

Using the media to support wind power

Why use the media?

If you just want to write the odd letter to your local newspaper, or if you're a dedicated campaigner, using the media is an effective way to reach the people that you want to hear your message. A local paper is read by thousands. The most ardent door-to-door leafleting cannot reach so many in so short a time.

Introduction to the Media

Types of media

It is a misconception that only national media counts, local and regional media are important too.

For example, the Manchester Metro is read by more people than the Independent newspaper. Arguably local media is more important and more noted, as what happens in people's backyard directly affects their lives.

Regionally, there is a network of TV news centres, with their own nightly programmes, and a large number of local radio stations. Every city and large town has at least one daily paper and often a morning and evening edition or separate publication. Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland have their own media including TV news and daily newspapers.

An important fact about local papers (and regional and local radio and TV) is that they cut across social groups. Your local free paper goes through every door, regardless of age, income, education or politics. Local media also tend to be read, watched or listened to with more attention and to stick in people's minds more than national media stories. It's also notable that audiences to speech radio are rising.

Find out how your local media works

Which regional and local newspapers, regional TV programmes and local radio stations cover your area? Look in the yellow pages under Newspapers, Radio and Television. Visit the local library and see what local or regional newspapers they stock. Ask your friends what media they know; often parish magazines and the like are easily forgotten. If you are looking for a relatively inexpensive media directory then the Guardian Media Guide is recommended.

Media doesn't just happen; it has to be researched, written or recorded, edited or packaged, and fitted to a schedule for printing or broadcast. Media is manufactured just like any other artefact we make. If you think how you can fit into this process then you're more likely to be successful in being included in the media.

Letter writing

Why write letters?

Most newspapers have letters pages; sometimes radio programmes invite listeners to write in too. Writing letters to a newspaper or radio programme is effective because:

- the publication or broadcast reaches a large audience
- the media are often monitored by people we're trying to influence
- letters can bring up information not addressed in a news item
- letters create an impression of widespread support-for, or opposition-to, an issue

in people reading the newspaper or listening to the radio.

Good Letter Writing

- **Keep it short and on one subject.** Many newspapers have strict limits on the length of letters and have limited space to publish them. Keeping your letter brief will help ensure that your important points are not cut out by the newspaper.
- **Make it legible.** Your letter doesn't have to be fancy, but you should use a typewriter or computer if your handwriting is difficult to read.
- **Make references to the newspaper.** While some papers print general commentary, many will only print letters that refer to a specific article. Include a reference to the article (article title, page and date) in your opening sentence.
- **Include all your contact details.** Include name, daytime telephone number and address. The letters' editors may want to verify the identity of the letter writer by calling them, especially for a letter sent by email.
- **Meet the deadlines.** The letters page will often include instructions and the deadline for receipt of letters. In general, if a weekly newspaper were published on a Friday then it would go to press on Wednesday and Tuesday lunchtime is the deadline for your letter to be received by the Letters' Editor. Having said that, if your letter arrived on Monday morning so much the better.

Some Tips on Style

- **Increase your credibility by mentioning anything that makes you especially qualified to write on a topic.** For instance, "As a local resident, a stones throw from the proposed wind farm," or, "as a mother," or, "as an engineer," or, "as someone who's experienced flooding," etc.
- **Try to tell readers something they're not likely to know** — such as how wind farms are built — and encourage them to take action (such as writing to the planning office).
- **Keep personal grudges and name-calling out of letters;** they'll hurt your credibility.
- **Speak affirmatively.** Don't give lip service to anti-wind arguments.

Example

"It's not true tourism is damaged by wind farms."

Better

"Wind farms attract tourists and they'll do so for years to come."

- **Avoid self-righteous language and exaggeration.** Readers may dismiss arguments if they feel preached to or if the author sounds hysterical.

Example

"Only a rabid, heartless oil head would sacrifice our children's future and inflict further cataclysmic pain and suffering upon the poor and innocent of the third world."

Better

"People concerned about our children and their future know that we need to stop global warming. That means replacing power from fossil fuels like coal, oil and gas with clean renewable energy. The proposed wind farm is a good start."

