

Environment and Sustainability Committee

Inquiry into Energy Policy and Planning in Wales
EPP 90 – Diane Whittingham

Dear Environment and Sustainability Committee,

I am writing to complain about the TAN 8 programme and specifically the lack of consultation with regard to the environmental impact of the planned Wind Farms in the Mid Wales area. This policy seems to have a total disregard for TAN 5 & 15 policies. I understand that there are proposals for a large number of wind farms in Montgomeryshire. I do not feel that the residents of Montgomeryshire or Shropshire had been made aware of the huge impact of these Wind Farms nor of the plan to connect these farms to a local hub at either Abermule or Cefn Coch then to the National Grid with a series of over ground cables of 400kv attached to massive pylons, when the TAN 8 policy was voted for at the Welsh Assembly.

Tan 8 has a number of serious flaws. The large areas of landscape zoned for turbines as SSA's (Strategic Search Areas), were set no upper limit on number or size of turbines for construction. The proposal for exporting this potential electricity from the area was a single wooden pole line that looped around all the SSA's, collecting the energy and running it across Shropshire on a single wooden pole line to the National Grid, no hub or 400kv were mentioned. There was limited engagement with National Grid about possible reinforcement of the grid. It was given just one paragraph. At the consultation meeting I went to a National Grid representative stated that they are legally obliged to connect these wind farms but no thought was given to the impact of this.

The TAN 8 policy gave traffic issues one paragraph. No study was done on how the wind turbines would reach the proposed sites on minor country roads. No consideration was given to the socio-economic impact these plans would have on Wales. There was no mention of EMF risks for those living near the power lines or hub. No consideration was given to the environmental impact this would have on the landscape. It failed to consider the cumulative impact of a 400kv, wind farms and 132kv lines. Turbines in 2003 were 110m high, and are now 140m+. TAN 8 has 'tied the hands' of the planning system in that it has been set up to encourage the sacrificing of large areas of landscape with no cumulative considerations. Advances in technology since 2003 mean we are facing a huge number of massively taller turbines which need a hub and 400kv power lines, whilst figures show last year wind energy produced just 18% of its stated capacity because of reducing wind pattern. With so much loss for so little gain how can this permanent destruction be justified? I think there should be a judicial review of the TAN 8 policy.

I believe the National Grid's (and Scottish Power and SPEN's consultations) consultation on the planned routes will provide flawed and unreliable evidence in favour of one route or another route, and therefore should be disregarded as actually there is no suitable route through the Severn or Vrynwy Valley. The people representing the National Grid at the consultation meeting told me this after they asked if I was carrying a wire. They didn't want that said on record. At least National Grid are consulting the people which is more than the Welsh Assembly have done in their decision to site on shore wind farms in Mid Wales. Most

people had no real idea about how the proposals for the wind farms would impact on them and there should have been widespread consultation much earlier in this process.

TAN 8 states that not all land within the strategic search areas may be economic or environmentally suitable. I grew up on a farm two miles downstream from Abermule. The farm, Lower Llegodig is prone to flooding. The water does not come over ground it bubbles up through the ground because the water table is high. The water then moves down slowly encompassing villages and homes on route to Shrewsbury and beyond. I believe that wind companies tend to scope out the risk of flooding and the various schemes are not seen as a whole entity. Having read the environmental impact assessment for the Dyfnant forest, I noted that the company played down the tributary of the Banwy, the Afon Twrch, calling it a small stream. It is if it is viewed at high summer, but in winter it quickly turns into a raging grade III white water, this water then flows into the Banwy, then to the Vrynwy and then to the Severn. I now live at Pontysgawrhyd Farm, adjacent to the Vrynwy and last winter I observed the river reaching its highest level in years. As a kayaker, following a flood, it is horrifying to see the number of dead sheep and plastic and other debris hanging metres above the water line. I feel that many people simply do not understand the land and the rivers of this area, how quickly the water can rise and the uncertainty of how a large scale development may impact on them. I am concerned about the massive environmental impact of these farms could cause increased flooding in areas already prone to worse and worse flooding. Every single bit of concrete used to support these massive turbines will displace water which will cause increased flooding downstream affecting not only Mid Wales but Shrewsbury and towns along the whole of the river Severn. The cost of the increased need for flood defences has not been taken into consideration. This issue should be assessed and reviewed.

The wind farms and industrialisation of a large area of mid wales will destroy valuable bat, buzzard, curlew and red kite populations. I do not think that appropriate Environmental Impact Assessments have been adequately carried out. If they have been carried out I would like to see the evidence of these assessments and the name of the organisation that carried out these assessments.

A strategic Environmental Assessment carried out for Powys Council stated that wind farms are not compatible with Strategic Environmental topics. Are the wind farms going to reduce unemployment levels? No, few jobs will be created for the size of the development. Are they going to increase business and employment? No, tourism in this area will be adversely affected, affecting existing jobs and businesses. Are they going to conserve biodiversity at all levels? No, wind farms do not improve biodiversity. Are they going to conserve and enhance characteristic habitats and native species? No, they will destroy them. Are they going to reduce contamination and safeguard soil quantity and quality? No, soil will not be safeguarded. Carbon realised from peat bogs will outweigh the benefits of this so called green energy. Are they going to improve water courses? No, culverts will be displaced or filled in. Are they going to reduce risk of flooding? No. They will increase the risk of flooding.

