

Environment and Sustainability Committee

Inquiry into Energy Policy and Planning in Wales

EPP 233 - Brechfa Forest and Llanllwni Mountain Tourism Cluster Association

Submission re Tan8 and the designation of Brechfa Forest as a strategic search area.
by Brechfa Forest and Llanllwni Mountain Tourism Cluster Association.

The Welsh government strategies TAN6 and TAN16 focus on the importance of the development of sustainable communities, specifically quoting the example of a sustainable community as one which makes the most of the recreation and tourism opportunities of open access land they adjoin. However, TAN8 directly conflicts these strategies by designating our major forests, which are all open access land, as suitable sites for wind farms. No research was undertaken into the economic impact on each strategic search area, or on Wales as a whole prior to selling the rights to apply for planning permission for wind farms to developers.

We ask that Welsh Government is urged to comply with their policies to support the development of sustainable communities. TAN8 should be revised as a matter of urgency to prevent it causing further damage to the Welsh economy. There have been a number of independent studies which show that windfarms cause 'migration' of tourists away from the area in which they are constructed. The economic impact on each strategic search area in TAN8 should be researched and where it is clear that planning permission will not be granted due to the impact on the local economy that area should be removed from the list of strategic search areas.

Brechfa Forest and Llanllwni Mountain form the south western end of the Cambrian Mountain Range in Carmarthenshire. The area has benefited from regeneration programs developed by Carmarthenshire County Council and supported by EU funding via the Welsh Government focusing on assisting the community to make the most of the potential of the forest and mountain as a tourist destination and for recreation.

The Brechfa Forest area is one of the regions benefiting from inclusion in the Cambrian Mountain Initiative. The aim of the Cambrian Mountain Initiative is to develop a strong, sustainable economy in the region linked to the attractiveness of the landscape. The partners in the project include the Welsh Government, the Forestry Commission, Countyside Council of Wales, County Councils and community groups. The president is HRH the Prince of Wales.

The Cambrian Mountain Initiative focuses on supporting the community in each area to take the lead in developing the local economy based on the strengths and features of the region. The tourism cluster group are a group of business owners working together and with outside agencies on projects for the benefit of the community. We are currently working with both Carmarthenshire County Council tourism department and Trinity St David University on projects to evaluate the current value of the tourism industry in the area and to identify opportunities to supporting and expanding the employment. We are using the standard methods

of identifying the number of businesses providing accommodation to tourists within 10km of Brechfa Forest and value to the economy of those businesses. These are the same methods that are used to evaluate the success of projects to establish a tourist attraction using EU funding via WAG and are based on the information held by the tourism department of Carmarthenshire County Council. **The work is scheduled to be completed by the end of October and we request the opportunity to supply a full report to you once it is completed. While only half of the area of economic benefit has been researched, we have already identified 256 businesses providing holiday accommodation to visitors to Brechfa Forest. There are no alternative tourist attractions in the area, if planning permission is granted for wind farms in the forest, these businesses will no longer be viable. In addition the local pubs, shops, cafes and craft businesses all depend to some extent on the visitors to the area.**

We have researched the economic impact of just one of the 3 wind farms for which planning applications are expected to be submitted in the near future. In that case the economic value of the tourism businesses within a 10km radius of the site was £8.2 million a year using the baseline figures for occupancy and average visitor spend quoted by Visit Wales.

We have been shocked to discover that no analysis of the economic impact on the area was undertaken before including Brechfa Forest as a strategic search area under Tan8. At all stages of the process this is the first time this work has been done for the Brechfa Forest area.

The inclusion of Brechfa Forest as a strategic search area within TAN8 has already had a negative effect on the local economy, Existing businesses are reporting that they are not prepared to invest in opportunities to expand due to the impact a windfarm would have on their business if planning permission is granted.

We ask that Brechfa Forest is removed from the list of strategic search areas for wind farms on the grounds that planning permission would not be granted due to the economic impact any such development would have on the local economy.

Brechfa Forest and Llanllwni Mountain Tourism Cluster Association