- **Don't assume your audience knows the issues**

Example

"Renewable energy is best."

Better

"Electricity generated by wind power will never run out."

- **Inclusive language helps your audience identify with you**

Example

"Burning fossil fuels is bad for climate change."

Better

"We know burning coal, oil and the like is leading to long term changes in our weather that could be costly and harmful."

- **Use positive suggestions rather than negative commands**

Example

"Don't use fossil fuels."

Better

"Let's power our homes using clean energy from renewable sources."

- **Personalize your writing with anecdotes and visual images**

Example

"Noise isn't a problem from wind turbines"

Better

"I've visited a wind farm and seeing the turbine blades sweeping through the air with only a whisper was quite a surprise. Standing near the foot of the wind turbine my sister and I could quite comfortably hold a conversation."

- **Avoid jargon.** If the reader is unlikely to understand technical terms then don't use any.

Example

"The turbines are 60MW total output"

Better

"The wind farm will provide electricity for about 40,000 homes" (See FAQs for conversion rate)

- **Avoid Euphemisms**

Example

"I'm between jobs at the moment"

Better

"I'm an electrician by training but unemployed"

- **Criticize the policy, not the newspaper.**

Example

"There is no excuse for your anti-wind article."

Better

"There is no excuse for the anti-wind policies of the Council."

Example Letter

This letter is included as an example of good practice in letter writing. It's a 'rebuttal' to the concern that wind power is intermittent, unlike nuclear power i.e. it's only produced when the wind blows. Notice it's length and that it covers one issue at length and briefly touches on another; the dangerous pollution from nuclear power. The letter is also humorous, but not comical, which helps to win the heart of the reader, as well as the Letters' Editor.

Renewable sources

Simon Doughty asks (Comment, 14 July) how he can make a cup of coffee on windless days. Several options are open to him.

Today, he could use electricity from a hydro-electric scheme, using water which is still there because it was not needed on previous windy days.

In future, he could use electricity from a wave scheme, which has the useful feature that it is generated by wind anywhere in the Atlantic and can be available when local winds are not.

He could also use electricity from the large Scottish tidal-stream resource.

He could also import electricity from other places in Europe with renewable supplies that are out of phase with our own.

These renewable sources have an advantage that we can at least forecast their non-availability for several days ahead, unlike the outages of a nuclear station which can be stopped for months at a few seconds notice, just as has happened at Liability nuclear power station.

After his coffee, he can draft a letter to his descendants, explaining why they are still paying part of the £48 billion it will cost to clean up the nuclear waste we left them.

Patrica Wilson

Radio Phone-ins

- Radio phone-ins are an excellent way to get your viewpoint aired. If possible listen to a previous edition of the programme to get an idea of the format, the presenter's approach, etc.
- Most radio stations prefer a caller using a land line and not a mobile phone. When you ring in, you will be answered by a researcher who will want to know what you plan to say and then will either put you on hold until there is a slot or call you back.
- Before making your call, jot down what you would like to get across. Once you are on air use your notes to jog your memory but you will sound stilted if you read from a prepared script. Spoken English and written English are different and reading from a written statement can sound 'wooden'. Don't expect to be on the radio for very long as the station will probably have many callers.
- Consider the audience for a radio programme. A mid-morning radio phone-in might be heard by parents at home with small children or those not out at work during the day, but it could be missed by the local business community. Although your call will be heard by a mass audience, you should address the presenter or guests as if you were speaking with them in a normal conversational setting.
- The guidelines for letter writing, in terms of 'framing' your comments, are also applicable for questions in a phone-in. If you have a personal story and you are particularly affected then you're more likely to get on.
- A phone-in may simply involve a presenter, possibly with a guest or it may be a studio discussion. Studio discussions usually involve a panel of people who disagree with each other. Your question will be 'fed' to them.
- If you get into a discussion with the presenter or a guest then remember the person you are trying to convince is the listener, not the person you are in discussion with. If you feel the presenter is being provocative don't rise to the bait; it's not personal, that's their job, to create 'good radio'. Take a moment and step back, think about the different ways you could reply and what would sound best for the listener.

