



# Beyond the Headlines

Public sentiment  
towards onshore wind.

## 2025



INTRODUCTION

Tune into any evening news programme currently, and you would be forgiven for thinking that people in the UK have fallen out of love with renewables. Reform’s ‘declaration of war’ on renewables takes centre stage, with advocates relegated to the wings.

SEC Newgate UK’s latest research suggests **the picture is more complicated**. We looked at the views of rural communities towards onshore wind. These are the parts of the country where people are most likely to have lived near a wind farm – and also those where new ones are most likely to be built.

The research shows that **overall sentiment towards onshore wind remains positive and spans the political spectrum**. 73% of respondents felt positively towards onshore wind. This cut across party lines: while the strongest supporters of the renewable energy transition intend to vote Green or Labour, **42% of people who said they planned to vote Reform also support the transition away from fossil fuels to renewable energy**. This highlights the importance of engaging broadly across the political spectrum.

73% 

of respondents felt positively towards onshore wind.

Crucially, though, the research also shows that **this positivity is vulnerable to change**. More than 7 in 10 people said they knew little about onshore wind. This leaves them vulnerable to misinformation – particularly on issues that matter to them. The research suggests that **impacts on wildlife are by far and away the issue likely to move people**.

42% 

of people who said they planned to vote Reform also support the transition away from fossil fuels to renewable energy.

The research also identifies that **trust is a major issue**. 57% of people said they felt that communities are sufficiently consulted on new projects, while **53% felt that developers do not have communities’ best interests at heart**. Promoters of new onshore wind need to address this for any of their other engagement efforts to connect.

Importantly, **concern about new wind farms is self-reinforcing**. Respondents who supported wind in general were comfortable with the concept of turbines getting taller. Those who are concerned about new wind farms are concerned about taller turbines. Stopping the slip into opposition is important.

Our research shows **knowledge and trust have a key role to play in determining whether people in the countryside accept new onshore wind near them**. This report explores how both impact on how people feel about onshore wind, which factors make someone more likely to accept or oppose development, and what project promoters can do to build acceptance.

53% 

felt that developers do not have communities’ best interest at heart

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

SEC Newgate conducted a 10 minute online survey with n=1,014 respondents (between 28th July and 4th August).

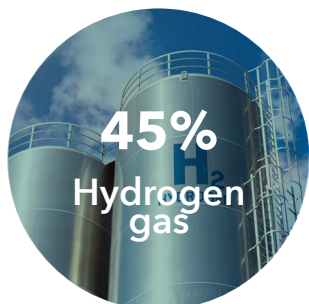
The sample comprised rural residents from England and Scotland, proportionally representative across different rural regions with natural fall out across age and gender. Rural residents were defined as those living in villages, hamlets, or small towns.

The research focused exclusively on this cohort to gauge sentiment towards onshore wind among those most likely to be affected by development and who have traditionally held the strongest views about it.



SENTIMENT TOWARDS RENEWABLE /LOW CARBON ENERGY SOURCES

(% shown is net positive 6-10)



RURAL SENTIMENT TOWARDS ONSHORE WIND IS POSITIVE BUT BEGINS TO FRACTURE WHEN THE PROSPECT OF DEVELOPMENT BECOMES A REALITY

