

The campaign to halt a "monstrous" windfarm proposal in the South Hams has received a boost from the Westcountry's highest profile protester. Noel Edmonds, who lives at Jacobstowe, West Devon, yesterday said he was "horrified" when he heard of Npower's proposal to erect three 100-metre high wind turbines in a field near the village of Goveton - just off the A381 towards Kingsbridge. Yesterday residents of the picturesque surrounding hamlets continued to contemplate the impact of the plans, and to formulate their next move. Mr Edmonds, chairman of the Renewable Energy Foundation (REF), urged protesters to focus on "hard facts."

He said: "I advise them not to focus on the look of the things - although I believe they drive tourism away. Focus on the fact that these things are a fraud and they do not work. Explain to the landowner he is collaborating not only in the destruction of the countryside, but also the local community - and he's doing it for very little money."

Mr Edmonds, who has written a series of articles for the Western Morning News on the emotive windfarm issue, cited the findings of studies in Denmark and Germany. "They are far more progressed than we are, and they have found turbines to be ineffective." He said Npower's claim the three turbines would supply 2,000 homes with electricity were misleading. "In Germany they have only managed 14 per cent efficiency. Yet this Government's target is between 30 and 35 per cent. Even in the windiest parts of Scotland - a countryside being decimated, with more than 450 applications -- they achieve about 25 per cent."

He urged the Government to invest in researching other forms of renewable energy, such as wave, tidal and solar energy. And he said more money should be spent on saving energy, especially in new housing developments.

Mr Edmonds warned: "there are people in the countryside who are apathetic to this threat because they don't think it will happen near them. "The reality is we are going to have power lines and pylons criss-crossing the South West. We are going to see the total destruction of the countryside." Meanwhile, the information contained in a pack distributed by Npower was being absorbed in the 350 homes it was sent to yesterday. Tess and Eric Drake, who were visiting their daughter in picturesque Goveton yesterday, described the plans as "dreadful".

"We are absolutely disgusted," said Mrs Drake. "We have seen the way the Spanish landscape has been ruined by these horrendous developments."

Goveton residents John and Sally Combe raised concerns over effects on wildlife, noise levels and the visual impact of the turbines. Mrs Combe said: "It would be a crying shame to spoil this landscape. Here we are in an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, and that site is just next door. It makes a mockery of the whole thing." At a meeting of Kingsbridge Town Council on Tuesday night, the authority voted to invite all neighbouring parish councils to a meeting to discuss the issue. Ernest Fleck, chairman of Buckland-tout-Saints parish council, said: "The site is very attractive and immediately adjacent to an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. The vista from that site is one of the most outstanding views in the area and this would not be at all appealing."