

Environment and Sustainability Committee

Inquiry into Energy Policy and Planning in Wales
EPP 134 – David Bellamy

Dear Sirs,

I am writing in response to your consultation on wind energy implications for Mid-Wales and the associated infrastructure.

I regard TAN 8 as a deeply flawed ruling rushed through by an incompetent committee and based on inadequate information, without consultation with those living in the area affected, and sincerely hope that this time a full, unhurried and detailed investigation will take place to examine every aspect of how a future policy on renewables will affect Mid-Wales.

TAN 8 shamefully involved no environmental study - an unforgiveable omission;

TAN 8 did not investigate the devastating effect of thousands of abnormal loads driving through Mid-Wales;

TAN 8 made little effort to consider health issues or the effect on the local economy of flooding the area with massed wind turbines.

Tourism

The Mid-Wales economy relies heavily on tourism, and any suggestion that tourists will come to see wind turbines or wind energy visitor centres is wishful thinking: they come to Mid-Wales for peace and tranquility, to enjoy unspoilt rolling countryside, the type of countryside that is becoming rarer in Britain. There are many foreign visitors and through my work I attract quite a number who are here most definitely for the quality of landscape beauty. Proposals to flood the area right across the heart of Wales will have a devastating effect on the local economy and rob those from other parts of Wales and beyond of a resource for recharging their batteries and finding peace and quiet where they can relax away from the ills of life. Many visitors are walkers who will certainly be put off coming to an industrial landscape.

Furthermore, the effect of exceptionally-large loads of turbine parts on this scale will not only jam up the highways for locals, but will have a killer effect on tourists.

Destruction of landscape features

Many turbines are being built on peat blankets, and thus thousands of tonnes of CO₂ is released into the atmosphere. As in the case of Cefn Croes this has become an ecological disaster, as the developer of the wind farm site admitted to me recently. However, I do not get such an honest admission from the politicians involved and this is little short of scandalous. Likewise, vast swathes of forestry are scheduled to be torn up to accommodate turbines, when it is well known that trees are an excellent counter to carbon release. Additionally, wildlife habitats are being destroyed in the name of so-called environmental progress.

Wildlife

What studies have been carried out on how such massed turbines affects wildlife? I don't believe any have taken place by government. Raptors are especially vulnerable to spinning turbine blades, but sadly the organisation most responsible for this, ie,

the RSPB, is prejudiced by accepting financial income from the wind industry and hence will only oppose certain sites.

National Parks

There are no areas of protected status between the Brecon Beacons NP and that of Snowdonia, while in England they are creating national parks in areas that are of less scenic quality than much of Mid-Wales. With the encroachment of wind turbines to the very edges of national parks, such as at Pontneddfechan on the southern boundary of the Brecon Beacons NP, even these areas are under threat, for much of the southern part of the NP is now dominated by this wind farm, which from many angles appears to be within the national park itself. This is unacceptable in a civilised society and crass beyond belief.

Noise considerations

Low frequency noise does not affect everyone, but for those who suffer in this way the effect can be devastating, affecting sleep, concentration, ability to study, inducing headaches and other symptoms. Despite much evidence on this, the government refuses to take it seriously and those affected are not permitted any compensation, although this may soon change, especially given independent research into noise effects. As yet no area in the UK has been subjected to the massed turbine-scape that is proposed for Mid-Wales, so it would be highly irresponsible to continue without carrying out a thorough and unbiased investigation into this potentially devastating issue.

Amplitude modulation is a much more tangible noise problem, exacerbated by higher winds and by larger turbine blades. The last study on turbine noise (ETSU R1997) was carried out in 1997 when turbines were relatively small compared to the giants of today. Given the enormous increase in the size of the blades it is vital that an updated investigation on amplitude modulation is carried out without delay.

Visual considerations

Wind turbines present two different problems in a visual context:

1. The intrusion into scenic natural landscapes
2. The visual effect on the health of residents

Those advocating wind energy speak of how they find turbines 'attractive and a potent symbol of a new, clean, green energy process.' Within an industrial complex they may well seem to be attractive, but within the Mid-Wales countryside they are alien and completely unnatural, out of scale with every other feature - particularly those standing 606 feet high, or greater - and destroy any sense of rural beauty or charm. They simply create an industrial complex that threatens to run from the Welsh Marches to the Cardigan Bay coast. Added to the vertical dimension will be new roads torn out of the hillsides, pylons, industrial buildings and associated infrastructure.

Much is discussed regarding noise effects on health, but the visual issue can also cause considerable problems if massed wind farms are introduced on an even greater scale. Wind turbines are designed to work on high ground, their structures highly visible in most lighting conditions and strikingly so in strong sunlight. Their design is such that they present a two-directional diagonal arrangement at all times,

and diagonals will always emphasise restlessness, which destroys any sense of rural tranquility. With massed turbines surrounding communities this will become overwhelmingly oppressive, as indeed will the vertical sections of the turbines which present a sense of imprisonment.

The intimidating scale of what is proposed for Mid-Wales will exacerbate these two vital visual aspects to an unacceptable degree.

Flooding

Construction activities and the building of turbine bases with so much concrete contribute to increasing the speed of rainfall run-off in the uplands, thus exacerbating flood potential in the many low-lying areas already susceptible to flooding. This is another area where a thorough investigation is required.

Turbine reliability and disposal

There are a great many cases of turbines exploding, catching fire, collapsing, and causing damage to nearby structures. Over 150 people died in the USA in 2009 in turbine-related incidents. Photographs and video footage of many of these spectacular events are freely available on the internet.

The disposal of turbine blades is causing great concern in Denmark, for instance, as mountains of these parts are growing from damaged and old blades. Burning them creates a toxic waste and this will increase dramatically as the number of turbines increases.

Employment

Wind developers and Friends of the Earth quote employment as a positive outcome to windfarms, but once these are built there is rarely any local benefit. The turbines are usually operated from abroad. Given the almost certain destruction of the tourist industry there will be vastly more jobs lost than created, and the UK is in a very negative situation on this front already.

Other issues

An industry that gets paid thousands of pounds every time it is told to shut down its turbines because we have too much energy is clearly an absolute loser.

Many of the developments in the pipeline are so large they will be decided by Westminster, not WAG; by ministers who will not visit the affected area to see what effect their actions will have on the local population, thus treating Mid-Wales like some left-over colony unfit for democracy. Local developments should be decided locally, but we are now in danger of completely losing a treasure that is very much at the heart of the Welsh heritage and creating a new sub-culture of people dependent on the handouts of a diminishing working population, and impoverishing a nation because its administrators are concerned solely with energy targets that are completely out of fairyland.

This, I might add, is only the tip of the iceberg in the case against wind energy.

Yours faithfully,

David Bellamy