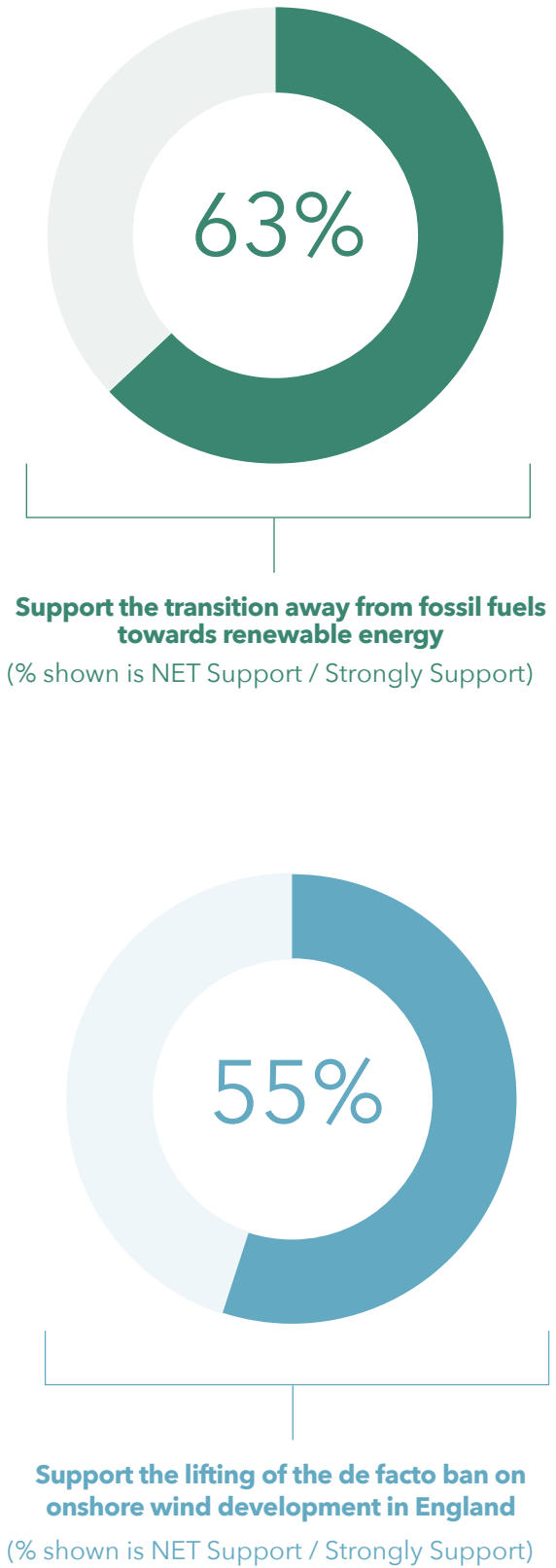
- 1. Rural sentiment towards onshore wind as a renewable energy source is strong.**

Over 7 in 10 (73%) of rural residents are positive about onshore wind, far surpassing nuclear and hydrogen, and close behind offshore wind and solar farms. This is a strong result for onshore wind, especially in areas where the population are most impacted by onshore wind development.
- 2. However, attitudes towards the renewable energy transition are less strong.**

When residents are engaged on their sentiment towards the UK's transition to renewable energy, support starts to diminish. 6 in 10 (63%) are supportive of the transition on a national scale, which is lower than support for onshore wind specifically. This suggests that while rural communities are generally positive about onshore wind infrastructure, this enthusiasm does not fully extend to the UK's broader renewable energy ambitions.
- 3. And with the prospect of onshore wind development, support divides completely.**

When asked about their support for the lifting of the de facto ban on onshore wind development in England, we see an almost complete split in sentiment, with just over half of residents supportive.

The research reveals that onshore wind is broadly welcomed in principle, but support begins to fracture with consideration of national policy changes and when the prospect of development becomes more tangible.





POLITICAL AFFILIATION DRIVES STRENGTH OF SUPPORT FOR THE RENEWABLE ENERGY TRANSITION.

Notably, political affiliation impacts sentiment towards renewable energy in rural communities and future voting intention is a key predictor of support for the renewable energy transition. Green Party voters demonstrate strongest support, followed by Liberal Democrats and Labour voters.

However, Reform voters are not uniformly opposed.

While Reform voters are less supportive overall, over 2 in 5 still back the renewable energy transition. This reveals a stark disconnect between the many newly elected councillors attempting to overturn net zero targets, and what people are feeling on the ground.

Despite strong experience of onshore wind turbines in rural communities, knowledge is starkly low.

Rural communities have substantial experience of onshore wind. On average, they live within 10 miles of 10 turbines. Despite this proximity, over 7 in 10 (73%) have little or no knowledge of onshore wind. Our previous research tells us that this knowledge gap can be detrimental. In the absence of the right information, people are more susceptible to misinformation and opposing messaging.

