

Environment and Sustainability Committee

Inquiry into Energy Policy and Planning in Wales

EPP 257 – Miss Layla Long

To The Environment and Sustainability Committee, National Assembly for Wales.

Dear Sir/Madam,

I am writing this letter to show my objection to the development of more windfarms in Powys Midwales and to the proposals by National Grid and SPEN to build numerous 26m high steel pylons and 132kv lines to connect undetermined windfarms to the proposed hub sites in Abermule and Cefn Coch. I strongly oppose all proposals for the following reasons:

POOR CONSULTATION

The meaning of CONSULT in the English dictionary is;

'1. seek information or advice from (a person, book, watch, etc) 2 (often foll. by with) refer to a person for advice, an opinion, etc 3 seek permission or approval from (a person) for a proposed action.'

National Grid and SPEN are not consulting us. We have been told through your consultation process that these proposals are not an option, that they WILL be going ahead whether we oppose them or not. They are not seeking our approval, because ultimately they tell us that this will make no difference. They are DICTATING to us not 'consulting' us.

Myself and others in this rural community are outraged that when consultation events were scheduled in the area 'Rhiwhiriaeth' - which is bang smack in the centre of the proposed National Grid pylon route and associated infrastructure - were not considered to be important to consult.

WE HAVE NOT BEEN CONSULTED PROPERLY. We 'have' a community Centre which should have been used to consult a community which you are proposing to transform with your pylons. The National Grid are proposing to erect 50meter high pylons on our doorsteps, the very least they can do is to come and consult us! Instead, members of our community (many of whom are elderly) had to travel across the miles to visit a consultation in either Llanfair Caereinion or Adfa, both of which are nowhere near as affected by your proposals as Rhiwhiriaeth is!

WE HAD TO APPROACH THE NATIONAL GRID AND SPEN TO 'PLEAD' FOR A CONSULTATION ABOUT THEIR PROPOSALS IN OUR COMMUNITY CENTER! We secured a date with SPEN but the National Grid REFUSED to come. WE HAVE BEEN LEFT FEELING INSULTED.

Are we not 'worth' informing? The people who would be affected most by these proposals are not being consulted properly. National Grid and SPEN are not being CONSIDERATE nor RESPECTFUL of the people of mid-wales's right to be consulted properly.

It was of great surprise that the choice to inform a rural, farming community of your proposals and the only way of obtaining a consultation feedback form came at the most difficult time of year for the majority of residents, the farmers. Lambing season was right in the middle of your chosen time to consult this farming community. Many farmers were unable to attend the local consultations, let alone have time to read the information about it. This is ridiculous. Surely National Grid and SPEN should have been aware and taken this into account if they are so keen to consult 'everyone'.

As a Welsh woman I speak fluent Welsh and know many families in this area who speak nothing but Welsh in their day to day lives. These Welsh speaking families have been totally let down by the consultation process. There has been a serious lack of Welsh speaking members present at consultation events! It is very difficult to communicate vital information to Welsh speakers when they are faced with only unfamiliar words in English from English staff. Many Welsh speakers had only bilingual posters to read, but felt unable to ask their own questions without doing so in Welsh. We 'are' in Wales and the least the National Grid and SPEN can do is to recognise that we have our own language and want to talk one to one with your staff just as English speakers could.

The feedback forms provided were only available from visiting a consultation event. These forms

should have been sent to every address. It is not fair that members of the community could lose out on expressing their opinion because they did not attend a consultation event. Many Llanfair and Welshpool residents did not even know that feedback forms existed and it was hard for them to obtain a feedback form without travelling miles to the next consultation event.

The feedback forms provided are DELIBERATELY DEVISIVE. It is a closed questionnaire, the public have no option but to follow the answers chosen by the National grid and SPEN. THEY HAVE CREATED THE QUESTIONS 'AND' THE REPLIES WHICH THEY WANT FROM US. There is no option to object. Instead they are playing two communities against each other, which is totally wrong. At the consultation events I found staff to be very patronising. Many of my serious and important questions were laughed at to my face by 'National grid and SPEN' staff. This is unacceptable. I was treated by staff as if I had absolutely no say, and no reason to be at the consultation. It was National grid and SPEN staff 'telling' me and my family what was going to happen to our community instead of actually consulting us. Staff had very little knowledge of the area which would be greatest impacted by these proposals. When trying to discuss matters about certain remote areas, they were unable to give any significant reply.

