Onshore wind

Thank you for your letter of 10 February about my Department’s approach to onshore wind.

There has been real public concern that inappropriately-sited onshore wind turbines have been spoiling the landscape, harming the local environment and damaging heritage for miles around. The coalition government, with collective agreement from both Conservative and Liberal Democrat ministers, openly changed national planning guidance in July 2013 to ensure that proper weight should be given to the protection of England’s valuable landscape and heritage, and we have sought to ensure planning appeals decisions properly reflect that guidance. I know that this new guidance has been welcomed by a large number of Parliamentary colleagues in rural constituencies. All planning appeals are considered with due process and a fair hearing in light of planning policy and the local circumstances.

Wind farm applications go to appeal where the elected local council had refused or not approved the original application. Making a decision on an appeal where a wind farm developer is seeking to overturn the local refusal by the council is quite different than those instances where an application is ‘called-in’ for my decision. The power to call in an application is used very sparingly, usually where planning issues of more than local importance are involved. Since October 2013, only three wind turbine applications have been called-in.

We are encouraging local councils to set out in their Local Plans where renewable energy development should, and should not take place, in line with the National Planning Policy Framework. We have also introduced requirements for compulsory pre-application consultation for more significant onshore wind turbines. These are crucial steps in helping deliver proposals which are more acceptable to local communities, and should help speed up decision taking and reduce the number of appeals.