

Environment and Sustainability Committee

Inquiry into Energy Policy and Planning in Wales

EPP 84 – Charles Turpin

I refer to your inquiry into all aspects of energy policy and planning, and make the submissions below. I am originally from Mid-Wales, but have since 1994 been working for an international organisation in Luxembourg and returning to Mid-Wales each summer on holiday.

I believe Wales should fully exploit newly-accessible deposits of shale gas beneath the South Wales coalfields, as a way both of meeting emission reduction targets and of furthering Welsh independence, economically in the shorter term, and in the longer term also politically.

Although a small country, Wales has two great natural assets, namely its energy resources in the South-East and its world-class landscape in the remainder of the Principality. My fear is that the country is in danger of squandering both those assets by blurring the two; failing to secure the energy benefits in the South, while degrading the landscape elsewhere by inefficient windfarms.

Given that generation of electricity by gas involves only half the emissions of coal generation, I believe that a wholesale replacement of coal with gas will produce faster reductions in emissions than the current TAN 8 windfarm programme. Given also that carbon generation is in any event required to back up intermittent windpower, and that these gas stations are thus in any event necessary, I believe that they should be given the priority in the first place. That is doubly so because they have a much smaller impact on the landscape, being confined to a small area that does not need to be in a scenic location.

As a resident of continental Europe, I wish to give a foreign visitor's perspective on this. I am a keen hill-walker, and my main holiday destinations for hill-walking are Mid-Wales and the Czech Republic, my home in Luxembourg being located roughly half-way between the two. In August 2011, on holiday in Mid-Wales, I walked the section of Glyndŵr's Way between Llanbrynmair and Llangadfan. I found it largely spoiled by the intrusion of industrial windfarms, particularly Mynydd y Cemaes, which interrupts the iconic profile of Cadair Idris standing behind. The remainder of the walk was just about worthwhile, particularly the scenic and tranquil Nant yr Eira valley, but that is now under threat from further proposed windfarms.

At the same time, the walk itself is not sufficiently maintained to bring out its full tourist potential. Although the quality of the gates was mostly good, the signposting was inadequate, and on a number of occasions I found myself more than knee-deep in bog. On similar hillwalks in the Šumava and Jeseníky National Parks in the Czech Republic, I enjoyed easy-to-follow signposting and well-constructed wooden walkways over boggy areas.

Whilst by no means all the Czech Republic is idyllic, the country does make a clear distinction between industrial and tourist areas and draws the maximum benefit from each. Wales would do well to follow that example.

Specifically concerning windpower, the limitations of this form of renewable energy are by now well-known. See, for example, just within the last few days:

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/comment/telegraph-view/8771172/Wind-power-a-policy-spinning-out-of-control.html>

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/earth/energy/windpower/8770937/Wind-farm-paid-1.2-million-to-produce-no-electricity.html>

Given these failures, I support a switch to gas (as stated above) and to other forms of renewable energy. Specifically, I support Petition P-04-324 "Say No to TAN 8 – Windfarms and High Voltage", which has been referred to the Environment and Sustainability Committee. The transport chaos which would follow from a full implementation of TAN 8 speaks for itself, and I therefore also support Petition P-03-273 "Transportation of wind turbines in Mid-Wales".

I also support the use of nuclear energy in Wales. It is virtually carbon-free, produces more electricity than anything else, and is safe when properly managed and situated in seismologically stable areas.

I also think priority should be given to domestic energy efficiency and savings. As the total amount of energy consumed reduces, the amount of renewable energy produced represents a correspondingly higher percentage of that total. Home insulation, solar panels on roofs, and electronic apparatus not constantly kept in standby mode are measures that readily come to mind. By way of example, Italia Nostra, the Italian national environmental and heritage organisation, calculated in its First National Report on Energy of November 2010 that, by means of small changes in habit, the typical Italian family could reduce its energy consumption by 30%, causing Italy (which is of similar size to the UK) to save approximately 7 billion cubic metres of gas each year. The organisation concluded that the aim of reducing non-industrial consumption by 30% in a few years was not a utopia but a question of political will.

Charles Turpin