

Energy minister vows: ‘No more wind farms’

Isabel Oakeshott, Political Editor, Published: 15 April 2012



BRITAIN does not need more onshore wind farms, according to the climate change minister.

In what will be seen as a shift in strategy, Greg Barker has declared there will be no significant expansion in the number of turbines on land beyond those already in the pipeline.

The move comes five months after his department unveiled plans for up to 10,000 extra onshore turbines, prompting an outcry among Tory MPs.

More than 100 Conservative backbenchers wrote to the prime minister labelling onshore wind “inefficient” and attacking the scale of government subsidies to the industry.

In an interview with *The Sunday Times*, Barker claimed the Department of Energy and Climate Change had adopted an “unbalanced” approach to wind farms in the past and must now look at other options.

“Far from wanting thousands more, actually for most of the wind we need . . . they are either built, being developed, or in planning. The notion that there’s some spectre of a new wave of wind [farms] is somewhat exaggerated,” he said.

The former energy secretary, Chris Huhne, was an enthusiastic proponent of wind power, publishing a report last December which called for up to 32,000 new wind turbines, 10,000 of which could be onshore. There are now about 3,000 onshore turbines, with a few hundred offshore. The plan would have transformed Britain’s wildest landscapes, alarming local MPs. Huhne’s resignation in February appears to have paved the way for a retreat.

Barker dismissed the 10,000 figure, saying: “It’s about being balanced and sensible. We inherited a policy from the last government which was unbalanced in favour of onshore wind.”

He wants a focus on offshore farms and admitted some onshore locations had been misguided. “There have been some installations in insensitive or unsuitable locations — too close to houses, or in an area of outstanding natural beauty.”

Last week Barker announced new details of the government’s “green deal”, a scheme to make homes more energy efficient. Under the programme, householders will be able to invest in energy-efficient installations, such as double glazing and underfloor heating, without having to pay upfront.

Barker said the economic downturn had forced the government to change its approach to green issues to deliver better value for money.

“There is a requirement to rethink the economics of green. We have to have a more nuanced and sophisticated policy. Basically, that means reducing costs quicker, looking to commercialise sooner, and thinking more carefully about the use of public subsidy.”