

P-04-473 Wind Farm Public Inquiry Financial Support – Correspondence from the petitioner to the Committee

There is a tremendous depth of feeling in regard to the lack of support given to Powys County Council and to the people of Powys by the Welsh Government.

Please find copy of letter below sent to the First Minister to be used as supporting information to the Petition (To-date I have not received a reply)

3rd March 2013

Rt. Hon. Carwyn Jones AM
First Minister
National Assembly for Wales
Cardiff Bay
Cardiff
CF99 1NA

Dear Mr Jones,

Financial Assistance for Public Inquiry

My understanding is that the Welsh Government is refusing to give financial assistance to Powys County Council to help them defend their position at a public inquiry later this year. I understand that they have received a small amount of funding since 2010 to help with the extra work involved with the large number of planning applications.

I recently read the statement below, reportedly by a spokesman for the Welsh Government on a BBC Website. Which to my utter disbelief said:-

"It must be remembered that the decision to object to the wind farm applications referred to is entirely down to Powys County Council." "They were aware of the financial implications when they decided to object to these schemes." Source BBC Wales (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-mid-wales-20727030>)

If this is correct I believe that refusing to give financial help to fight proposed wind farm schemes in Powys is an affront to democracy.

Furthermore it gives the impression that you are backing the wind farm developers.

I cannot believe that this view of the democratic and legal Public Inquiry process is held by elected members or Civil Service staff, or indeed by you the First Minister who was called to the Bar at Gray's Inn. Also a member of Amnesty International, whose stated aim is to stand up for humanity and human rights and protect individuals wherever justice, fairness, freedom and truth are denied.

Surely you should be supporting the people of Powys. The Welsh Government has a responsibility to provide funding to the County Council as it was Welsh Government planning policy TAN 8, that encouraged wind farm developers to Mid Wales in the first place.

Powys has received a very high number of applications to construct wind farms on an industrial scale. The wind farm developers stand to make millions of pounds out of government energy subsidies.

The people of Mid Wales are not alone in their well founded concerns over the construction of wind farms and high voltage power lines.

Last week Shropshire County Councillors expressed 'deep concerns' about controversial wind farm plans which could see high voltage electricity pylons built through parts of Shropshire and Mid Wales. A full meeting of Shropshire Council saw councillors almost unanimously back a motion expressing fears about the potential impact of the National Grid's proposals. As with Powys County Council, they are being responsible in carrying out their democratic duty, following the will of the people who elected them, acting on their behalf and in their best interests.

I am aware that we are facing very tough financial times, but I believe you are penalising the people of Powys unfairly by not providing substantial funding to help finance the Public Inquiry. Powys County Council is already under huge financial pressure. Without doubt they should receive financial assistance from the Welsh Government.

Yours sincerely,

John Day

Copies to:

Mr. Russell George AM;

Rt. Hon Glyn Davies MP

Cllr. Susan McNicholas, Chair, Powys County Council

Jonathan Wilkinson, Chairman of Montgomeryshire Against Pylons

Wind farm inquiry costs

National planning policies concentrating wind farm applications in Powys will have a massive impact on the county council's budgets with a near £3m predicted cost.

The Welsh Government's Technical Advice Note 8 Planning for Renewable Energy 2005 identified seven strategic areas in Wales suitable for wind farm development with two wholly and one partly in Powys.

Cabinet Member for Planning and Regeneration, Councillor Graham Brown said: "A consequence of the Welsh Government's TAN 8 guidance is that Powys has experienced a much higher proportion of wind farm applications than many unitary authorities in Wales with huge associated costs.

"The number of applications and their size has not surprisingly generated huge public interest and concern. The council has already invested considerable resources into ensuring that any planning decisions are debated in public using webcasting technology.

"As an executive body we have objected to five large applications – Llaithdu, Carnedd Wen, Llanbadarn Fynnydd and Llandinam and a grid connection from Llandinam – decisions that will result in a major combined planning inquiry being held in the county next year.

"The costs associated with a planning enquiry are considerable and will be an additional budget burden at a time when the council is already facing huge financial pressure. We have been forced to set aside £2.8m to defend the county council's interests at the inquiry.

"I am sure that when the Welsh Government adopted TAN 8 it did not anticipate the huge financial burden it would be placing on councils. We are appealing to current governments both in Cardiff and Westminster to recognise this unfair situation and provide additional resources to councils like Powys who have been placed in this very difficult position."

"TAN 8 policy was not of our making and the residents of Powys should not be made to suffer as a result. The financial consequences of the Welsh Government's policy could have a detrimental impact on our services," he added.

Source: Powys County Council Internet site

<http://www.powys.gov.uk/index.php?id=14550&L=0#>

Below are some of the relevant comments that I have received from members of the public who have signed the Petition.

The decision to withhold any funding to Powys County Council with regard to their enormous costs which will be incurred when conducting the conjoined wind farm inquiries, is iniquitous and undemocratic, and made even more grossly unfair given the reduction in normal council funding for the current year.

In my view it is little short of state oppression by vindictive ministers who care little about the Welsh countryside, its people, culture, economy or welfare. This abandonment of responsibility for a significant region of Wales, in total defiance of local opinion and sense of democracy, is unprecedented in both scale and rancour in modern Britain.

I support this petition because the WAG has shown a total disregard, if not complete contempt for the people of Mid Wales. They have threatened and bullied Powys County Council over these huge wind developments.

They do not appear to have any interest whatsoever in the effect these wind factories on our glorious landscape will have on tourism, one of the most important elements of the mid Wales economy.

All this destruction and devastation will provide merely a part time, intermittent, unpredictable and incredibly expensive trickle of electricity. It is time the Welsh Government and Westminster finally admitted that they have got it wrong and acknowledges that wind energy is a monumental folly.

Failure to provide funding will inevitably lead to a reduction or loss of essential services within Powys. Yet again the people of Powys are justified in thinking that the Welsh Government has let them down.

The belligerent stance the First Minister and the Welsh Government are taking in relation to Powys County Council is hampering local democracy. They continue to point the finger of blame at the UK Government, which considering it was Welsh Government planning policy through TAN 8 that has drawn wind farm developers to Mid Wales, is quite extraordinary.

Now the Welsh Government is saying that if Powys County Council couldn't afford to take the decision to appeal through a public inquiry, it should have never objected to the development schemes in the first place.

Clearly this First Minister has absolutely no regard to local democratic accountability and is determined to push his policies through even if that means substantial additional cost to Powys residents.

I urge the First Minister and his Government to support the people of Powys.

I thank the administrative staff in the Petitions Section for their help and support. I also thank those who have signed the petition and our elected representatives in Powys for their support.

John Day