representatives of the developers), and who (with one exception) had all participated in the earlier round of interviews. This final round of interviews examined individuals' reflections on the construction process and to what extent their expectations (and in some cases fears) of the development and its construction had been realised. The interviews also explored relationships between the developer and the local community and how these relationships had changed over time.

A central theme that emerged through all stages of the case study was the importance of fairness to experiences and perceptions of the planning process. Fairness was referred to both in terms of process and outcomes and was highlighted as being a central consideration of both supporters and objectors to the development. This paper will explore the particular topic of the community benefits package which was set up by the developers. This topic became a key subject matter, particularly within the final round of interviews, and provides an excellent example of how the issue of fairness is largely recognised by all actors to be of central relevance within planning and development processes.

5. The case study

The wind farm discussed in this paper consists of 16 turbines and has a total capacity of 32 mega watts (MW). The site is situated between two small towns with the largest being 7 miles away and having a population of 1700 and the smaller of the towns located approximately 3 miles away. The site is otherwise used predominantly for grazing sheep. The wind farm has an operational life of 25 years after which time it will be due to be decommissioned. The developers are one of the largest energy companies in the UK.

The planning application was formally lodged in 2003 and at the time was described as generating an unprecedented number of objection letters written to the local council (approximately 700 letters in total). When the application was lodged a local campaign group organised to oppose the proposed development. This group disseminated leaflets and prepared proforma objection letters to facilitate representations to the council (for a discussion of these objection letters see Aitken et al., 2008). The original determination of the planning application was delayed and a decision was not taken until the beginning of 2005. At this point the council voted to refuse planning permission.

The developers then lodged an appeal against this decision and this took place by means of a public inquiry. At the inquiry a reporter from the Scottish Executive Inquiry Report Unit (SEIRU) (now renamed as the Directorate for Planning and Environmental Appeals [DPEA]) was appointed to oversee and adjudicate the proceedings and evidence. The final outcome was that the appeal was upheld meaning that planning permission was granted. Construction of the wind farm then commenced one year later and lasted approximately one year. The wind farm was commissioned in 2008, and the final round of research interviews took place in 2009 when the wind farm had been operational for roughly one year.

6. Initial perceptions

During the early stages of the planning process the community benefits package was not discussed in any detail. Members of the

local community were aware that there would be a community fund should the wind farm be developed, however the details of this were not discussed. For example, one objection letter sent to the council commented that the Environmental Statement relating to the planning application made:

“a vague reference to significant contribution to a community trust fund but this is unqualified and unquantified.”

In the early stages of the planning process there appears to have been awareness and some scepticism about an anticipated community benefits package (the community fund was mentioned twelve times within the objection letters written to the council). Objectors were sceptical as to the extent that community benefits would actually benefit those that were most affected by the development, for example one objection letter stated:

“It is expected that the developers will accept that local residents should receive some kind of goodwill gesture, or compensation for loss of amenity, and I understand that community funds are commonly set up by developers in similar situations. Providing a community fund will fail to address this need so far as it is relevant to those who are most affected by this particular proposal, because these households do not form a community.”

Furthermore, where objection letters referred to community benefits this was typically to suggest that these were not legitimate, for example one letter described the community fund as being ‘a paltry bribe’. Objection letters often illustrated a degree of scepticism in relation to claims made by the developers that they would be a ‘good neighbour’. For example, one objection letter stated:

“I have no confidence in the intentions of the developers as far as our interests are concerned. Their only interest is money, and any idea that they are motivated by altruism or concern for their neighbours is unconvincing.”

However this was not a main issue of objection and did not play a significant role within the opposition campaign which emerged in relation to the planning application. For example, within the proforma objection letter which the local opposition group created and distributed to facilitate individuals' objections to the council there was no mention of the community fund.

