Executive summary

Despite the government’s own statistics showing consistent and growing support for onshore wind, it has suggested that wind projects often fail to win public support. It has also implied that public support for onshore wind is only present in UK regions outside of England, and that communities in England will not accept local projects.

For this reason, the government has introduced planning blocks on onshore wind that are specific to England, and has refused to bring forward a national route to market for new wind projects. Since these planning blocks were issued, there has been a 94% drop in planning applications for new projects - constituting a shutting down of the industry in England.¹ This is despite the fact that onshore wind is now our cheapest source of power.²

The Conservative Party’s 2017 manifesto states that ‘more large-scale onshore wind is not right for England’. The government has not, however, produced any evidence to substantiate this position. In fact, recent pollings find that support for onshore wind is at a minimum consistent across the UK - and could actually be highest in some English regions. In this briefing, we present the evidence demonstrating that support for onshore wind, and local wind projects, is strong across the UK - including in England.

The British public support the use of onshore wind

Despite government claims that onshore wind projects often fail to win public support, government figures from 2018 show that onshore wind is hugely popular across the UK - with 76% of the British public now supporting its use.

Levels of support have risen by around 9% since 2012 - a period during which we have seen record numbers of installations of new projects, including in England. This suggests that the more onshore wind people see in the UK, the more they support the technology.

Contrary to common perception, Conservative voters favour onshore wind over gas, nuclear and coal. 59% of Conservative voters support onshore wind provided it receives no subsidy,³ which is significant in light of the fact that onshore wind has become our cheapest source of new-build electricity and could deliver subsidy-free projects.⁴ Polling further shows that 61% of Conservative voters do not agree with the blocks the government has placed on the technology.⁵

Public support for onshore wind far exceeds support for other technologies such as nuclear and fracking, currently standing at 38% and 17% respectively.⁶
Support for local onshore wind projects is strong across UK regions, and polling shows it to be highest in England

Contrary to government statements indicating higher opposition to onshore wind in England, YouGov polling shows that support for local onshore wind projects is actually highest in the south of England (excluding London). On average, 65% of the British public would be happy to live within five miles of wind turbines - and this rises to 70% in the south of England, compared to 63% in Scotland. In contrast, only 21% of people in the south of England would be happy to live within five miles of a fracking project.7

Public support for local onshore wind remains high in constituencies of English MPs who called for blocks on onshore wind

Consistent with national public opinion, nearly three quarters of the constituents of the Conservative MPs who signed the 2012 letter opposing onshore wind - nearly all of whom represent English constituencies - support the use of onshore wind. Opposition to onshore wind is also consistent with national statistics - with only 6% of respondents opposing its use.

73% of these constituents would also be happy to have wind turbines within five miles of their home, undermining the government’s assertion that wind projects would fail to win public support in these regions - which are often claimed to be particularly hostile to onshore wind deployment.

Significantly, just 12% of people in these constituencies are aware of the fact that the government is currently blocking onshore wind, and only one in five say they would support a block on the construction of new onshore wind turbines. This suggests that if the constituents of the MPs who have called for blocks on onshore wind became aware of the government’s current position, they would view the government unfavourably on this issue.

This data is reinforced by polling commissioned by Co-op Energy this year, which demonstrates that support for wind turbines within two miles of respondents’ homes is consistent across UK regions. It also suggests that people in Scotland are in fact more likely to oppose a local wind project than people in England, though opposition in Scotland remains low.8

The YouGov polling further shows that unhappiness with local wind projects in the south of England decreases from 22% to just 14% if the turbines are community-owned. This indicates that a significant proportion of concern about wind projects is related to the corporate and top-down nature of some developments, rather than the wind turbines themselves.
Summary

There is mounting evidence to demonstrate that support for local onshore wind projects is strong across the UK, including among communities in England. We are not aware of any evidence that supports the government’s assertion that communities in England are less likely to support wind projects than people living in other UK regions.

The government is therefore in the extraordinary position of blocking the UK’s cheapest new source of power in its largest region based on claims of public opposition that are undermined by the available evidence. This is endangering the UK’s ability to meet the 4th and 5th carbon budgets and to control energy bills for consumers and businesses. This position also arbitrarily denies communities across England the opportunity to develop, own and benefit from local low-carbon power.

1. www.1010uk.org/articles/investigation-has-the-governments-onshore-wind-ban-worked
2. www.eciu.net/assets/Reports/EClU_Blown_Away_Final_1.pdf
4. www.eciu.net/assets/Reports/EClU_Blown_Away_Final_1.pdf
5. www.thetimes.co.uk/article/tory-voters-favour-wind-of-change-for-onshore-turbines-poll-showsnmv3mkbx
7. www.1010uk.org/articles/fracking-nuclear-and-wind-which-would-you-rather-have-in-your-backyard