

My Interventions in the Energy Bill

(3)

John Redwood:

Does my right hon. Friend accept, on the cost argument, that we also need to build a new gas turbine station as back-up for when the wind does not blow?

Sir Alok Sharma:

We do need a diversified energy system, and I think the Minister set out all the work that is going on on nuclear, for example. However, as we drive forward for greater energy security, we need to change the planning rules to allow more onshore wind. The objectives of new clause 43 are to ensure a more permissive planning regime. The new clause seeks to lift the current planning restriction that in effect means that a single objection can block a development. It also seeks to ensure that local communities willing to take onshore wind developments will receive direct community benefits.

The Government have today responded to new clause 43 by bringing forward a written ministerial statement on onshore wind. I thank the Government for the constructive dialogue we have had over the past days on this issue. I acknowledge that that written ministerial statement, and indeed the accompanying changes to the national planning policy framework, move things forward and will help to deliver a more permissive planning regime for onshore wind.

The de facto ban is lifted. The statement clarifies that the policy intent is not to allow very limited objections or even a single objection to ban a planning application, and it is explicit that local communities willing to host onshore wind farms should directly benefit, including potentially through energy discounts. That is positive, but we do need to see the Government's formal response to their consultation on this issue to understand the detail of the precise mechanism by which the benefits regime will work. Toggle showing location of Column 291

I also welcome the fact that local plans will not be the only route to delivering more onshore wind, with more agile and targeted routes available. Of course it is now a requirement for local planning authorities to support community-led initiatives for renewable and low-carbon energy. Vitally, those policy changes are effective today.