During the planning process representatives of the developers acknowledged that there would be a community benefits package but avoided going into any detail as to what this would entail. In discussions with representatives of the developers it was clear that there were several reasons for this lack of discussion about the community benefits. Firstly, the developers did not want to be drawn into discussing details (such as amounts of money or arrangements for its management) before these had been finalised. Secondly, the community benefits package was not considered to be a material planning consideration and as such it was seen to be inappropriate to discuss it within this context, and thirdly; the developers were aware of the potential for such benefits to be perceived as bribes, and aimed to avoid the possibility of being accused of trying to buy planning permission. Even after the public inquiry was finished and planning permission had been granted the developers were not ready to discuss the details of the community benefits package. At this stage, when asked about the community benefits package within a research interview, a representative of the developers stated that:

“We haven't finalised what we are doing there [...] We haven't agreed a mechanism for that yet, but it is a not inconsiderable sum.”

Within the initial round of interviews, which took place after the end of the public inquiry, it was clear that the community fund had become a controversial issue within the local community. Whilst local supporters were very positive about the potential for the community fund to have a long-lasting positive impact objectors were sceptical that the fund would actually benefit the local community. For example, it was speculated that the money would instead be used in the city where the council headquarters were located, in which case it was felt that it would be used for 'more polished granite on the streets of [city]'. Furthermore, and to a certain extent vindicating the developers' fears, local objectors commented that the promise of a community fund amounted to an attempt to 'buy' planning permission and was therefore seen as a bribe. Additionally, since the developers had announced towards the end of the inquiry that if their appeal was granted they would seek to claim their expenses from the local council, some objectors were angered that the money which would be offered as community benefits might actually come from expenses claimed back from the council, which in turn meant that they were paid for by local tax payers. As such it was contended that:

"the local people – until I put them right – will be going round saying "they've given all this money to this trust" – there will be a whole PR drive [...] for the next 25 years people will be going round saying "aren't [the energy company] a lovely little, cuddly little local company and they put this money [...] and they are so nice to local people." What? That is the ultimate snub! Actually we pay this money which has been so kindly donated" (Local Objector).

However, there were a range of views expressed regarding the community benefits package. Whilst some objectors considered this to represent a bribe, others viewed it as a perfectly understandable and acceptable aspect of the process. For example, one representative of the opposition campaign group stated that:

"All developers can do is offer money [...] It's all very well to say it's not a planning consideration, but of course it is a relevant planning consideration if a wind power company is offering to pour significant sums of money into a community for the life of a wind farm why is that not a good thing—why should that not be recognised as a good thing?"

Similarly, another local objector commented that:

"I do think the developers have to handle this sensitively and make sure there's not too much disruption to the local community – it would also be nice to think that there was some sort of community benefit – financial payback for the communities who have to put up with the construction and with the turbines – some sort of financial compensation".

As such it is clear that not all objectors were opposed to the notion of a community benefits package, but there was very little understanding of what such a community benefits package would consist of.

7. After construction

The next round of interviews took place three years later, once the wind farm had been constructed and commissioned. At this point the community benefits package had already been set up and a significant amount of money had already been invested into the local community. The community benefits package associated

with the development takes three forms:

1. *Fixed Payment*: This fixed amount (£2000/mega watt installed capacity as of April 2008 to increase annually in line with inflation) began to be paid to the community fund from the point at which construction started, and is set to continue for the 25 year operational life of the wind farm. In previous projects the developers had not released the fixed payment until the wind farm became operational, but it was decided that the majority of disruption to the local community would occur during the construction phase and so it made sense to release this payment then.
2. *Variable Payment*: Representatives of the developers referred to this part of the community fund as a 'bonus' payment. It is an additional payment on top of the Fixed Payment which varies depending on the output of the wind farm. It comes from a proportion of the payment which the developers receive from OFGEM from this particular project. This payment began when the wind farm became operational and will run for the life of the wind farm (25 years).
3. *Energy Efficiency Fund*: This is a one-off payment of £75,000 to help deliver efficiency improvements, cut fuel poverty and reduce energy usage within the local community. At the time of the interviews this part of the fund had not yet been initiated.

Representatives of the developers described the community benefits package as having been 'well-received and [...] quite well managed'. The developers handed over the management of the fund to a Scottish charity which specialises in delivering grants. This approach was chosen since the developers sought to avoid potential political interference which was perceived to be a possibility if the money was administered through the council. Additionally, the charity was considered to have valuable expertise in administering grants.

