

Locals fight back as ‘monstrous’ wind turbines threaten Italy’s medieval charm

Activists fear that energy companies are pouncing on easily obtainable permits for projects that will ruin the countryside



James Graham, a resident of Tuscia, opposes the construction of wind turbines that will be visible from Orvieto and Civita di Bagnoregio

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In a field close to his house on the edge of Umbria, James Graham recently launched a drone and flew it almost as high as the 200m wind turbine that is to be erected on the spot.

The video he recorded took in the 14th-century cathedral in nearby Orvieto and the world-famous village of Civita di Bagnoregio, which sits perched on a rocky outcrop near the glittering waters of Lake Bolsena.

“If you can see all that from up there, it means the wind turbine they want to build will be visible from all those places,” said Graham, a British expatriate who moved to the area 12 years ago.



Graham and other campaigners hope to protect the countryside from hundreds of turbines

The turbine is one of seven planned that Graham, 63, and fellow residents claim will wreck this part of Tuscia, a stretch of rolling hills, lakes, castles and Etruscan tombs straddling the regions of Lazio, Umbria and Tuscany.

The locals are among a growing number of Italians who back renewable energy but argue that private firms pouncing on incentives and easy permits are destroying the countryside in the name of saving the planet.

This year thousands turned up for protest meetings in Sardinia, gaining support from the island’s governor, who [imposed an 18-month ban on new turbines](#) as requests to build them rose to 3,000.

Now an estimated 540 applications have been made in a swathe of Tuscia, from Pitigliano with its natural thermal baths to the town of Tuscania, home to an 8th-century church. The plans have prompted fears that the rural backwater which sits between Rome and the crowded cities of Tuscany will lose its appeal, just as tourism starts to take off.



Protesters believe the turbines violate a law stipulating that they must be 3km away from listed sites

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Standing at the site of the future turbine, Graham was joined by Carlo Maria Melone, 73, a farmer who discovered by chance on the internet that a chunk of his land, which has been farmed by his family for 200 years, would be expropriated for one of the seven turbines. “How does a private company working for profit get to take my land?” he asked.

Graham’s house, a converted 19th-century granary just over 600m away, boasts a 17-acre landscaped garden with 400-year-old oaks, which is open to the public.

He joined a group of residents and activists in a legal challenge against the turbines and says it is not just his property he is worried about. “We believe almost all the turbines violate an Italian law banning them from being built within 3km of listed sites, whether castles or [Etruscan tombs](#). If they get away with that, there will be a domino effect, a free-for-all across Tuscia,” said Graham, a multi-media artist who has exhibited around the world. “We feel so vulnerable and unprotected,” he added.

The group’s lawyer, Mario Chiti, said: “It’s the first time the 3km law has been overruled as far as we know.”

In July the group lost their case at a local administrative court but they hope to appeal to a higher court.

RWE, the [German company that has the permits for the turbines](#), said every Italian authority with a say in the permits, including the environment ministry, had declared that the turbines respected “all requirements, criteria and rules”.

The growth in permits given to build turbines in Italy is seemingly at odds with the scant sympathy shown for the European Union’s [Green Deal](#) by Giorgia Meloni’s government, which has limited the spread of solar panels on farmland.

“The reality is that commitments already made on expanding wind farms are being stuck to [in order to] avoid hurting the companies involved in the sector,” said Chiti.

Monica Tommasi, head of the environmental group Amici della Terra, said: “Companies continue to invest because of the incentives and the high price of electricity in Italy.”

Tommasi was among speakers at a protest meeting in Orvieto last week where 200 locals were shown maps covered with hundreds of dots marking where turbine applications have been made.

Luca Angelozzi, a member of the activists’ group Nova, which organised the meeting, said the regional government could yet get involved in the test case of the seven turbines. “They have the chance to decide, by the end of December, where turbines can be sited. That is our next hope and we are making a lot of noise,” he said.

Stefano Aluffi-Pentini, a tourism expert who lives in the area and was at the meeting, said the tourism potential of Tuscia was in the balance. “There is so much history here, including the medieval architecture, not to mention mountains, great views and the local golden tufa stone. Destroying tourism with these monstrous turbines is just short-sighted,” he said.