The pylons are going to destroy or affect distinctive natural and historical landscapes including Roman hill forts and archaeological sites. Every single Broad Route corridor in the National Grids proposal goes past sites of special scientific interest, scheduled ancient

monuments and special areas of conservation and I would argue that all routes are through areas of outstanding natural beauty although only one route is deemed as such. I would like to know if an assessment on the costs to local tourism and trade has been carried out as tourism is a major employer in this area. I have spoken to people who say they won't stay in mid wales if the proposals to industrialise Montgomeryshire go ahead.

The effect of house prices is also a concern. I put my house on the market a couple of months before the National Grid road shows started, we had people viewing the property every couple of weeks and at one stage sold it, only for the sale to fall through due to the buyers not being able to secure a mortgage. Following the publicity surrounding the pylons, when it became known that my property is on six of the nine proposed routes, we have had only one viewing and no offers. This issue has clearly impacted on our ability to sell our property, perhaps making it worth less or even unsellable. I worked hard to be able to buy a property, I need to move, so I am perhaps faced with the prospect of walking away from a property which I bought for £400 000 depending on where the route will go and where the pylons are sited. It is already becoming more and more difficult to live in this area as services are cited far away and as public transport is limited and does not reflect peoples complex travel patterns. People have to travel by car and petrol costs are huge.

I would like to see a cost benefit analysis of tax payer expenditure on turbines versus the benefits of these turbines as I understand that these turbines are less than 18% efficient. Taxpayers will be paying twice for their electricity, directly from the company and through the tax system. Everyone understands the importance of renewable energy but if individual homes were given more help to generate their own electricity and conserve energy then the energy savings can match the electricity of the turbines. It is particularly offensive that yet once again, Wales is expected to be industrialised and destroyed in order to provide resources, this time electricity, mainly for England. At least the Victorians buried their water pipes from Lake Vrynwy to Liverpool underground.

Most importantly, I am concerned about the Health benefits of these power lines especially as children's cancer services are being moved even further away from this area which means that people have to travel many miles (35+ miles) for cancer care. Shrewsbury and Telford NHS Trust were happy to ignore the risks to the people of Mid Wales and move services further away in order to best suit themselves. When women and midwives get up at a meeting and say that women and babies will die if services are moved away but then the Trust still goes ahead and does it anyway it shows a complete contempt for the people of Powys. This seems to be with the support of both the Welsh Assembly government and the UK government. The National Grid exhibition stated that although the epidemiological evidence suggests a link that there is no overall consensus that these pylons are a risk and therefore clearly misrepresented the Draper research (2005) in their literature. When I challenged the representative of National Grid on the research and then asked him if he would live with young children near a 400 KV power line, he said he would not! That answer I believe speaks volumes, here in Montgomeryshire, we are being sacrificed. National Grid's interpretation of the research is from a highly positivist paradigm and reflects the biased view of government that the need for electricity for all triumphs over the rights of the individual, however, under the Human Rights Act everyone has the right of life and respect for their property. Compulsory purchase will be used to site the pylons and the threat of

illness disregards the rights of the people affected by these proposals. I am not impressed with the concept of the Pylons being redesigned. The health risks will still be there. The BBC in particular seems to be biased towards wind farms and pylons even used Radio 4's "Thought for the day" as part of their propaganda weapons. It disgusts me that the government seeks to manipulate public opinion in this way.

I am also worried that the Wind Farm and energy companies and those benefitting from investments in wind energy have a disproportionate ability to influence politicians. How can David Cameron be objective about this issue if his father in law is a turbine tycoon? I would not like to think that the whole wind farm proposals for the countryside is all about the powers that be lining their own pockets, yet looking at the research, it's pretty clear that the numbers don't stack up, alternatives such as ground source heating or solar power would provide individual homes with reliable energy sources and decrease their bills, yet wind energy is unreliable and increases peoples bills. It is inefficient to site power stations far for the need for power because of the transmission costs and loss of electricity on route. My 5 year old understands this as a basic concept, so how come politicians don't??

I would really like to see individual homes and farms supported to generate their own electricity, perhaps through interest free loans where instead of an electricity bill the loan is paid back. Each home would be assessed to see the best solution from a range of eco solutions such as ground source, solar, wood chip and so on. If they can't generate their own then the homes should be super insulated to reduce energy use. I would love it if Montgomeryshire paved the way for this to happen and became the first eco county! I would love solar power but can't afford the outlay, my mother has it to heat her water and it has cut her bills in half over the ten years that she has had it. I think it is great especially as she is a pensioner with limited income.

I do not think the Welsh Assembly Government or the Westminster Government care much about Mid Wales or ever have but I do think they have underestimated the strength of feeling in the community about these proposals. No one wants these Wind Farms, or Hubs or Pylons and we will fight to keep them away from our beautiful area. My concern is that the government and press are not critical of the wind power industry and have blindly accepted that wind power is the way forward. Groups against wind power are dismissed as nimbys and the planning process is weighted heavily in favour of supporting these applications. This is undemocratic and unfair. Wind farms are unreliable and inefficient and all over the country local groups are realising how little the government cares about the concerns of local people and are blindly following the mantras of the green lobby groups and the absolutely silky smooth persuasion of the energy companies. We do live in democracy though and people should be listened to and not dismissed.

Yours Sincerely,

Diane Whittingham,