Working with journalists and newsdesks

Who to contact

The first time you send out a press release, or organise a newsworthy event, you may not have any media contacts. This is fine. Just call up the switchboard of your local paper or radio station and ask to speak to the newsdesk. There you'll be able to talk to a journalist and find out a fax number or email to send a press release to.

You may then be able to find out who the key people are on your local paper and local news programmes. Ring them and find out what subjects interest them most. If there is a local journalist with a strong green interest, it pays to know who they are. Make up a contact list of media outlets with names of key journalists, telephone and fax numbers and e-mail addresses and update it every few months. But **always send a copy of your release to the newsdesk as well as to named contacts.**

What do they want?

The media wants news. But what is news, you ask? There is no good definition, but there are some obvious elements. For a start, it helps if your "news" is in fact *new* (although politicians get very good at dressing last month's announcement in new clothes). Also helpful are:

Meeting their deadlines

Every media organisation works to deadlines and you need to know what they are. Your local weekly paper probably goes to press on Wednesday lunchtime. If so, get your story there by Monday morning or even by Friday the week before. Don't ring at 2pm on Wednesday and expect to hear them cheerily call 'hold the front page!' Your local radio station probably has a morning news programme from around 7am to 9am and an afternoon one from around 4pm until 6pm. Get the story to them with at least 24 hours notice if possible. If you are holding a demonstration at an evening Council Meeting and you want to keep it quiet, embargo your story for a suitable time to make the afternoon/early evening news (see Writing Press Releases).

Human interest

"The proposed wind farm will not only avoid the emission of Greenhouse gases but also provide new jobs. For Pat, an unemployed electrical engineer at the recently closed steel works it means she can pay the mortgage on their family home."

Controversy

"Anytown Council Leader Rod Foodbotham was slammed by local greens yesterday ..." - rows are often news.

Pictures

The newspaper can take a photo of Pat outside the Council's planning meeting where the proposed windfarm is being discussed. Pat holds her six year old daughter Jennifer who wears Pat's oversized hard hat from the now defunct 'McGregor Steel Industries'. It cannot photograph the tonnes of carbon dioxide that will not be produced at a power station run on oil, coal or gas, which is situated far, far away from the site of the proposed wind farm.

Opinions are not news. Give the news organisation the news, *then* comment on it. We may love the planned new wind farm, but this opinion really only becomes news when we organise a dramatic demo outside the Windy Weston District Council meeting with local residents, unemployed workers from the recently closed 'McGregors Steel Industries', local businesses and environmentalists waving placards for the proposed wind farm. Of course, if the newspaper or radio station rings to ask your group's

opinion on something – and we actually do have an opinion – by all means give a snappy quote or do a quick radio interview.

Make sure you can be contacted, particularly if your name appears on a press release. If possible, give them a home and work number, and/or a pager/mobile phone. If you get a media message on your answer phone return it in good time. There is nothing more frustrating for a journalist than to be unable to contact key sources before deadline.

How do we give the news to them?

Media organisations get their news from many sources, including news agencies, forward news planners, and the courts. But a key source is *press releases*.

To a campaigning group, these are a literary form as vital as the novel. You must know how to write. Media outlets get hundreds or even thousands of press releases. They are sifted at the rate of one every few seconds. Most go onto the dreaded “spike” and are never seen by a living soul again. Your group’s press releases must avoid this terrible fate at all costs.

Example Press Release

Below is example press release with annotations. The numbers in double square brackets e.g. '[[1]]' indicate which note is applicable.

Windy Weston Residents for Wind Power

PRESS RELEASE

[[1]]Embargo: 00:001 Wednesday 15 May 2003

Windy Weston MP accepts 'Wind-o-Meter' poll results on Tuesday 24 June

[[2]]PHOTO CALL Time: 11 am Saturday 18 May 2003 Where: Outside Office of Sophie Passmore MP, Market Place, Windy Weston. What: Families from Windy Weston Residents for Wind Power and Sophie Passmore MP holding aloft a giant cardboard 'Wind-o-Meter' indicating the poll result with a pointer on a scale and a banner 'Windy Weston says YES to Headland Wind Farm'. Residents children will have colourful windmills.

