

by ADAM BRUCE, chairman of the British Wind Energy Association

The 2020 goal for EU member states to supply 20% of their energy needs from renewables is a mighty one. If that target is to be met the proportion of electricity to be generated from renewables will be in the region of 35%. For the UK, with the EU's largest share of wind and marine resources, that target is ambitious but achievable. As part of that 35% mix we will need around 12GW of installed onshore wind and around 20GW of installed offshore wind generation.

Although the UK has just over 2GW of installed wind plant, the appetite in the renewables industry – and in the City – should be sufficient to propel us towards those goals.

However, industry and government need to renew the 'Renewables Covenant' that guides current policy making. That covenant is very simple: Government sets targets for renewable energy generation; industry develops suitable sites for that generation; Government then assesses and grants consent for those developments, while balancing the need to develop with the wider interests of the community.

The political and commercial case that underpins that covenant is driven by an overriding ambition to reduce CO2 emissions, the need to ensure security of energy supply in a market of increasing consumption and a broad requirement to keep the domestic price of electricity low.

Concerns surrounding security of energy supply have increased as the noises off from Russia have grown. The result is an ever-increasing awareness and acceptance of the need for clean, sustainable and dependable sources of energy – in short, for renewable energy.

Wind is currently the only scaleable and economically and commercially viable renewable electricity generating technology. The global installed capacity of wind electricity generation increased by almost 15,000MW in 2006, from 59,091MW to 74,223MW.

As more wind energy is delivered into the system it is increasingly clear that it has considerable value as a source of electricity for consumers. The basic fuel is free, so wind energy will always replace expensive sources of electricity at the margin.

And yet, while the opportunities are huge, the reality of development is more prosaic. Research shows that the time taken to determine wind farm planning applications is now much longer than for other large developments.

Last year 70% of all major development applications, whether office, housing or retail, were determined in the statutory 13-week period. Only 5% of onshore wind farm applications were determined in that time frame. The UK Government is already in danger of missing its 2010 target to have 10% of our electricity from renewables by a significant margin – not because the industry has failed to deliver, but because government, local and national, has not met its responsibilities under our 'Renewables Covenant'.