

Environment and Sustainability Committee

Inquiry into Energy Policy and Planning in Wales

EPP 203 – Jamie Dalmer

Dear Sir/Madam,

I am writing to voice my concerns regarding the harmful effects of the proposed large scale industrialisation of Mid Wales and the current obsession with the (outdated) TAN 8 document. I am a keen environmentalist, conservationist and I design and write energy monitoring software for a living, so am not entirely unfamiliar with the calculation of energy use and carbon emissions.

I live in Penrhos (near Llanymynech, Powys) and I can only speak with reference to the proposed "Mid Wales Connection". However, I believe the issues raised by this plan are indicative of the issues faced by many rural communities in respect of the massive infrastructure required by some of the current proposed energy solutions. Many of which seem to be centred on Wales!

I have particularly strong feelings regarding the proposed 400kV route through the Meifod/Vyrnwy valley. The view into the Meifod/Vyrnwy valley is totally unspoilt, with nothing other than the field sizes to reveal any change over the last few hundred years! There are no major roads, no pylons, no railways and no industrial structures of any kind. I have always felt lucky to overlook this, as there are so few such panoramas remaining. This route would also pass straight through the conservation areas of Meifod and Llansantffraid.

Our area has a rural economy, which depends very heavily on tourism. There are a number of caravan parks and many B&Bs. These would all suffer tremendously if the area lost the unspoilt views it currently enjoys – many people would simply stop coming. Who would choose to picnic by a pylon? It would not only be businesses providing accommodation that would decline, as the pubs and shops in this area depend heavily on visitors to the caravan parks for a welcome increase in business over the summer months. There would inevitably be job losses and more people leaving the area in search of work. It has been calculated that the income from tourism in Montgomeryshire not only greatly surpasses the income from agriculture, but is far greater than the tourism revenue in the Brecon Beacons National Park!

In my area there are greater crested newts in many local ponds. I regularly see skylarks, lapwings and curlews and am concerned about the impact of construction on such ground nesting birds. I also worry about the threat the cables pose to our peregrine falcons. There are also protected bat roosts adjacent to the proposed route through the Meifod valley – I see various bats here almost every night.

There are many archaeological sites along the proposed power transmission route, some with national importance to Wales and/or Scheduled Ancient Monuments. Many sites have never been highlighted for specific protection, as they were never perceived to be under threat. The area is steeped in history and less than a mile from where I live there was a major archaeological

dig, which revealed a fortified hill slope enclosure that had been in use for over three thousand years. There is evidence of Roman villas in the area, although these have never been fully explored. There are many as yet unmapped and unstudied aerial features.

The Meifod valley is known to be misty and damp, which will exacerbate cable noise. The valley leading through Trefnanney, Sarnau and Penrhos (area F4) not only suffers from the same conditions, but is exceptionally narrow in places. Not only would the pylons truly dominate the landscape, but it would be impossible to escape the noise – the area is exceptionally quiet. This valley is also too shallow to accommodate the pylons without them frequently rising above the skyline.

These plans will have a tremendous affect on people's quality of life, which stems almost entirely from the tranquillity of our surroundings. The nearest shop or pub is four miles away, there is no gas, no mains sewerage and no public transport or facilities – take away our unspoiled environment and the one thing we do have is gone!

It goes without saying that people are also concerned about house values. However, it is worth adding though that in this area an unusually large part of the value of many houses comes entirely from the view/location offered – so the concern is especially great for those in this area.

Another issue is how on earth our local roads will cope with the construction traffic, almost every road within three miles of where I live is single track. They would have to be completely upgraded and widened (destroying ancient mixed species hedgerows) – which would change the character of the landscape and lead to faster traffic and a danger to our children (I have two young children myself). I was under the impression that there was a preference for sighting pylons close to major roads or other existing major infrastructure?

Even the traffic this will bring to the major roads causes great concern, as the huge number of slow moving abnormal loads will effectively remove all access to emergency services and hospitals for significant parts of the day, over a period of years. What do we do if one of our children falls ill or is injured?

It amazes me that there appears to have been absolutely no research into the cumulative effects these plans will have on the areas concerned. For instance, the 35 x 606ft turbines proposed for Dyfnant Forest would be the tallest in Europe and would be the tallest man made structures of any kind in Wales. There are very few objects of any kind in Wales that rise more than 600ft in relation to the surrounding countryside (Snowden being one) and this one development will suddenly be the majority of them! The visual impact on the surrounding area will be incomparable to anything constructed in Wales before and will be seen for tens of miles in all directions. The required aircraft warning lights on the blades will also make them the prominent in the night sky!

I feel the proposal to clump such a large number of wind farms in this area, which would lead to the need for a grid extension, is deeply flawed. RenewableUK, who speak for wind and marine energy generation, say that the first thing they look for when planning a wind farm is a convenient grid connection. Yet it is proposed these turbines be built as far from the existing grid

as possible. National Grid themselves confirm this is the furthest it is possible to get from their existing infrastructure – barring Lands End!

The grid skirts all around the coast of England and criss-crosses North Wales, South Wales and much of England – with a huge hole in Mid Wales! Why was this selected as a “first choice” for so many large wind farms?

This is like building a new town many miles from the nearest road and then needing to construct a motorway to reach it!

I am generally in favour of renewable generation, but I believe we should not squander precious resources just to tick boxes or satisfy political goals, without due consideration as to whether or not they achieve the overall objective.

In this case the overall objective is supposed to be reducing carbon emissions, so it seems of paramount importance that turbines be sited where the least carbon is needed in construction, including the grid connection, if required. In this case this could not be further from the truth!

There are figures available from the wind generation industry estimating the payback period for the recovery of the carbon emitted in construction – but none include grid extensions.

National Grid suggested I ask RenewableUK if they had done any research on the carbon emitted during construction of the grid connection ... and RenewableUK suggested I ask National Grid.

The embedded carbon in the thousands on tons of steel, aluminium and concrete will be vast. There will be huge quantities of petrol and diesel used in transporting the thousands of tons of materials, plus the use of diggers and earth movers during construction. There will also be carbon released by felling trees or uprooting hedges for access and clearance for the transmission path. Many hedges in this area are ancient and made up of many mixed species – even if these are replaced they would most likely be replanted as hawthorn only, adversely impacting biodiversity.

It makes no environmental or economic sense to site such a large number of turbines so far from the existing grid infrastructure, when there are plenty of alternative locations which could be connected to the grid using shorter stretches of 132kVA lines – with a far smaller carbon footprint and much less impact on the landscape. If they were closer to the places actually consuming the energy there would also be less energy lost in transmission!

We should be concentrating on reducing energy waste, making more use of (more reliable) offshore wind and investing in other forms of renewables and low carbon energy – instead of

putting all our eggs in one basket.

Yours sincerely,
Jamie Dalmer