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THE SUNDAY TIMES

Council tax cut for homes near wind farms

Jonathan Leake, Environment Editor Published: 22 July 2012



The windfarm at Kessingland in Suffolk has dented local property values (Rob Howarth)

Wind farms can cause property blight to nearby homes, according to what could become landmark rulings by a government agency.

The Valuation Office Agency (VOA), which decides council tax valuations, has accepted that having wind turbines built near homes can sharply decrease their value and has, as a result, moved some into a lower tax band.

The decisions are a serious threat for the wind farm industry. Until now, such negative views have been rejected by the industry and planners as simply subjective opinion.

In one of the latest cases, a couple living near the 22-turbine Fullabrook wind farm near Braunton, Devon saw the price of their home fall from about £400,000 to £300,000. Three of the turbines are within 650 yards of their home.

That figure is based on a valuation by local estate agents and the couple have not yet tried to sell. However, they fear that in reality the constant noise and visual intrusion mean they could get even less — or that their home might be unsaleable. When they put those points to the VOA, it agreed, moving their home from band F to band E, saving them about £400 a year.

It follows a 2008 ruling in which Jane Davis, of Deeping St Nicholas, near Spalding, Lincolnshire, was given a discount on her council tax because the value of her £170,000 farmhouse home had been reduced by an eight-turbine wind farm 1,000 yards away.

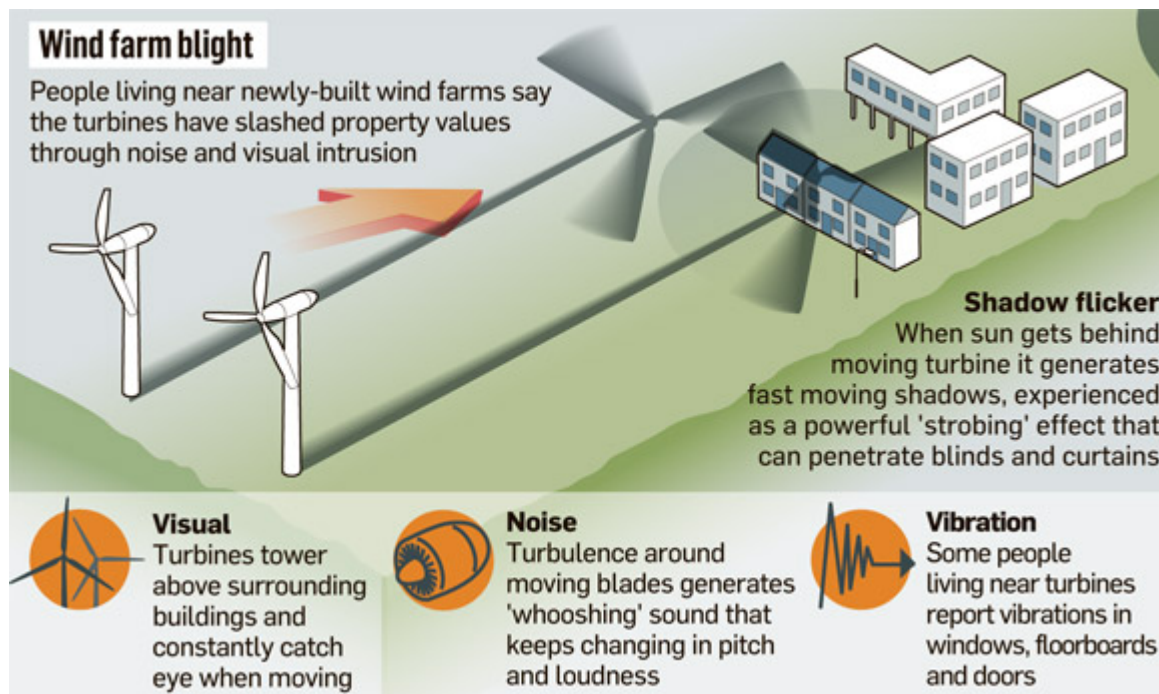
Davis's initial request for a council tax reduction was rejected but she appealed to a VOA tribunal and won after describing how the noise left her family unable to sleep, forcing them to move into rented accommodation.

Davis went on to sue the wind farm owners, including French-owned energy giant EDF, in the High Court. The case ended late last year in a settlement that included a confidentiality agreement so tight that none involved will comment. It is understood, however, that the wind farm owners bought Davis's house.

Proximity to wind farms has played a part in at least three other decisions by VOA appeals tribunals to move homes into a lower council tax band — although in each case there were other factors.

The VOA has received similar applications from homeowners elsewhere — although last week it could not say how many because only cases that go to appeal are made public.

Rob Norris, of Renewable UK, the wind industry trade association, said: "No study has ever been produced showing evidence to back up the claim that wind farms have a detrimental effect on house prices,"



However, the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors published a report in 2007 showing that homes within one mile of wind farms could lose value.

Some say the blame lies with the government's planning guidelines, known as ETSU-R-97 which were drawn up in 1996 when turbines were smaller, and less was known about their impact. Despite the complaints, the Department of Energy and Climate Change revalidated the rules last year with few changes.

One area that has experienced the blight that can be caused by wind farms is the seaside village of

Kessingland, near Lowestoft in Suffolk. Two 400ft turbines, financed by Triodos Renewables, tower over dozens of homes less than 550 yards away and residents complain they can hear a constant swooshing noise, especially in high winds.

A spokesman for Waveney council, which covers Kessingland, said the noise was sufficient to constitute a “statutory nuisance” but it preferred to work with Triodos on a technical solution. Matthew Clayton, of Triodos, said he was working with Waveney.

Many Kessingland residents have applied for council tax rebanding. The VOA was unable to say whether any had succeeded but the decline in value claimed by villagers appears to be reflected in prices.

Sue Price put her Kessingland home up for sale at £460,000 and had found a buyer when, last year, local papers described the machines that were then about to be erected.

“The buyers simply pulled out and the estate agent told us to cut our prices because the wind farm had blighted our property,” she said. “We went down to £360,000 and still could not sell so now we have taken it off the market.”

John Constable, director of REF, a charity publishing data on the energy sector, said: “Current policies are making renewables deeply unpopular by creating a few rich and happy winners and a larger number of very angry losers.”