Every member of staff was oblivious to the natural habitat which proposals would have a direct impact on. I asked a number of questions about birds which migrate to the lakes to the north of my property and about the otters and bats that inhabit the pylon and turbine routes proposed but staff didn't even realise that these wild, protected and vulnerable creatures are in the heart of the routes proposed for pylons/turbines! This is information they 'should' know.

At consultation events and in the initial information sent by post, I was disappointed not to see any photo-montages of the proposed hub, turbines or pylons as they would appear at the proposed sites/routes. To give the members of the public an idea of the changes you are facing us with. It would be beneficial for all communities to have an idea of the scale of change that we may be faced with if these proposals go ahead.

I was surprised that no route corridors from strategic search area D to the hub were put forward for consideration, and yet are set to be developed so will need a connection in the near future. I did not see SSE renewables represented at most events either.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

I had absolutely no adequate response from the National grid or SPEN when asking about the environmental issues involved in these proposals. A huge scale development, lines of pylons for miles across an area of outstanding natural beauty such as Cefn Coch and Abermule will have devastating consequences for our wildlife.

From Cefn Coch area there are otters, curlews, red kites, buzzards, bats (such as the Lesser horseshoe bat), pine martins, badgers, foxes, various species of Owl, Peregrin Falcon, Red squirrels, Hen harriers, Stag beetles, water vole, lapwing, fritillary butterflies and dragonflies, great crested newt many of which are protected species. These creatures are habitating in the very area which the proposed route for pylons, turbines and other associated infrastructure tear through.

This (and many other areas which would be affected by these proposals, especially DYFNANT FOREST) is such a rural, secluded area is one in which wildlife, flora and fauna can thrive in their natural habitat, and this is all because it is an area 'untouched' by industry.

TO DEVELOP ACROSS MILES OF UNTOUCHED LANDSCAPE WOULD DEVASTATE THE NATURAL HABITAT WHICH HAS BEEN ESTABLISHED OVER GENERATIONS.

To lose this strong environment in mid Wales in which species that are endangered- such as curlews and red kites- would be unforgivable and affect the future of wildlife in this area. The scale upon which this devastation would cause, whether the ripping up of hedges on quiet country roads to accommodate the transportation of abnormally large loads (for hub/windfarm/pylons) or the destruction of natural peat bogs, wildflower meadows and ancient grasslands, this all contributes to the destruction which the National grid and SPEN proposes for the future of Mid Wales's natural environment.

The lakes at 'Llyn Hir' to the north of our home and 'Horeb Chapel' have birds such as Sandpipers, dunlin, black-tailed godwit, mallard, pochard, tufted duck, goldeneye, teal, wigeon, gadwall, great crested grebe, mute swan, Canada goose and cormorant. These are all nesting and visiting them.

All of which fly across the proposed route for these pylons and turbines in cefn coch area. It is not only the 50 meter high pylons and lines which would affect our environment but also the cumulative impact of the windfarms, hub and 400kv and 132kv lines. This has NOT been considered.

VISUAL IMPACT

Landmap grading undervalues our beautiful landscape. National Grid and SPEN staff have no idea of the appearance and surroundings where routes have been drawn up for their proposals nor have the majority of them ever set foot in the valleys which their pylons and turbines would damage.

These large scale changes to our landscape are incomprehensible. Communities are in shock that all of a sudden industry are allowed to dominate the majority with these proposals and transform the daily lives of the people of mid wales. Thrusting upon our rural communities 50 meter high pylons, large scale windfarms, a 19 acre hub and all other aspects of associated infrastructure. Where will they stop? After all, in the 'SP NETWORKS initial strategic optioneering report' March 20011 they highlight the opportunity for more:

'4.6- Mid wales is an area of significant wind farm generation development.....These connections are due to be made from 2015 onwards. In addition, 300MW of generation capacity is known about but not yet contracted.'

MID WALES WILL NO LONGER HAVE A BEAUTIFUL VIEW, LUSH GREEN LAND THAT HAS BEEN CHERISHED BY OUR FORE-FATHERS. MID WALES WILL NO LONGER BE A LANDSCAPE TO BE PROUD OF IF THESE PROPOSALS GO AHEAD.