The charity conducted a profiling exercise of the local community to establish its existing resources and strengths as well as its goals and funding priorities. It also set up a community panel which aimed to be representative of the local community. When applications are made to the fund the charity reviews them and makes a recommendation as to whether or not they should be funded but it is the community panel which ultimately makes the decision. There are just four rules which applications must adhere to. These are that the fund:

1. cannot be used to replace statutory funding (i.e. to fund things which should be paid for by public money);
2. cannot be used for political or religious purposes;
3. cannot be used to support individuals, and;
4. cannot be used in a way which is adverse to the energy company's interests.

Within the final round of interviews it was apparent that the community benefits package had become a contentious topic. A variety of opinions were expressed regarding its value and significance. Two key aspects relating to the community benefits package which divided opinion were who was to be counted as 'the local community' and what was to be considered a legitimate project to fund. In order to explore the range of views which were expressed these two considerations will now be discussed in greater detail.

7.1. Who is the local community?

Representatives of the developers acknowledged that determining who the relevant community was was problematic. They referred to the need to set boundaries as to who should benefit

from the fund, but noted that determining who the affected community was was not straightforward. It was asserted that it was not just a matter of assessing which community was closest to the wind farm since these communities are not necessarily the ones which are affected the greatest. For example, it was noted that the closest communities are not necessarily confronted by the visual impact of the wind farm since their views are not necessarily directly of the wind farm (i.e. they could be shielded by a hill). It was also noted that the closest communities are not necessarily the ones most affected by construction traffic. The developers therefore acknowledged that determining who the 'affected' community was represented a major challenge in setting up the community benefits package.

However, despite the developers' attempts to fairly direct the benefits package towards the most 'affected' communities, individuals within the local area (both objectors and supporters of the wind farm) maintained that this was not done adequately. For example, one objector commented that:

"And it is ironic that the two communities, albeit with more people, are the ones that are actually benefiting that can't even see the wind farm and it doesn't even affect them in any way at all"

The wind farm is located within the boundaries of two community council areas. During the planning process, one of these community councils (Community Council A) was largely positive about the proposed wind farm whilst the other (Community Council B) was largely opposed to it. Several interviewees from the local area contended that it was now primarily the community council area which had been supportive of the wind farm which was benefiting. For example, one interviewee (a local supporter of the wind farm) stated that:

"I think it's more centred on [Community Council A] than it is up the other direction, whether that's to do with [Community Council A] were a little bit more pro-wind farm than [Community Council B] [...]"

Additionally, objectors contended that the community panel set up to determine which applications to the fund were successful was made up of people primarily from within the area of Community Council A and that the interests of residents within Community Council B area were not adequately represented. A local supporter of the wind farm from within the area of Community Council A also questioned the democratic nature of the panel in stating that:

"there is a local group but as to what the vetting procedures are for applications—there is a local group but [it is] very anonymous."

A further consideration relating to who should benefit from the fund concerned whether or not people who had objected to the planning application for the wind farm were entitled to the benefits. If the fund is viewed as compensation for disruption caused by the development of the wind farm then the individuals meriting compensation perhaps ought to be those who perceive the development to be disruptive. However, conversely interviewees who had been supportive of the planning application suggested that it was hypocritical for those who had objected to later seek to benefit from the development. For example, one local supporter asserted:

"There's still, there are those who were against it [the wind farm] and still are, but ironically these are the people who are stepping forward to say we should be making a claim from the fund, so in a perverse way you say kind of well you know your moral argument and your high standpoints have sort of fallen by the way-side."

7.2. What is a legitimate project?

The second major contentious issue relating to the community fund was which applications merited funding. As the following quotes illustrate, many local interviewees (both objectors and supporters of the wind farm) felt that the money was not being spent wisely.

"And the money is also just being frittered away on things that would have got grants from elsewhere, and some quite extraordinary pro-nothing with any meat on it that's actually going to change anything or revitalise the community in any way" (Local Objector).

"So it is disappointing, quite frankly very disappointing, but it's not a surprise, it's exactly what I thought would happen and no project has come up that I would say has really enhanced the community or made a difference. I think that's really the right way of describing it – making a difference – something new" (Local Objector).