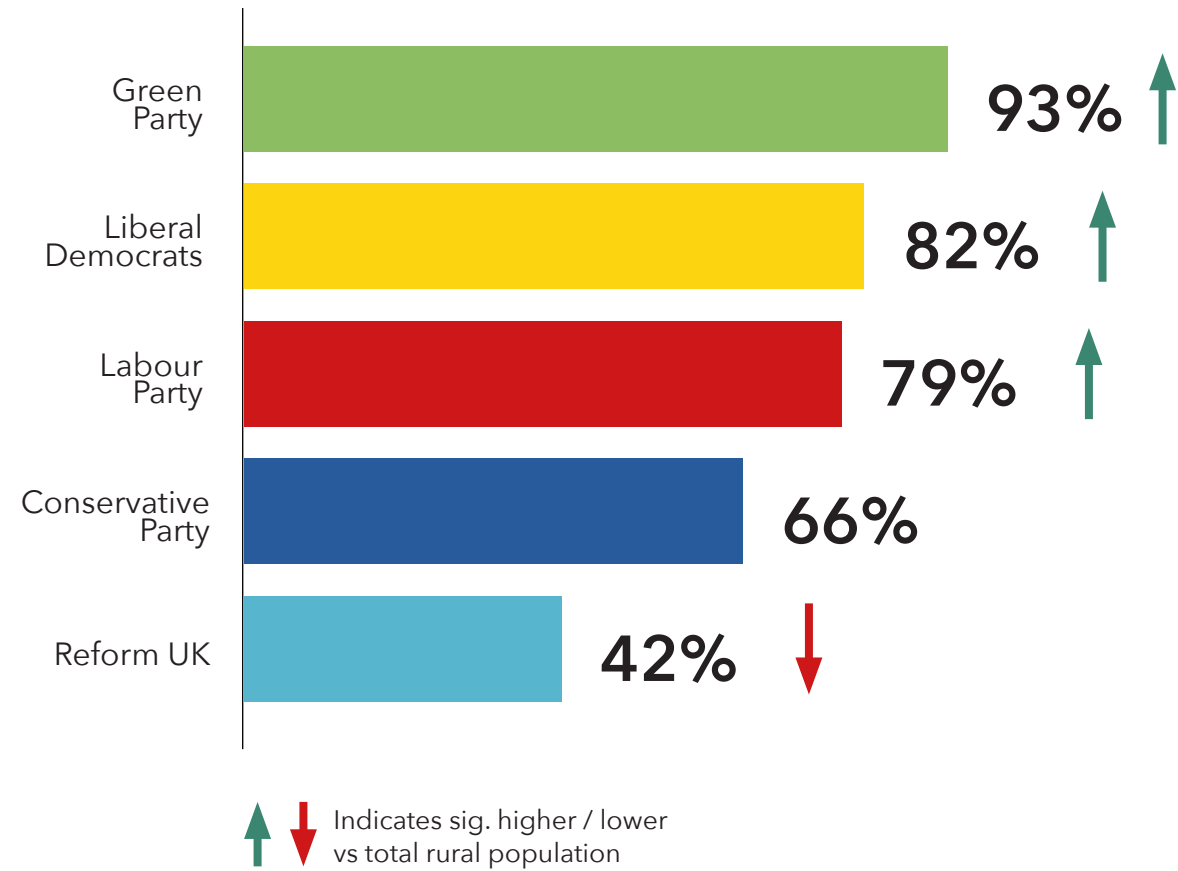
A significant gap in acceptance reveals that targeted engagement is essential.

Compounding the knowledge challenge in rural regions, only half (52%) find development in their local area acceptable. Reflecting their lower support for the renewable energy transition, only 38% of Reform voters find onshore wind development acceptable. However, this still represents a sizeable minority, with 2 in 5 open to local projects.

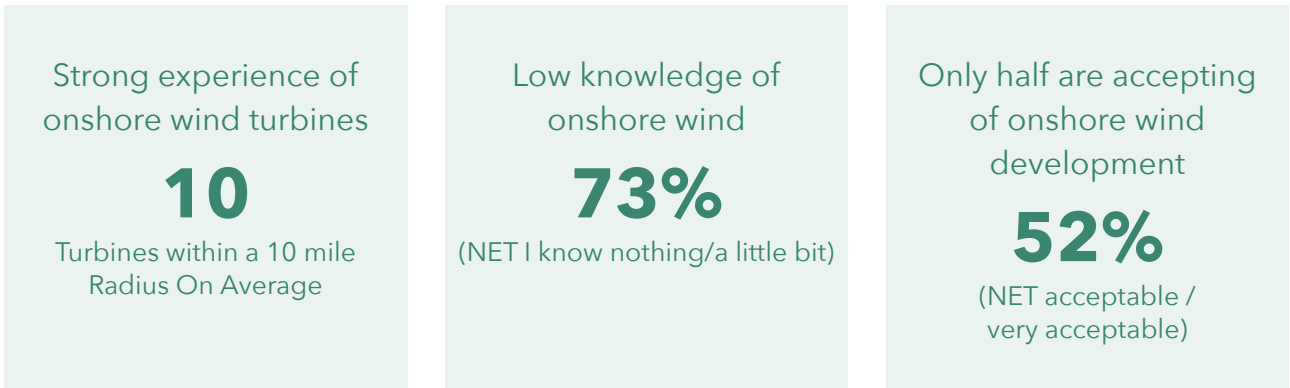
In addition to acceptance of onshore wind development generally, the research also explored the impact of new, taller turbines on acceptability. The findings show no movement in acceptance and that even with increased height, 54% of rural residents are accepting. Those who are less accepting are less accepting of onshore wind overall, indicating that this divide is driven more by broader concerns than by turbine size alone.