Instead we will have industry. Factories to generate power from the wind and huge steel pylons towering over our homes and fields.

We 'CHOSE' to live in an area of outstanding natural beauty, we didn't 'choose' to live amongst pylons, lines and hubs! where is our choice?!

How comes is it that according to the National grid and SPEN, we have no say in these proposals. They have already been drawn up without our involvement. But, if a neighbour or land owner wished to apply for planning to create changes to my surroundings, the impact of objections from relevant members of the public including myself could effectively put a stop to any such changes. So why is it that their proposals for these large scale windfarms, which will also (so they say) require a 19 acre hub, 26m high and 50m high pylons and powerlines in my, and others back yard can just go ahead. Regardless of the objection of the majority of mid wales!

SOCIO-ECONOMIC

The visuals of the countryside in which most of us in mid wales chose to live amongst 'are' the reason for our being here. If this is devastated by these proposals then many families livelihoods would also be devastated.

Government tourism surveys show that many will NOT return nor visit a 'urbanised' and 'pylonised' area. This is extremely worrying for our economy. Tourism earns almost £2 billion a year for Wales. It contributes 7% to Welsh GDP. The conventional electricity industry contributes less than 2% to Welsh GDP and if the 2010 renewable generation target of 10% is achieved, it would represent at best only 0.2% of our country's GDP.

In our valley there are a number of businesses which will be affected by the visual impact which turbines and pylons would bring. The impact of multiple lines converging on either hub site would be visible for many miles. Our valley is very narrow and 50meter high pylons would be totally unacceptable.

Next door to us is a successful recording studio (Foel Studio) where bands from all over the world come to record because it is in such a beautiful, secluded location unspoilt by industry. It is of great concern that the pylons would affect the recording at the recording studio also if in close proximity. Industrialisation of this valley which draws people from all over the world would ruin a long established business such as this.

These proposals would have the same consequence for the outward bound center (Red Ridge) where children from industrialised areas all over come to get away from industry and experience this natural habitat.

There are too many bed and breakfasts and caravan sites (In particular Cefn Coch Caravan site and public house) to name which would be effected by the proposals, as families and walkers who frequently stay in the area to enjoy the views and wildlife would no longer want to come here to see the destruction of it by pylon after pylon, country lanes spoilt by widening, damage to natural trails, canals, historical and SSSI sites. Our valley is recognised as the 'Golden chain' and people visit it to see the unusually large numbers in a secluded area of yellow laburnam trees which line the fields. People come to this area to see an unspoilt natural wilderness and locals depend on this to make a living.

The journey to the welsh coast (such as Aberdovey, Tywyn and Barmouth) is frequented along the Llanfair Caereinion/ Llanerfyl A458, because of its beautiful views. Tourists travel this way because it has not been spoilt and adds to the whole holiday experience of mid wales. Roadside garages, caravan sites such as 'Neuadd Bridge' would become abandoned by tourists if there is no longer a reason to travel this route.

Families have established businesses in the area over generations based on its visual impact, but National Grid and SPEN are proposing to destroy the legacy of these families, creating ghost towns and villages.

WHAT GIVES THE NATIONAL GRID AND SPEN THE RIGHT TO DE-VALUE OUR PROPERTY?

Many of us depend on the value of our homes for security. In terms of financial value, a loss because of the proximity of 26M high and National grid 50M high pylons including nearby windfarms would have a detrimental effect on next generations of families.

My family have been living at this property for 33 years. My parents (with whom me, my partner and my 2 year old son live with) built this house from a ruin- a pile of stone- to a home which in turn would provide me and my family a future. It would be seriously damaging our future and if these proposals were ever accepted. And we- like so many other young families- would not only have to face the ordeal of moving away from our inheritance and heritage, but also face de-valuation of the property and the impossibility of selling the property within these proposals. Because our house is within the Route corridors of all of the proposed infrastructure it has 'already' been tremendously de-valued!

When asking about the possibility of undergrounding cables instead of Pylons, I was met with little response and only the extra costs of undergrounding seemed to be mentioned. It is obvious that undergrounding would make a significant difference to the visual impact of overhead pylons, which would be of some comfort to mid wales's tourism, but not solve the impact of the windfarms.