"The community fund's been set up and there's been a variety of applications from the bizarre to the ridiculous to the outrageous!" (Local Supporter).

"I don't know where it will all go in time, but eventually—I imagine there's probably a void to be filled with a lot of applications to begin with and then what are we going to do next? So soon probably [the town] will probably have an Olympic swimming pool!" (Local Supporter).

It is interesting to note that the complaints which local interviewees raised in relation to the allocation of funds were also considerations which representatives of the developers acknowledged as challenges in setting up the community benefits package. For example, representatives of the developers stressed that they aimed for the fund to make a long-lasting positive impact within the local community and to meaningfully add value to the community. This was given as a key justification for involving the charity in administering the fund since the profiling exercise conducted by the charity facilitated long-term strategic thinking about how the money could be most effectively allocated. The developers acknowledged that initially the existence of the fund would encourage a lot of applications for highly visible – but not necessarily substantial – projects and improvements (i.e. new tablecloths in the town hall or new bowls for the bowling club), and that this might be followed by a lull in applications. At this point it was considered that the charity would play a role in helping the community to think strategically about how to spend the money, and how to most effectively make use of the fund over its 25 year period. It is interesting therefore to note that the developers were conscious that the community fund needed to be well-managed to ensure that the money was not frittered away, and that it made a meaningful, long-lasting impact on the community. However, just as there was little agreement over who the relevant community was, there was also little agreement about what should be considered a long-lasting and meaningful benefit.

A particularly contentious grant made from the fund was used to buy a local shop and petrol station. The owner of this shop was moving abroad and the shop needed to be sold in order to remain open. A community group therefore applied to the fund for £35,000 to partly cover their costs of buying the shop. The grant was successful and the shop is now run as a Community Interest Company (CIC), and is said to have created six jobs in the local area. Representatives of the developers cited this as a positive example of how the community benefits package is having a long-term positive impact on the community, it was also described as being a positive example of the community thinking strategically

to use the fund. However, other interviewees perceived this example very differently.

One local supporter of the wind farm commented that:

“[whilst on the one hand] that local community has been given a lifeline in terms of the local shop being maintained and also the fuel supply in terms of petrol, diesel etcetera being kept open because of the funds [...] I don't think that giving £35,000 to somebody who's gone off to Australia is really the best allocation of funds! I think it was probably rushed through, and there probably could have been a bit more of an exposé if people had dug a bit deeper.”

Similarly, a local objector stated that:

“the biggest surprise lately has been the purchase of the village shop [...] which actually technically they could have got money from a community buy-out scheme for. Now who owns it and where that capital goes I really don't know at the end of the day, but anyway there's been a buy-out of that shop.”

Interviewees expressed a range of concerns in relation to this grant. Firstly, it was contended that the community benefits package was not an appropriate source of funding in this instance and that the group should have instead looked to a community buy-out scheme. Secondly, the grant was considered by some to be lining the pockets of one individual (the former shop owner who was moving abroad) rather than benefiting the wider community. Thirdly, it was contended that the shop had previously benefited from other grants when it was first opened and as such it was inappropriate that it should benefit from further funding, and fourthly, individuals expressed concern about how the money was going to be managed. For example, one local supporter of the wind farm joked:

“I'll be keeping a close eye on their books to make sure their accountancy proceeds as it should!”

The discrepancies in the views expressed by representatives of the developers and interviewees from within the local community highlight the difficulty in managing the community fund in a way which would be widely perceived as fair, effective and which presented meaningful benefits for the community. Whilst small grants were described as ‘nothing new’ and as ‘frittering away money’, this large grant was also viewed as an inappropriate use of the funds. The developers placed a great deal of emphasis on identifying ways to add value to the community and make a long term impact, but it may be difficult to find a project which all members of the community would agree was meaningful and valuable particularly given the divided nature of the community/ies.