The current stance of rural residents on onshore wind presents a challenging landscape for developers. Effective engagement will require acknowledging communities’ existing experience and addressing gaps in understanding to drive acceptance.

NET SUPPORT FOR THE RENEWABLE ENERGY TRANSITION BY FUTURE VOTING INTENTION (Support / Strongly Support)



ONSHORE WIND SENTIMENT ON A LOCAL LEVEL



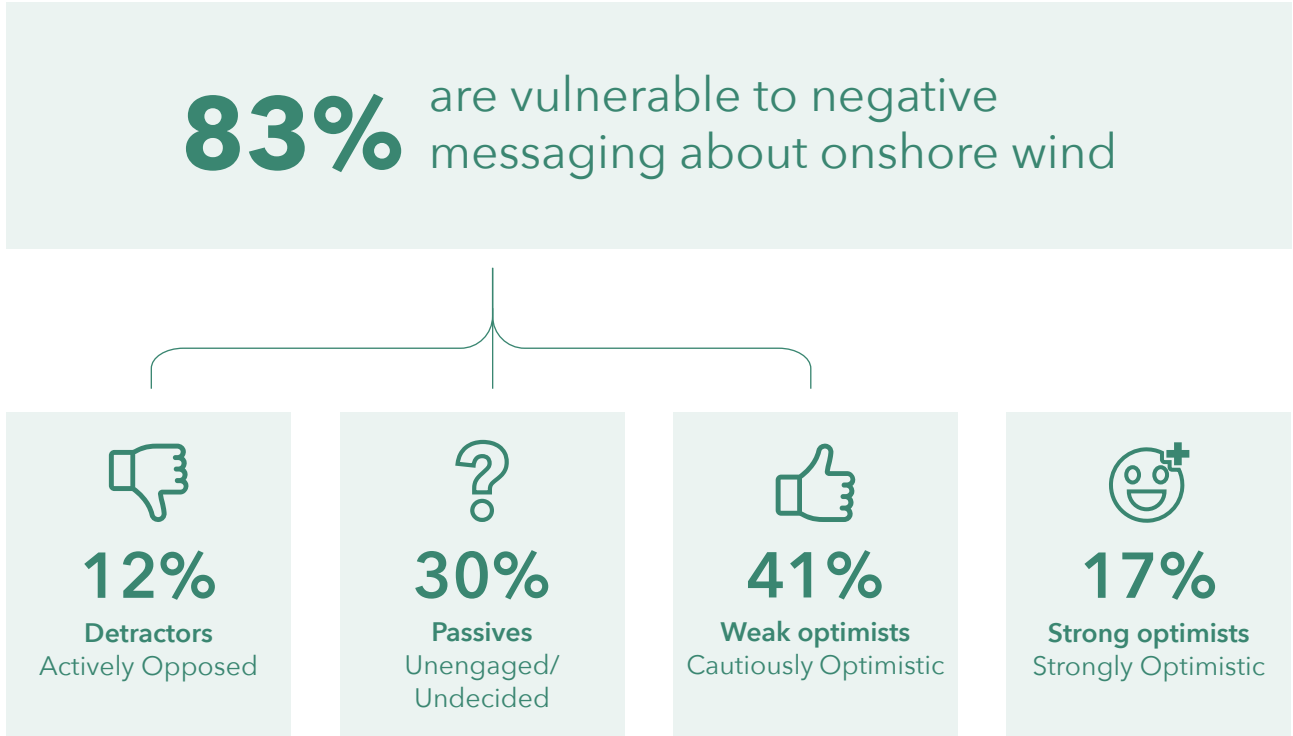
**A SEGMENTATION ANALYSIS OF THIS RURAL POPULATION REVEALS THAT A SIGNIFICANT PROPORTION OF RESIDENTS ARE VULNERABLE TO THE INFLUENCE OF NEGATIVE MESSAGING ABOUT ONSHORE WIND.**