We live in a ministry of defence tactical training area and have training helicopters etc from nearby Shawbury (one of the UK's largest facilities for RAF helicopter training) using this area for training purpose. The proposed SPEN and National Grid pylon and turbine routes through this area would detrimentally affect the training of our servicemen and women and negatively impact on our response to natural disasters and threats to national security.

TRAFFIC ISSUES

Consultants Capita Symons were commissioned by both WAG and Powys CC to study the transportation issues. Their report published in October 2008 stated:

'scale of the planned development is unprecedented and will be the largest infrastructure project ever undertaken in the principality.'

Both roads to potential hub sites are unsuitable for large abnormal loads. The cost of modifying these roads would be great. The impact on residents daily life would be unacceptable and the ripping up of hedges and wildlife habitat to replace with tarmac is definitely not a green approach. With the transportation footprint, (90% of material imported) plus the construction, peat extraction, traffic chaos, due to volatility of wind energy turbines will require 75% fossil fuel back up, the whole project will increase CO2!

No consideration has been given to the disruption which your the construction of these proposals would cause our Emergency services. The years of disruption would greatly hinder their work and a service the community greatly depends on. Powys county council's calculations show that constructing all of the planned windfarms will need in excess of 3000 very large, slow moving convoys over a seven year period.

The Air Ambulance is crucial for this rural community. The erection of windfarms and pylons will have

a detrimental effect on the service they provide. It is hard enough for them to find ground to land in this area, but huge pylons would seriously reduce this ground and put an almost instant stop to this crucial service. In Snow the Air Ambulance is even more important as there is little chance of vehicles reaching us!

HEALTH ISSUES

BECAUSE SPEN ARE PROPOSING TO CREATE THESE LARGE SCALE WINDFARMS THE NATIONAL GRID ARE INVOLVED. IF SPEN DID NOT EXPLOIT OUR COUNTRYSIDE TO ITS LIMITS THEN WE WOULD NOT BE FACED WITH THE RISKS WHICH I AM ABOUT TO EXPLAIN. THE BUILDING OF THESE WINDFARMS IS NOW GOING TOO FAR.

I have a two year old son. The health risks linked to high voltage electricity pylons are too much of a risk for myself- and I'm sure many other parents- to the health of our children. We believe that the health of our children is first and foremost of importance, after all they are our future and we have brought them into the world. It is not up to multinational companies to decide their fate.

At the consultation event I was given a booklet by the National grid called 'Electric and magnetic fields' by ENA. I quote from this booklet:

'With EMFs and risk the situation is different, no risk has been proven. Instead EMFs are sometimes described as a 'possible' cause of cancer or a 'possible carcinogen. The word 'possible' is used about all sorts of things in our lives.'

But in our daily lives we can 'choose' to take a risk and way up the 'possible' outcomes. BECAUSE OF SPEN'S PROPOSALS, THE NATIONAL GRID HAVE THRUST THIS RISK UPON ME AND MY FAMILY, AND EVERY OTHER FAMILY WHO WILL BE LIVING AMONGST THEIR PYLONS IF PROPOSALS GO AHEAD. They have given us no choice. I do not want to take a risk with the health of my child but they could be making me.

Where are 'my' human rights to protect the health of my baby!?

As National Grid state under the heading 'The National and international view' :

'In march 2004, the NRPB published a comprehensive review of the science on EMFs. For the key issue of childhood leukaemia, they talk about the difficulties with some of the studies and say:" The epidemiological evidence is currently not strong enough to justify a firm conclusion... 'but also' nevertheless, the possibility remains that intense and prolonged exposures to magnetic fields can increase the risk of leukaemia in children.'

The most recent evidence reported in this booklet written by the National Radiological protection board, states that there is a 'possibility' that 'intense and prolonged exposures to magnetic fields'- which would be the case of many children living in proximity of these pylons- 'can increase the risk of leukaemia in children'. The National grid are proposing to place a potential death sentence on children who would be in proximity of these pylons. A 'possibility' should be too much of a risk to take with the health of our future generations. This isn't being eco-friendly, this isn't being green! No renewable energy target can be so important that it risks the health of a generation.