Several interviewees did however point to ways in which they felt the fund could be more appropriately allocated. For example, one local objector contended that the community fund should be focussed on energy efficiency or renewable energy projects. They maintained that there should have been:

“a local holding fund that was a renewable energy fund that would go as grants to people to improve the efficiency of their houses in some way or put up solar panels or whatever and would supplement any government grants so it would mean that people who couldn't afford to pay the 50% that they would have to pay, because I think some of them were 50% from the government [...] I felt that that was a far better scheme and a much fairer scheme and it meant that the frittering away wouldn't happen”

It is worth noting that at the point at which the final round of interviews was conducted the third part of the community

benefits package – the Energy Efficiency Fund – had not yet been launched. As such objectors' comments that the community fund should be focussed more on renewable energy or energy efficiency projects may have been addressed once this third part of the community benefits package was in place. Nevertheless, it is interesting to note that several interviewees from the local community asserted that the fund ought to be focussed on projects with an environmental justification, or related in particular to energy efficiency and/or renewable energy. As such, there was a feeling that the outcomes of the development (the community benefits) should be related to the nature and underlying justification of the development (i.e. renewable energy and/or emissions reductions). This is consistent with the view expressed by the Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE) who contend that: ‘Contributions should ideally be used to promote energy efficiency and/or a range of low carbon technologies, such as community combined heat and power’ (Miner, 2009: 537).

8. Discussion and conclusions

The case study presented in this paper highlights the challenging nature of community benefits from wind power developments. Even the most well intentioned developers may have a hard time earning the trust of local communities. Important decisions regarding who the relevant local community is or what form community benefits should take present opportunities for disagreement between conflicting interests. It is interesting to note that within this case study representatives of the developers and members of the local community shared a common concern with generating meaningful, long-term benefits from the community fund, but this common concern did not translate into agreement about what would constitute a worthwhile outcome or project. It is important to note that there is not necessarily one single local community but instead several interested local communities, and that even within such communities there can be a range of interests and perspectives: ‘communities of place do not constitute communities of interest’ (Goodlad et al., 2005: 924). Walker et al. (2010: 2662) warn against viewing communities according to the ‘rosy rhetorical image of close-knit rural communities’. Consensus over how a community fund should be managed and/or allocated may never be fully possible.

Clearly, within the local community/ies there would be individuals and groups who had benefited from the community fund and considered these benefits to have been valuable. However, there were other members of the community who had been suspicious of the developers from the earliest stages of the planning process and viewed the community benefits package as representing an attempt to bribe the local community into accepting the wind farm. These early suspicions never fully subsided. For example, one local objector commented that they had considered applying to the fund to set up a community project but decided not to since they did not want to be ‘dictated to’.

It was stated above that the main focus of this paper was not perceptions of procedural fairness in the planning processes but rather outcome fairness relating to ongoing relationships between the developers and the local community after the wind farm had been given planning permission. The extent to which the research findings continue to relate to procedural fairness is therefore extremely noteworthy. It was not possible to separate individuals' perceptions of the fairness of the community benefits package from their perceptions of the fairness of the decision-making processes through which the planning application had been

determined. Crucially perceptions of fairness were also inextricably linked to judgements relating to the trustworthiness of the developers. As such, initial suspicions that the developers would not act in the community's best interests led individuals to view decision-making processes concerning the development to be unfair. From the earliest stages the community benefits package was perceived as representing a bribe and this sense of unfairness – or lack of trust – continued to influence perceptions of the community benefits package even after it had become a reality.

During the planning process members of the local community had been aware that the developers would most likely provide some form of community benefits should the development proceed, however there was no discussion of the details of this. Members of the community were unsure as to what form this would take, how it would be managed or in what way (if at all) the local community would actually benefit. This uncertainty and lack of discussion about the details of the community fund played a role in heightening suspicions and scepticism regarding the fund. It is unclear whether those who were strongly opposed to the wind farm would ever have accepted the community fund as a positive feature of the development. However, it is likely that earlier discussion and involvement of the local community in early decisions relating to the design of the community benefits package may have helped to reduce suspicions and scepticism and to give members of the local community a sense of ownership over this aspect of the development. It is frequently acknowledged that involving members of the public in planning and development processes can lead to positive outcomes (e.g. Breukers and Wolsink, 2007), as such the potential to involve members of the public in the design of community benefits packages may represent an opportunity to improve planning and development processes for renewable energy projects.

