

Do onshore windfarms affect property prices?

It is widely feared that the construction of a windfarm will have a detrimental effect on local residential property prices. This is an entirely understandable fear, particularly for those people who dislike windfarms generally; if you yourself don't like windfarms then you wouldn't want to buy a house near one, and you would therefore expect properties near windfarms to become less desirable and to fall in value. This fear has been widely aired in media coverage, and - perhaps through the power of repetition - the idea that windfarms depress property prices is now increasingly stated as 'fact'.

However, as with a number of other 'facts' about windfarms (on both sides of the debate), there is little if any evidence to support it. The claim that local property prices fall after windfarms are built has not been supported by any of the systematic studies that have been carried out so far. Of course, some anecdotal evidence exists, and there have been some publicised examples of individual house sales which have been affected, but whenever the issue has been rigorously investigated the conclusion has been that windfarms have no detectable impact on house prices in the surrounding area. Summaries of two of the larger studies can be found at the following links: http://www.rics.org/site/download_feed.aspx?fileID=3524&fileExtension=PDF
<http://www.windenergyplanning.com/wind-energy-questions-what-is-the-impact-of-wind-turbines-on-house-prices/>

Closer to home, a 2009 study in southern Scotland found that trends in property prices in the vicinity of windfarms closely mirrored those elsewhere over the years during and after construction. The conclusion, based on house price data and interviews with local estate agents, was that the windfarms had had no discernible effect.

The reality seems to be that, for most people, there are other factors which are of greater importance than windfarms in their house-buying decisions. No doubt a few potential buyers will be put off by the existence of a windfarm, and some will be attracted, but the majority do not regard it as a 'first division' issue. Consequently, the property market remains unaffected by windfarms. This is borne out by the fact that local property values sometimes *rise* after windfarms are built. So do windfarms boost house prices? Probably not. Such rises reflect wider and more important influences, just as falls in prices are rarely if ever due to windfarms.

Given the amount of 'air time' that this issue has had in the media, one might expect that the question has been extensively researched. In fact, relatively few studies have yet been carried out. What is striking, though, is that the research so far (in the UK, the USA and elsewhere) has all come to the same conclusion, namely that local people need not fear that property values in the area will be blighted if a windfarm is built nearby. This is the clear message of the research on this issue to date.

This short summary was written by Dr Charles Warren who is a Senior Lecturer in the School of Geography & Geosciences in the University of St Andrews. He has published widely in the fields of glaciology and environmental management, and a second edition of his book 'Managing Scotland's Environment' was published in 2009. One of his research interests is the factors which affect the social acceptability of onshore windfarms in Scotland and Ireland.