To explore rural sentiment towards onshore wind in more depth and understand the attitudes and behaviours that are most likely to influence response to future development, SEC Newgate conducted a segmentation analysis.

The segmentation identified that rural communities can be categorised into four distinctive segments, based on:

- > Their position on the UK’s renewable energy transition
- > Sentiment towards the UK governments’ lifting on the ban on onshore wind development
- > Acceptability of onshore wind development in their local area

Just 1 in 5 (17%) rural residents fall into the Strong Optimists segment. The remaining 83% comprise Weak Optimists, Passives and Detractors: cohorts that hold residual concerns or actively oppose development.



**DETRACTORS HIGHLIGHT THE RISK OF INADEQUATE ENGAGEMENT WITH RURAL COMMUNITIES ABOUT ONSHORE WIND DEVELOPMENT.**



Belief in negative messages about onshore wind rise to 90% + among Detractors. SEC Newgate’s previous research shows that Detractors are most likely to mobilise against development. This cohort have the strongest views towards renewable energy infrastructure and are more likely to hold negative perceptions about it, which they actively circulate online and in-person in conversations with family and friends.

Additionally, our experience shows us that residents who are neutral or less opposing to development are more susceptible to persuasive opposition, particularly as these groups tend to have lower knowledge about renewable infrastructure. In these cases, more vocal opposers can fill that knowledge gap, shaping the narrative in ways that can escalate local resistance.

The research highlights that developers engaging with rural communities must be armed with communication strategies that alleviate concerns about onshore wind, not only to quell active opposition but also to contain the risk of these opposing messages gaining traction amongst vulnerable, lower-knowledge groups.

**TO ENSURE ENGAGEMENT STRATEGIES ARE EFFECTIVE IN RURAL COMMUNITIES, IT WILL BE VITAL TO BUILD TRUST IN DEVELOPERS AND ADDRESS LOCAL CONCERNS**

**Rural residents lack trust in current engagement efforts from developers.**

7 in 10 (69%) of rural residents identify issues with current levels of engagement about development of onshore wind infrastructure, revealing an engagement flaw that is generating mistrust towards developers. Over half do not feel sufficiently consulted about onshore wind development (57%), nor that developers have their community's best interests at heart (53%).

This indicates that early and transparent communications are essential to generating confidence among rural communities and to secure the necessary buy-in from rural residents.

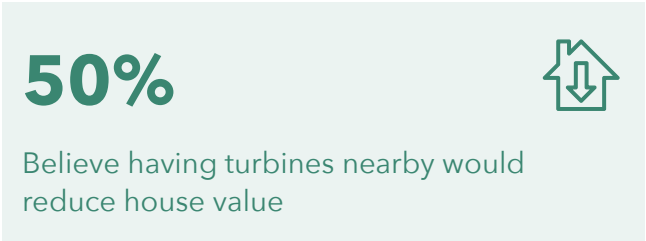
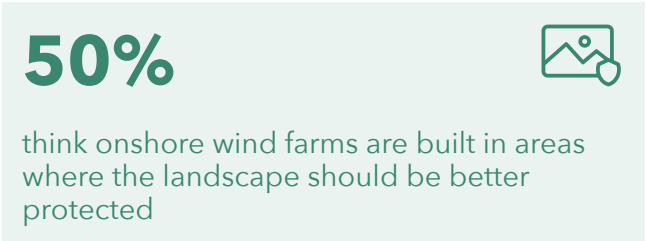
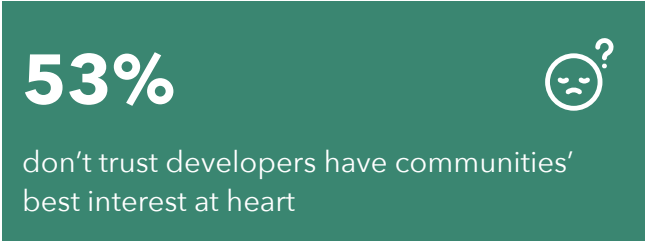
**Ingrained negative beliefs about onshore wind in rural communities must be addressed.**

Rural communities hold several significant negative perceptions about onshore wind, including the impact of onshore wind farms on wildlife, local character, the land and house prices. SEC Newgate's previous experience engaging rural communities highlights the importance of combatting negative beliefs early on in the consultation process. Left unaddressed or addressed insufficiently, harmful associations can fester, creating roadblocks to building trust and acceptance among rural residents.