However, community benefits are only one aspect of renewable energy development. If public participation is facilitated only in relation to community benefits – and not wider decision-making about proposed developments – it may do little to foster public acceptance. As Gallagher et al. (2008: 234) have commented 'existing empirical evidence is conflicting as to whether or not compensation-based siting has reduced opposition and increased fairness in the process of siting LULU [Locally Undesirable Land Use] developments'. They contend that consultation and engagement are far more effective as means of making proposed developments more locally acceptable. Public participation in design and decision-making relating to community benefits may make the community benefits more appropriate and socially acceptable, but without broader participation in decision-making relating to aspects of the proposed development the overall project may still face local opposition and the developers may still be perceived as untrustworthy. Furthermore public participation is not a straightforward activity and attention must be paid to the ways in which this is facilitated (Aitken, *in press*); for example, to what extent can public participants freely express their views or influence decision-making processes and outcomes?

There are therefore broader issues relating to public participation in renewable energy development. It has often been observed that countries which have higher rates of wind power development are also those where there is greater community involvement (e.g. Germany and Denmark) (e.g. Toke, 2005). For example, Wolsink (2009: 542) contends that 'those proposing wind power developments in Germany tend not to focus on issues of local resistance, but more on matters of local involvement and identity'. In the UK where the vast majority of wind power developments are owned and operated by commercial developers the same level of community ownership and/or involvement is not present. This has often been posited as a reason for higher

levels of public opposition and lower rates of development in the UK. However, it should not be presumed that experiences in one country could be straightforwardly imported to another: 'What is possible in one context, may not be elsewhere' (Walker et al., 2010: 2662). Whilst broader community involvement and ownership may lead to greater acceptance in other European countries such as Germany or Denmark, social or cultural differences may make it difficult to apply these same approaches in the UK (Aitken, 2010). Approaches to public participation need to be developed in relation to particular social and cultural contexts.

There is great scope for improving and expanding public participation in renewable energy planning and development in the UK. This ought to allow involvement in relation to a wide range of factors relating to renewable energy developments. However, community benefits provide an excellent illustration of how increasing participation in early decision-making, or design processes – and striving to increase a sense of procedural fairness – might in turn increase local acceptance of the outcomes—or a sense of outcome fairness. Currently, as illustrated within this case study, developers do not appear to have confidence to discuss the details of community benefits packages within the planning process. Understandably, developers may not wish to discuss this before arrangements have been finalised. Yet, it is precisely because the arrangements are undecided that this stage is an appropriate time to engage with the local community. Providing opportunities for local community members to influence and determine what form the community benefits should take is likely to have positive outcomes. A more off-putting factor may be the concern that discussing community benefits during the planning phase might be perceived as an attempt to bribe the community or buy planning permission. Since community benefits are not material planning considerations it is inappropriate to raise them as a consideration within formal planning processes. Additionally, since the provision of community benefits remains voluntary and institutionalised guidance or standards relating to how these should be administered do not exist, developers may feel uneasy opening up discussion about the community fund with community groups who may be suspicious of the developers' intentions or hostile towards the proposed development.

However, institutionalised guidance or rules setting out the minimum requirements of what developers should provide in terms of community benefits would mean that there may be less likelihood that these would be considered as bribes on the part of developers and might instead be accepted as a routine part of renewable energy development. Members of local communities may more readily accept the prospect of a community benefits package, and be more willing to get involved in discussions regarding its design and management if it was seen to be a standard feature *if* the wind farm was given planning permission, rather than a voluntary act by the developers to try to win public support (or avoid public opposition). By making community benefits a routine and obligatory aspect of renewable energy development they are less likely to be perceived as attempts to influence planning outcomes. Given the awareness that members of the public are often suspicious of commercial developers (Bell et al., 2005; Hadwin, 2009), a community benefits package which is offered voluntarily by developers may always be received with a great deal of scepticism, however a community benefits package which emerges from a national requirement to provide such benefits may be viewed more positively. As such institutionalised guidelines and rules dictating minimum requirements for community benefits would serve a number of worthwhile purposes. Firstly, they would provide greater clarity. Secondly, they would give developers greater confidence to discuss the community benefits package in the early planning stages, and thirdly, they would reduce the likelihood of community benefits being perceived as bribes.

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