[[3]]At 11 am on Saturday 18 May at the Office of Sophie Passmore MP, the Market Place, Windy Weston, families from Windy Weston Residents for Wind Power will present polling cards from a poll for or against the proposed wind farm at Windy Weston Headland[[1]]. When asked 'Do you want a wind farm at Windy Weston Headland' then 88 percent indicated 'YES'.

Sophie Passmore MP is being asked to support the development of the wind farm at Windy Weston Headland. The results of the poll will be sent to Councillors at Windy Weston District Council who will be considering the planning application in July.

[[4]]Pat Wilson from Windy Weston Residents for Wind Power said,
Our 'Wind-o-Meter' shows the overwhelming majority of people in Windy Weston support the development of a wind farm on the Headland. The wind farm means jobs for us and clean energy for 50,000 homes throughout the Country. Unlike burning coal, oil or gas for power there's no greenhouse gases so the wind farm helps limit global warming for us and our kids"

ENDS

Contact Pat Wilson: (mobile) 07999 999 9999

[[5]]Editors Notes

The Proposed Windy Weston Wind Farm consists of 30 wind turbines with a maximum capacity of 60MW which will provide electricity for a minimum of 50,000 homes offsetting the release of some 180,000 tonnes of carbon dioxide, the main greenhouse gas. The wind turbines are manufactured in Europe with substantial parts being manufactured in Britain. The proposed wind farm would occupy 10 hectares of land.

Photographs of the picture opportunity are available for publication without charge.

[[6]]Windy Weston Residents for Wind Power
C/o 34 Beech Wood Creasent,
Windy Weston,
Weston Peninsular

Fax: 01111 234 5678
Email: office@windywestonresidents.org.uk
Web: www.windywestonresidents.org.uk

Annotations

[1] Give Key Details

Put the date and time of publication of your release at the top. Either mark a press release: "For Immediate Use", followed by that day's date – which means it can be used at once, OR "Embargo" for a specific time and date – which means that it cannot be used until then. Do not use embargos unless you have a good reason for so doing – it will simply irritate.

[2] Photo Opportunity

If appropriate, include a separate box paragraph near the top of the release offering a 'photo opportunity' or 'photo call', to encourage local papers and TV to send cameras.

[3] First paragraph

Put ALL the key facts in the first paragraph, or even better the first sentence. If you want to know how to do this, read the news stories in any reasonable newspaper. You will find that the first paragraph is a concise summary of the whole story, and sets out WHO, WHAT, WHY, WHEN and WHERE (the so-called "5 Ws" of journalism, also known as Kipling's Riders). Note, get your facts right. You want to develop a reputation for accuracy. Don't risk damaging it.

[4] Quote

Include a quote from a key campaigner. This should be clearly indented or written in italics or both. This is spoken English and the expression of your opinion. It is likely to appear verbatim in the paper so make it interesting.

[5] Notes

If you need to give references for any facts, you can include notes at the end of the release. Number them, and include the numbers at the relevant point in the main release.

[6] Contacts

Put contact details at the bottom or top of each page of the release. Make sure they're accurate and that the contacts can in fact be contacted, especially during working hours when journalists will be working.

Using the press release

Stage 1. Write the release

Make up a template press release onto which details can be written. Create a logo and put it along with the name of your group and contact details at the top. Use the words "Press Release" in large writing. Use headed paper. Put the page number on each page of your release, in bold and in the form Page N of X. Press releases should be one side of A4, two sides maximum.

Stage 2. Send it out

Send your press release by both fax and e-mail if possible, and even by post when appropriate. The more ways you send it, the more chance there is that someone appropriate will read it!

Stage 3. Follow up

Your brilliant press release has gone to all your contacts. Now you need to follow it up. You must ring all your contacts to make sure they have received the release, and to ask if there is anything else they wish to know. Ringing up media folk in this way may make you feel like a door to door toothbrush salesman, but there is no alternative. Media organisations are chaotic, and things get lost. When the newsdesk says "Never seen it before", they may even be telling the truth. So send it again.

