

## Talk of wind farms benefiting locals is just a lot of hot air Iain Milligan

People across Scotland are used to seeing images of turbines to illustrate the challenges posed by climate change. For years large wind farms have become the go-to answer for politicians when it comes to promoting the cause of renewable energy.

More recently pictures of turbines towering over hillsides have become illustrative of economic change too.

From party manifestos to think-tank reports on how to bounce back from Covid-19, onshore wind energy has become the poster boy for change. But for people in rural communities, the idea of even more onshore wind farms is troubling, with large parts of the country already at saturation point.

We agree that renewable energy is important in terms of environmental and economic policy, but the unabated march of developers seeking to plaster the countryside with turbines must cease.

Our unspoilt scenery is the envy of the world, and we have a valuable tourism sector which depends upon it. Allowing more wind farms to appear on these picture-postcard vistas will jeopardise that industry.

Let's put the economic myth to bed too. These projects may look like they must create wealth for Scotland. In reality the people who are making the money are often foreign or English companies, paying absentee landowners for the privilege.

Organisations that promote wind farms like to point to surveys which show broad public support for wind energy, but the questions are too general: most people would agree that wind farms are a good thing in principle, but most people live in towns and cities where they are unaffected.

You need only to look at the scale of local objection almost every time a big onshore wind farm application is made. In England the government has sided with local communities and has only allowed developments to go through when there is majority community support. Scotland is seen by developers as a soft touch on this: councils or the government often say "yes" even when everyone else locally has said "no".

We can't have a situation where decision-makers shrug their shoulders and feel they can't stand in the way of wind farm development because they'll be painted as planet-hating extremists.

Renewable energy is crucial to the country's future, but the headlong rush has to stop and the next Scottish government must do more to investigate the virtues of offshore wind farms, tidal, hydro and other solutions. If they don't, the landscape will be sacrificed on the altar of half-baked, supposedly green policies.

Iain Milligan is the spokesman for the Save Our Hills campaign