**Negative perceptions of onshore wind are amplified for groups who are most vulnerable to opposition.**

Negative perceptions about onshore wind are exacerbated among those with lower levels of acceptance of onshore wind. Notably, future Reform voters are significantly more likely to hold adverse beliefs about onshore wind. Trust becomes a particular issue for this cohort, with 7 in 10 (70%) identifying a lack of sufficient community consultation about onshore wind development.

Therefore, it is critical that communications strategies acknowledge and alleviate key concerns that are most likely to fuel resistance to development.



Building trust with rural communities starts with transparent, hyper localised communications that directly address core concerns about onshore wind. Tackling negative perceptions early is essential to overcome barriers to acceptance and create the foundation for positive and constructive engagement.

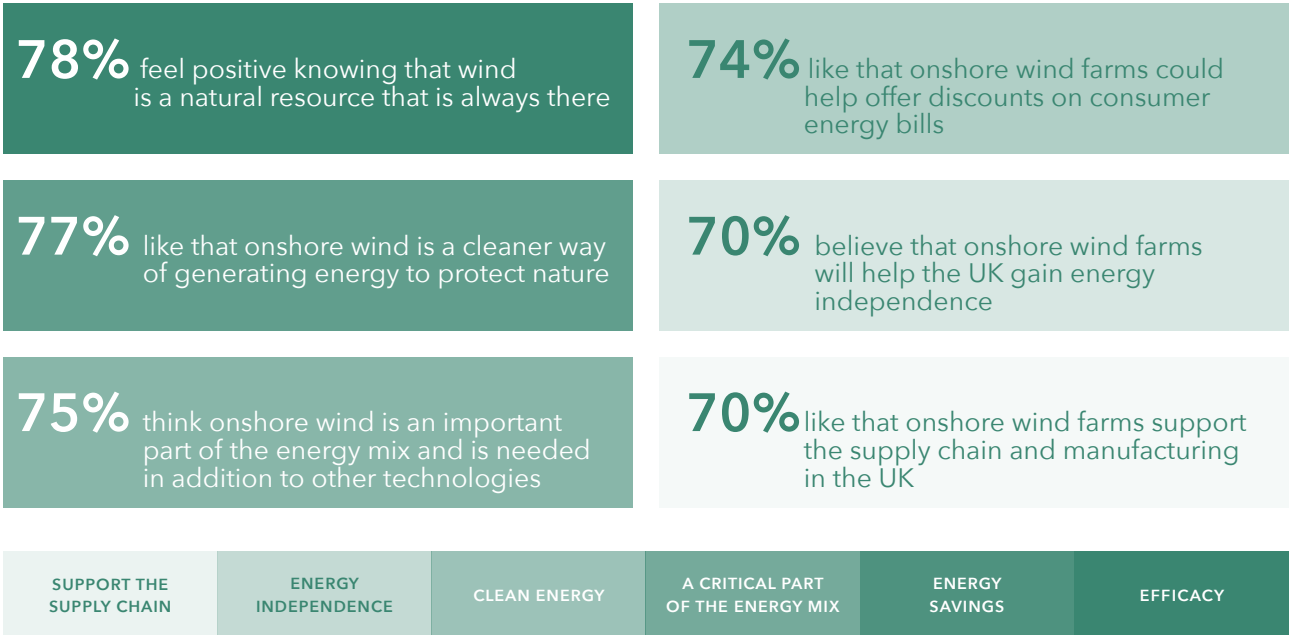
EXISTING POSITIVE PERCEPTIONS ABOUT ONSHORE WIND CAN BE LEVERAGED TO DRIVE ACCEPTANCE.

Despite the concerns rural residents have about onshore wind, there is also a strong set of positive perceptions among rural residents that can be leveraged to bolster acceptance.

