

Western Morning News

'NIMBY' BLAIR FIGHTS WIND FARM

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Prime Minister Tony Blair used his political clout to fight off a windfarm in his own "back yard".

And last night he was accused of being a NIMBY because of his opposition to four turbines two miles from his North East home.

While Mr Blair's Government has accused Westcountry campaigners of putting self-interest before "green" energy, he took up the cause of protesters in the Sedgefield constituency where he is an MP.

His agent even sent a letter backing Trimdon Area Group Against Wind Farms in its protest against the 76-metre turbines.

He opposed the development on former industrial land near his Trimdon Colliery home because it would not be "situated in the correct place".

And on Wednesday night, Durham city councillors over-ruled their officers' advice that the scheme should be approved because it met national, regional and local planning policies.

They rejected the application by energy company EDF by ten to four amid concerns about noise from the turbines, potential danger to aircraft and the effect on the landscape.

The news delighted campaigners in the North East but has sparked accusations of hypocrisy in the Westcountry where turbines are being erected on beauty spots in the face of vehement protests.

Campaigners in Bradworthy, Goveton, Den Brook Valley, and Fullabrook Down in Devon claim wind turbines could "vandalise" the landscape. And last night they were asking why their localities did not merit the same protection.

Sarah Payne, who fought plans for three turbines at Devon's first windfarm at Bradworthy, said: "All the time we were accused of being NIMBYs and this shows he is one. Tony Blair is being hypocritical. What does he think it is like in Bradworthy?"

The Bradworthy site is under rapid construction and is expected to be operating by next March.

Mrs Payne added: "Tony Blair should come here and see for himself what it's like when the turbines are up and running.

"If he thinks it's inappropriate there, what's the difference?"

Jenny Rosser, vice-chairman of the Den Brook Action Group, which is fighting plans for up to 19 turbines, said: "I just wish he'd come and show us how he succeeded."

Martin Ranwell, who is campaigning against two turbines at Goveton in the South Hams, said it was time to coin a new phrase for NIMBY that would be the

equivalent of "OK If It's In Someone Else's Back Yard".

He added: "I'm amazed and delighted at the news, but it just shows how two-faced people can be when it suits them."

Alan Nunn, chairman of the Realistic Energy Forum in the South West, said of Mr Blair's actions: "It is one law for them and one for us. If this keeps going on, the countryside will be ruined."

The Prime Minister's opposition to the windfarm was indicated in a letter written by his agent, John Burton, to an objector, which was passed to the council's planners.

Mr Burton wrote: "While both Tony and I support the development of alternative sources of energy, they need to be situated in the correct place. Large turbines should not be sited near housing developments and, in the case of Trimdon Grange, built on land that is liable to subsidence."

Last night, Mr Burton defended Mr Blair against accusations of hypocrisy. He said: "Mr Blair didn't object, I objected on behalf of the office. It may be considered that I reflect his views. The thing about this application was that it was near a mining pit that had 11 recorded cases of subsidence in the last few years and was about 500 yards from the nearest buildings."

He rejected claims of NIMBYism as he pointed out that the turbines would not be visible from the Blairs' home.

The WMN put it to Mr Burton that while many people would congratulate the campaigners in the North East, Westcountry beauty spots were not afforded similar protection from wind turbines. He said: "We are in favour of renewable energy and we are supporting nine turbines four miles away and that is in the countryside."

Dr Caroline Jackson, South West Conservative MEP, said: "Good for him, he is standing up for his constituents. I think we should use this to show that we can defeat windfarms."

But elsewhere the claims about a subsidence threat were dismissed as "absolute rubbish". The Bridgwater and West Somerset Conservative MP, Ian Liddell-Grainger, who hails from the North East, said: "He is guilty of pure NIMBYism. There is no problem with building on the top of old coal mines, especially not with today's technology."

Mr Liddell-Grainger, who is opposing an application for 12 turbines at West Hinkley, said: "I know the area where the Prime Minister lives very well and I can say from one North Eastener to another 'this is rubbish'."