Stage 4. Record media contacts

You're phoned by media outlets using the contact details on the press release. What do you do? You record the details in your 'media log book'. This is a blank hardback note book, available from most stationers, that you use to log journalists calls. Divide each page into three columns: date of contact, media outlet name and details – name caller, their contact details, what they said, etc. Periodically the media organization's contact details can be transferred into your 'media contact book'. The media contact book is a hardback address book with A-Z tabs that you use solely for campaign media contacts. Given the importance of individual personal contacts then your media contact and log books are essential tools for future media work.

Interviews

Your release may inspire requests for both radio and TV interviews.

Television Interviews

- Recorded TV interviews (by far the most common kind) tend to be very short – they may use a clip as short as ten to twenty seconds. So be brief and incisive with your answers.
- While the cameraman is setting up the equipment, ask the reporter any questions you want answers to – for example, what will your first question be?
- Look at and talk to the reporter, not the camera. If eye contact makes you nervous, fix your gaze two inches over the interviewer's head. If you stumble with your answer in a recorded interview, stop and ask for the question to be put to you again.
- Appear relaxed, confident, and friendly in your body language. The appearance of confidence creates confidence.
- Try to suggest a good spot in your building or pick an interesting backdrop for the interview.
- Eccentricities of dress or behavior will distract the viewer. Always look tidy and "ready" for the interview. Try not to fidget, sway or rock from foot to foot.

Radio Interviews

- Radio interviews are generally short. You may get three minutes or so for the complete interview, enough time to make maybe two main points. Decide what these points are before you do the interview.
- Find out if the interview is live or taped. It can be either and this will help you decide how prepared you need to be.
- Remember who your audience is for radio interviews. It will be difficult for them to capture every word you say while they are driving in their car or running around the house.
- Speak clearly and avoid complicated language that would be difficult for the audience to understand. Do not use jargon. Jargon can be defined as any words or concepts understood only by a particular community. For example, green activists know what is meant by “sustainable development”. Most other people don't. Use simple words to paint a picture and express feeling. You are campaigning because you care about the issues. Make sure the audience understands this.
- If you stumble with your answer in a recorded interview, stop and ask for the question to be put to you again. In a live interview, keep talking or – in exceptional circumstances – ask for the question to be put again.
- Remember, anything you say can end up on the air. So if you do not want it repeated, don't say it.
- These are the basic techniques of successful media work. Don't worry if it doesn't go smoothly first time. Repetition is the key to success. Keep at it, and the journalists will soon be ringing you. Sometimes they will even call when you haven't sent them anything at all, just to get a comment on their story, or to see if you have something good coming up. Then you will know you have them hooked.

Conclusion

Remember: be truthful, be helpful and be precise. But there's no need to be solemn. A good joke may worth a hundred statistics.

Resource Guide

Online resources

There are a number of guides which can be viewed over the internet or downloaded.

www.spinproject.org A training organisation based in the United States that produces media skills publications for campaigners and activists, a good deal of which is available online, including a set of tutorials.

www.mediatrust.org.uk The Media Trust, which owns The Community Channel, publish a number of short online guides to various aspects of media work

www.tlio.org.uk/pubs The publications section of The Land is Ours website has a copy of George Monbiot's 'Activist Guide to the Media'. It is a recommended resource written by an experienced activist and media practitioner.

Books

How to use the Media: Friends of the Earth

Guardian Media Guide 2003 Steve Peak Atlantic Books 2002

News for a Change - An Advocate's Guide to Working with the Media Lawrence Wallack, Katie Woodruff, Lori Dorfman, Iris Diaz; Sage Publications
(<http://www.sagepub.com>) 1999

SPIN WORKS! A Media Guidebook for the Rest of Us Robert Bray, SPIN Project
(<http://www.spinproject.org>)
2000

Using the Media Maggie Jones National Council for Voluntary Organisations
(<http://www.ncvo-vol.org.uk>)
1992