Amongst the most compelling associations are the efficacy of onshore wind as a natural resource, its role in delivering clean energy, and its importance as a critical component of a balanced energy mix. Rural residents also recognise the potential of onshore wind to lower energy bills, strengthen the UK's energy independence, and support domestic supply chains and manufacturing.

These perceptions are not abstract ideals; they are already resonating with rural communities. Once developers have addressed core concerns and built trust with rural communities, positive associations with onshore wind represent a suite of existing messages that developers can confidently amplify. By leaning into what rural communities already value in onshore wind, engagement strategies can shift from persuasion to reinforcement of core messages and drive acceptance of onshore wind overall.

AGREEMENT WITH POSITIVE STATEMENTS ABOUT ONSHORE WIND  
(% SHOWN IS NET AGREE 6-10 OUT OF 10)



ONSHORE WIND MESSAGES TO DIAL UP



CONCLUSIONS

We have looked specifically at people’s views towards onshore wind in the countryside. These are the places where development is likely to come forward – so worth considering for project promoters.

Sentiment is positive overall in the countryside, but this is rooted in low knowledge and many people’s views are vulnerable to change. There are a number of steps that promoters of any new onshore wind farm in England should take to build acceptability:

BUILD TRUST  
EARLY

Across the whole spectrum of respondents, trust and the way that developers are perceived is a major issue. Overall, 69% of people identified issues with the way that developers engage with communities. Lack of consultation was the single most powerful negative message for every group we identified – including those most likely to shift their views and people who are otherwise supportive.

This chimes with our experience supporting projects on the ground. Trust in developers is low everywhere, and project promoters need to address from the outset for their engagement to get off the ground. That means engaging early, demonstrating a track record elsewhere, and showing that you can be trusted by doing what you say you will.

PROACTIVELY ADDRESS  
CONCERNS FROM THE OUTSET

The research identifies that 83% of rural residents are vulnerable to negative messaging – so may change their views when contacted by opposition. Concern about onshore wind is also self-reinforcing. People who oppose onshore wind are more likely to believe other negative messages, with belief in common opposition messages rising to over 90% in this group.

That makes it really important to address the concerns which may lead to people shifting their views – simply focusing on the positive rationale for new projects does not work and undermines trust. Concerns about impacts on wildlife, landscape character and house prices figure highly for the people we have identified as most likely to change their views and need to figure in your frontline messaging.

ENGAGE ACROSS  
THE SPECTRUM

Reform UK’s spokespeople can give the impression that their voters all oppose renewables. The reality is more nuanced – 42% of people in rural communities who intend to vote Reform support the energy transition. This matches our experience: people are often choosing Reform as a vote for change and do not agree with all of its positions. It’s important to engage across the political spectrum and not make assumptions about how political affiliation impacts attitudes.

USE THE RIGHT  
SUPPORTING MESSAGES

Some positive messages land much better than others. As with other technologies, efficacy is the best performer. Dial these messages up to support your engagement.



**BEST PLACES  
TO WORK  
2023/2024/2025**

  
**THE SUNDAY TIMES**

**PODCAST/AUDIO  
CAMPAIGN OF  
THE YEAR**

CONTENT & PR UK  
AWARDS 2025

**RESEARCH  
INSTITUTE  
OF THE YEAR**

EDIE NET-ZERO  
AWARDS 2025

SHORTLISTED

**PR AGENCY  
OF THE YEAR**

FINANCIAL PROMOTER  
AWARDS 2025

SHORTLISTED

**BEST AGENCY  
CORPORATE AND CITY**

PRWEEK CORPORATE  
AFFAIRS AWARDS 2025

SHORTLISTED

**COMMUNICATIONS  
AGENCY OF  
THE YEAR**

UK GREEN BUSINESS  
AWARDS 2025

SHORTLISTED

**PUBLIC AFFAIRS  
CONSULTANCY  
OF THE YEAR**

PROVOKE MEDIA  
EMEA AWARDS 2024

**CONSULTANCY  
CAMPAIGN OF  
THE YEAR**

PRCA PUBLIC AFFAIRS  
AWARDS 2024

SHORTLISTED

**COMMUNICATIONS  
AGENCY OF  
THE YEAR**

EDIE NET-ZERO  
AWARDS 2023

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