It is not only childhood leukaemia that is at risk but also adult cancers, heart disease, Alzheimers disease, depression, suicide and miscarriage, headaches and lethargy.

Young families will move away from this area of mid wales with such a risk ruling over them.

Mid wales has been left in the dark for 6 years whilst these proposals have been formulated. Plotting behind closed doors. The National grid (and SPEN) proposals suddenly thrust upon mid wales has left its population in utter SHOCK and DISPEAR. Mine including the many other families have been put under an extreme amount of stress. It has caused anxiety, frustration, anger and confusion to mid wales's residents.

SPEN AND THE NATIONAL GRID HAVE UNDERESTIMATED THE IMPACT THEIR PROPOSALS HAVE HAD UPON THE MENTAL HEALTH OF MID WALES'S RESIDENTS. THE ELDERLY FEEL HELPLESS, OUR CHILDREN ARE SCARED AND CONFUSED. THIS IS TOTALLY UNNECESSARY AND MUST BE STOPPED.

THE FIGURES DO NOT ADD UP.

The very reason for this proposal originates from the Welsh Assembly government's technical advice note TAN 8. This ill conceived and badly thought out policy was introduced in 2005 and it completely out of date.

This £2billion plus project will yield an annual output from 700 plus additional turbines of 200MW at

present efficiency levels - equivalent to around a tenth of the output from a conventional power station. Such a miserable output for such a costly, disruptive proposal.

The target for windfarm capacity in the original Tan 8 is 800MW for all of Wales. In Wales in 2010 the load factor (efficiency) of the windfarm fleet was about 18%. Going by the figure of 23% this would mean the average output after a year will be only 184MW. This is less than 4% of the Welsh Assembly government's renewable energy target.

ALL OF THIS MISERY IS FOR NO SIGNIFICANT GAIN.

70% of the time the wind does not blow strongly enough and wind energy has to be backed up by conventional power (gas or coal fired).

In 2010 because of the variation in wind speed, windfarms only produced 21.4% of their stated power over a year. In mid Wales only 18% of their rated capacity! So much has been realised since the formation of Tan 8 in 2005. Why are these proposals made to appear of such urgency? Consider the bigger picture.

In May four energy companies were paid to switch off turbines on 16 occasions. On the 24th of May the most expensive shut down cost the Grid £613,000 when seven windfarms 'came offline' for 69 hours. This has happened on a number of occasions and amounts to millions of pounds. John Constable, of the REF, said:

"It is clear the grid is struggling to integrate the existing wind farms at reasonable cost to the consumer. There appears to be an expensive mismatch between political rhetoric and engineering reality."

All this and the public are 'still' seeing energy bills rising.

At our recent meeting with a SPEN representative we were informed that there is NO NEED FOR 50 METER 400KV PYLONS. We are aware that there is a conflict between the National Grid implying that there is a need for 'two' lines but SPEN actually only need 'one' line for their capacity. This would mean that there is a serious case for undergrounding with only one cable. Why do the National Grid press for the need of pylons when there is NO NEED.

SPEN announced that 'they' would also be willing to discuss plans to avoid 50meter high National Grid pylons by sending capacity through their own plans. Why have these not been considered?

Instead of so much work and money being put into apparently consulting mid Wales about a proposal which they reject and feel is totally ridiculous for the above reasons, National Grid and SPEN should instead be looking into ways to encourage saving energy. For example, there should be a serious investigation into the wasteful use of energy such as 24hours of lights in highstreet shops which aren't even open for business. There should also be research into Bioenergy, Hydropower, Ocean, Solar, Hydrogen etc. But then again these are not always better at producing profits for PLC's as I am sure big companies such as them are aware.

THERE IS MUCH ASSERTION BUT LITTLE JUSTIFICATION.

This will be the first instance when our own Government can decide the future of its fellow citizens. Public confidence in the Welsh Assembly Government 'and' renewables have been seriously damaged since the revelation of these proposals. This will only escalate if these proposals go ahead.

Wales remembers the flooding of their valleys in the 1950s and the Meibion Glyndwr 'holiday cottage campaign' 1979-1993. If these proposals develop our children will never forget. We will not allow SPEN or the National Grid to impose this upon us. Be ready for a fight.

Miss Layla Long