At 750MW, Gwynt y Mor is the largest of the project’s case studies, estimated to produce enough electricity to power 40% of Welsh homes, and its scale is significantly larger than the other offshore wind energy projects in the area. It has been controversial. A local opposition group based in Llandudno has campaigned against the project since it was first announced, and a local support group campaigned in favour. DECC announced planning consent in December 2008 and the project is likely to be operational by 2014.

Developer: npower Renewables. This will be their third offshore wind farm in the area. Rhyl Flats (90MW, 25 turbines) is currently in construction and North Hoyle (60MW, 30 turbines) has been operational for five years. The company also has hydro and marine energy projects in North Wales.

Sector: Offshore wind energy Scale: 750 MW (approx 200 turbines)

Site: 13 km (8 miles) off the North Wales coast at the nearest point to shore, 16km (10 miles) from Llandudno, sited within the North West strategic area for offshore wind energy development.

Decision process: taken by Department of Energy and Climate Change (DECC, formerly the Department of Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform, BERR), following written submissions by statutory consultees (e.g. the local authority, Countryside Council for Wales) and members of the public.

Timeline: the consent process took three years, during which time holding objections were submitted by statutory consultees (e.g. Countryside Council for Wales/CCW), the local authority recommended refusal, and the developer announced a community benefits package. DECC granted consent in December 2008.

Engagement with local residents
Alongside engagement with statutory stakeholders (e.g. Countryside Council for Wales), the developer engaged with local residents using methods such as public exhibitions, newspaper adverts, press releases, a website and information leaflets. Exhibitions were first held in 2004 and 2005 at the time of submitting the planning application. Between 2005 and 2008, a local opposition group (SOS, Save our Scenery) and a local support group (Sustainable Energy Alliance) sought to engage local people about the project, particularly in Llandudno, using methods such as a website and petitions. The opposition group wrote letters to the local paper and to DECC and lobbied local councillors. There is no indication of any direct engagement by the decision-making body (DECC) with local residents.

Data Collection: A total of 505 individuals took part in the research, conducted from March-June 2008. Six interviews: developer, opposition group, support group, local authority x 2, Countryside Council for Wales. Focus groups with local residents: two in Rhyl, two in Colwyn Bay and two in Llandudno (44 participants in total). Questionnaire survey of local residents: total responses 455 (219 in Llandudno and 236 in Colwyn Bay).
Results

1. How much do local residents support the project?
   Our findings show differences between the views of residents in Colwyn Bay and Llandudno. In Colwyn Bay, residents showed a spread of support (46.4%), opposition (28.1%) and neutral attitudes (25.4%). In Llandudno, there was less support for the project (31.8%), less neutral attitudes (17.6%) and a substantial minority (40.7%) who strongly opposed the wind farm.

2. What were the main reasons for public support and opposition?
   **Local impacts:** The results showed a spread of beliefs about benefits or drawbacks amongst Colwyn Bay residents, and that nearly half (49%) of Llandudno participants saw only drawbacks. In focus groups, people in Llandudno opposed the project because they viewed the town as a distinctive, historic place of natural scenic beauty - an escape from urban life, both for residents and tourists. They saw the project as ‘industrial’ in scale, an ‘eyesore’ that would ‘fence in the bay’ and deter tourists.

   **Developer engagement:** In Colwyn Bay and Llandudno, there were concerns about how the developer had engaged with local people, for example whether a lot of information had been provided or how much the developer had listened. There was some scepticism about the truthfulness of the photomontages. The community benefit offer was particularly negatively perceived in Llandudno, with 49% of respondents viewing it as a ‘bribe to silence opposition’.

   **Planning procedures:** few residents in either place regarded planning as fair (31% of Llandudno residents strongly disagreed). Large numbers of neutral responses (e.g. 52.5% in Colwyn Bay) suggest that many were unsure how decisions were made. In discussions, DECC was regarded as a mysterious ‘black hole’ and decision-making was regarded as secretive. Only 7% of respondents agreed that the decision should be taken in London.

   **Trust:** while many respondents in both places somewhat trusted the developer, lack of trust was particularly prevalent in Llandudno (48%), where complete trust in the local opposition group was strongest (23%). Trust in DECC was lacking in both places (58% in Llandudno, 47% in Colwyn Bay).

Conclusions: Gwynt y Mor proved controversial because residents were concerned about local impacts, the fairness of planning, and held little trust in either the developer or in DECC, colouring their perception of the benefit offer. Negative attitudes in Llandudno suggest the success of the local opposition group in arguing that the wind farm would threaten the place’s distinctive natural beauty and restorative qualities, damaging tourism.