

PUBLIC RIGHTS OF WAY ACCESS AND WIND FARMS – LONGHIRST

Introduction

Although this is primarily about the effect of a wind farm on equestrian access, it also applies in general terms to walkers and to cyclists.

The British Horse Society (BHS) Windfarm Policy

Approved by the BHS Board at the end of March 2007 is as follows:-

'As guidance to developers and planners, the Society recommends that, as a starting point when assessing a site and its potential layout, a separation distance of 4 times the overall height should be the target for National Trails and Ride UK routes, as these are likely to be used by equestrians unfamiliar with turbines, and ***a distance of 3 times overall height from all other routes, with the 200m recommended in the Technical Guidance to PPS 22 being seen as the minimum***, where it is shown in a particular case that this would be acceptable. The negotiation process recommended above should indicate whether, in the particular circumstances of each site, these guidelines can be relaxed or need strengthening to minimise or eliminate the potential difficulties.'

The Effect on Horses and Riders

The British Horse Society does not object to wind farm development in principle, but it is very concerned that the development of such sites should not reduce the enjoyment, which includes views across open country, and the safety of horse riders exerting their right of access to the countryside along public bridleways and quiet country roads.

It would appear that horses do not find wind farms/turbines themselves as a particular threat. However, there are several instances of problems from the shadow of the rotating blades on the ground. You will find on pages 171 & 172 of 'Planning for Renewable Energy: Technical Annex Wind', a publication from the ODPM, that the risks to humans and animals are listed (s50). We believe that there are additional risks associated with the ridden horse from the flicker effect in bright sunlight and the unaccustomed noise. Reports have been received of both of these causing horses to react in panic resulting in accidents to riders. We believe that this experience makes the application of the recommendation of a buffer zone of 200 metre essential, although it is not actually a statutory requirement (s56).

The Effect on All Users of Public Rights of Way (PROW)

One of the main concerns of all users of PROW should be the use of the PROW in the construction and ongoing maintenance of the structures.

- Because of the weight and quantities of material required to build the wind farm this can/will cause considerable damage to the surface of the PROW.
- The use of large, noisy and heavy vehicles will be a danger to all users who will not expect, and should not be expected, to meet large, noisy and heavy vehicles on these routes.
- The presence of the wind farm may, in itself, be sufficient to cause riders/cyclists/walkers to avoid the area altogether and to use local roads rather than the off-road routes. Creating an additional potential risk. This is particularly true of the most vulnerable users – old, young and inexperienced.

Conditions to be Applied to Any Windfarm Development

If Northumberland County Council is minded to approve the scheme we would expect the planning authority to protect horse riders, cyclists and walkers by placing certain conditions on their approval. In addition we would be looking for some improvements in the bridleway network in mitigation from the developer and/or the landowner on whose land the wind farm is to be built. These would then be of benefit to all users of the PROW in the area.

With regard to this scheme the following conditions should be applied:-

1. No turbine should be located closer than three times its height from any public right of way. 200m would be the absolute minimum distance.
2. Any work which may involve the use of public rights of way must only take place with the approval of the highway authority, Northumberland County Council. If a PROW is to be used for any construction traffic, with the landowner's permission, then an additional safe route for horse riders, cyclists and walkers **MUST** be provided. This route must be agreed as suitable and equally accessible to all users as the existing rights of way, and must obviously be approved by NCC. There should be no more gates on this route than on the original.
3. Where an access road follows alongside a public bridleway, there must be a fence separating them. All drivers of large vehicles using the access road must be asked to bring their vehicle to a stop should they meet horse riders or other vulnerable users to allow them to pass in safety.
4. If it were necessary for an access road to cross a bridleway, this must occur at right angles in order to minimise the distance of overlap. The drivers of vehicles must give way to users of the right of way and any gate considered necessary for stock security must always be left closed across the access road and not across the bridleway. The surface of the bridleway must be maintained and repaired if necessary.
5. As this development will cause considerable inconvenience to users of the PROW in loss of relaxed enjoyment of the open countryside improvements to the rights of way network in this area should be included in the application. To be paid for by the applicants/landowners. These should be:-
 - a. A behind the fence bridleway link from Bridleway 410/009 to Bridleway 410/001. This would form a valuable link between two bridleways and enable all users to avoid a very difficult stretch of road.
 - b. A bridleway link between Bridleways 407/022 and 407/006. This would enable effective use by all users of the two bridleway circuits on the former Butterwell OCCS. Due to administrative delays/errors this link was omitted when the final plans for rights of way in this area were accepted. It should be restored to that of the original plan.