

YOUR article on Sunderland's 200-year-old Fulwell windmill (The Journal, January 8) provoked a few thoughts. Windmills like Fulwell were abandoned because steam, and then electric, power allowed grain to be milled more efficiently and cheaply. Governments back then did not put a windmill levy on bread so that windmills could grind out guaranteed excess profits from an outmoded and inefficient technology. That is the equivalent of what is happening now. Wind powered electrical generators have been around since 1895 and the Americans and Danes have been building large "wind farms" for well over 30 years. The wind industry claims that wind power is a "mature" and "proven" technology that can compete on cost. Yet they howl with outrage if there is the slightest suggestion of reducing the subsidy paid to them under the Renewables Obligation. This hidden subsidy, paid from our electricity bills, accounts for about 70% of their earnings. The Government reviewed the RO last year and ignored advice from Ofgem, the industry regulator, the Carbon Trust and other expert advisory bodies by keeping the system and maintaining a level of subsidy for onshore wind that the National Audit Office found was twice what is needed to encourage most onshore wind proposals. Ofgem calculated that it costs between £184 and £481 to cut a tonne of carbon under the Renewables Obligation. This compares with a cost of between £12 and £70 under the European Union Emissions Trading Scheme. At this rate of "progress" we will soon be grinding our corn with windmills again. And bread will cost £10 per loaf. DON BROWNLOW, Norham, Berwick-upon-Tweed, Northumberland (website: www.moorsydeactiongroup.org.uk)