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Duke of Northumberland: an unlikely hero in the fight against wind farms

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Credit: By Robert Mendick and Edward Malnick, The Telegraph, www.telegraph.co.uk 20 August 2011 ~

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Ralph Percy, the 12th Duke of Northumberland, has emerged as the unlikely people's hero in the fight against wind farms spreading across Britain.

Despite a series of lucrative and tempting offers worth tens of millions of pounds, he refuses to allow turbines to be built on any of his 100,000 acres. The Duke also gives support, including financial backing, to local campaigns against wind farms.

"I have turned down all requests to develop wind farms on the estate and I will continue to add my voice to those fighting local wind farms on the Northumberland and Borders landscape," he said in an email to *The Sunday Telegraph*. He has declined to give interviews on the subject but in a letter passed on to this newspaper, he outlined his reasons for his vehement opposition.

He wrote: "I have come to the personal conclusion that wind farms divide communities, ruin landscapes, affect tourism, make a minimal contribution to our energy needs and a negligible contribution towards reducing CO2 emissions.

"The landowner and developer are enriched while the consumer is impoverished by higher energy costs. Turbines are ugly, noisy and completely out of place in our beautiful, historic landscape."

Worth £315 million according to the latest rich list, the Duke of Northumberland has an expensive estate to run, including Alnwick Castle, which provided the backdrop for Hogwarts in the Harry Potter films. The Duke also owns other historic assets including Syon House in London and the Albury estate in Surrey.

His stance on wind farms is in stark contrast to his northern neighbour, the Duke of Roxburghe, who runs an adjacent estate across the border in Scotland, and who stands to make tens of millions of pounds from a 48 turbine Fallago Rig development in the Lammermuir Hills.

The site will be operational by 2013, having been dragged through numerous planning and legal battle by local campaigners backed by the Duke of Northumberland.

“He is the good egg in the basket” said Angela Kelly, chairman of the Country Guardian, a national network of anti-wind farm campaigns, “I wrote to thank him for remaining a custodian of the country.”

In his reply to Mrs Kelly, the Duke wrote: “I am afraid we are all seduced by easy money, often to save crumbling assets, but ruining a countryside of which we are supposed to be custodians is a step too far, particularly for something as ineffective at providing power and as useless at reducing CO2 emissions as wind farms. Keep fighting.”

While the Duke of Northumberland may have lost the battle for Fallago Rig, he continues to thwart future developments in Northumberland.

It is suggested an ill-wind now blows through the ancestral homes of the Dukes of Northumberland and Roxburghe. One report suggests the two dukes have suffered a “spectacular falling out” while another claims they remain friends.

A spokesman for the Duke of Roxburghe refused to say how much the duke would make from the deal – and that it was impossible to calculate because it was dependent on the performance of the 48 turbines over the next 25 years.

According to experts, the turbines should provide an income for its owners North British Windpower (NBW) of about £875 million over its lifetime.

NBW has its own aristocratic pedigree. The former Tory party chairman Michael Ancram, now the Marquis of Lothian and chief of the Scottish Kerr Clan, is a shareholder as is Stella Tennant, the model and granddaughter of the Duke and Duchess of Devonshire.

The duke’s spokesman said the wind farm will provide electricity for 90,000 homes and save 300,000 tons of carbon emissions, helping Scotland to meet its renewable energy targets and make the country “less dependent on imports”.

The spokesman said the wind farm was ideally located, in a windy spot about five miles from

the nearest village.

It would provide a number of jobs while the Roxburghe estates and NBW had agreed to pay £240,000 a year to a local environmental and educational fund.

Source: By Robert Mendick and Edward Malnick, The Telegraph, www.telegraph.co.uk 20 August 2011

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