

Windfarms have the power to change communities and political allegiances

The Big Field Wind Farm in north Cornwall is dividing local opinion and may well influence voters in the general election

(Adapted from) *The Guardian*, 4 April 2014

Beef farmer Stuart May looked across the Cornish valley where 11 wind turbines will soon soar skywards, and shook his head.

"We don't need them and we don't want them," said May. "Cornwall has already done much more than its fair share when it comes to renewable energy. We're absolutely pickled in solar panels and windfarms. They're dotted around everywhere.

"I'm not against green energy but there are better ways of doing it than plonking these monsters here. For me, it's all about greed. The energy company wants to make money, the farmers who are giving them land want to get rich quick."

The scheme – called the Big Field Wind Farm – has divided the community. There have been fractious public meetings, rows in the local shop (plus one reported assault) and lifelong friends have fallen out. Insults, allegations of dirty tricks and wild conspiracy theories are flying around.

But it is more than just a local issue. Wind power is likely to be a key issue for the Tories and Liberal Democrats in the runup to next year's general election as the coalition parties distance themselves from each other. This week it emerged the next [Conservative manifesto may include new controls over onshore generation](#) such as cuts to subsidies and planning restrictions while the Lib Dems reinforced their support for wind farms.

Good Energy says the windfarm would provide power for about 13,500 homes and argues there will be a range of benefits for the local community. It is pledging to use local people where possible to build and operate the farm and to offer cheaper power to people living nearby. It will provide a £60,000-a-year community fund and build a learning centre to teach children about green energy.

The campaign group set up to fight the plans, Communities Against Rural Exploitation ([Care](#)), is furious at the scale of the scheme. Most emphasise that they are not against renewable energy but believe this scheme in this place is wrong.

A retired researcher, Nina Kamm, said she was concerned at the "industrial scale" of the turbines, which will dwarf local landmarks such as the beautiful old church at Week St Mary.

Teacher Pauline Smeeth said she was "shocked and horrified" at the size of the turbines, which will be up to 125 metres high.

The local Tory candidate at next year's election, postman [Scott Mann](#), said he would be campaigning on the issue. "We have far too many wind turbines in north Cornwall. I think attitude to onshore wind turbines is going to be one of the big differences between the Conservatives and the Lib Dems."

The founder and CEO of Good Energy, Juliet Davenport, said: "Only a matter of weeks ago in parliament, David Cameron publicly stated that manmade climate change is one of the most serious threats this country and this world faces, so putting the brakes on the UK's drive for more renewables makes no sense."

There are, of course, local people who are supportive, including the farmers who will make money out of leasing their land. Farmers Ray and Val Griffin, who are involved in the scheme, said farmers had to find new ways of diversifying to make a living.

(573 words)