

# Unholy row over ch

**Mark Enwistle and  
Jason Allardye**

THE Archbishop of Canterbury is being urged to block plans for the first wind farm on Church of England land in Scotland, following claims the project puts profits before people.

The church has already been warned by Martin Wharton, the bishop of Newcastle, that wind farms have become a "blot" on the face of "God's creation" and withdrawn plans to erect six turbines on its land in Devon after parishioners protested.

However, it has given its blessing to renewable energy giant RES to apply to ministers to site up to six times as many turbines in a tranquil area in the Scottish borders.

The company intends to build up to 37 giant turbines in Dykeraw forest, near Hawick, where the rolling hills, forests and rivers are home to rare birds, including peregrines, kites, merlins and hen harriers.

The development at Highlee Hill has angered residents who fear it will hit tourism and house prices in the area which was home to James Thomson, who wrote *Rule, Britannia!*, and the motorcycle racing star Steve Hislop.

"When you look at the scale

of what is proposed, 'incredulity' is the word that comes to mind," said Philip Kerr, vice-chairman of Southdean community council, who has raised concerns with the archbishop's office at Lambeth Palace.

"If they were to try to ram something of that nature through, it wouldn't seem a particularly church-like thing to do."

Opponents say the controversy could become another public relations disaster, echoing the row over the church's stake in Wonga, the payday loans company that the archbishop, Justin Welby, said that he wanted to "compete out of existence".

Because of the large scale of the project it will be considered by the Scottish government rather than the local authority.

As Alex Salmond's Scottish Nationalist party administration has set a target of producing the equivalent of 100% of electricity requirements from renewable sources by 2020, locals fear the project will be rubber-stamped.

Linda Holt, a spokeswoman for the anti-wind farm alliance Scotland Against Spin, accused the church of being motivated by greed and cowardice.

"Why is the Church of

England embarking on one of Scotland's most massive wind farm projects? The answer of course is wonga. The wind farm will receive hundreds of millions in subsidy from unwitting UK electricity consumers over its lifetime.

"But why pick on a forest in the Scottish borders? Because it's not in the church's backyard. It's a lot easier to impose these subsidy-milking monsters on communities that do not want them if they are not Anglican parishes."

"The church got its fingers badly burnt last year when it proposed six 82ft turbines in Devon. But the Lambeth accountants are badly mistaken if they think they can hide behind an unholy alliance with a foreign mega-developer and an acquiescent Scottish government."

"The archbishop should pull the plug forthwith. Not just because the Dykeraw forest wind farm puts profits before people, but because whatever wonga the accountants promise, it will be a massive PR own goal that the church cannot afford."

Hugh Roberts, a local resident, said: "Nobody is going to want to come into the area as the landscape will be dominated

by these huge turbines. Houses won't sell and tourism will suffer as people will prefer to go where they don't have a wind farm in view from every angle."

RES said the project has the potential to bring more than £13.8m in community benefits during its operational lifetime, and that those closest to it would get discounted electricity.

A company spokesman said: "RES has started a consultation process for Highlee Hill wind farm and we look forward to starting to work with the local community and organisations at this early stage. We will undertake full public consultations on our plans before any development application is submitted to the Scottish government."

A spokeswoman for the Church Commissioners said they "support development across the UK that provides needed infrastructure, be it for energy, housing, transport".

"These types of proposals can be sensitive matters, and must be balanced with an eye to the common good. We therefore support community engagement within the national planning process," she said.

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