



Cynulliad National
Cenedlaethol Assembly for
Cymru Wales

Y Pwyllgor Deisebau

Adroddiad Cwblhad

Crynodeb o ystyriaeth y Pwyllgor Deisebau ar P-03-116 Fferm Gwynt
yng Nghoedwig Dyfnant

Gorffennaf 2008

Cyflwynwyd

20 Mawrth 2008

Dyfarnwyd yn Dderbyniol

26 Mawrth 2008

Ystyriaethau Cychwynnol

10 Ebrill 2008

Cytunodd y pwyllgor i:

- Wneud cais am wybodaeth gefndirol gan Wasanaeth Ymchwil yr Aelodau.

(Gweler Atodiad 1 ar gyfer y darn perthnasol o'r trawsgrifiad ar gyfer y cyfarfod ar 10 Ebrill)

Ystyriaethau Pellach

08 Mai 2008

Ystyriodd y Pwyllgor y papur a ddarparwyd gan Wasanaeth Ymchwil yr Aelodau Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru, a chytunodd i:

- Ysgrifennu at y Gweinidog dros yr Amgylchedd, Cynaliadwyedd a Thai i gasglu gwybodaeth o ran ymwneud Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru yn y datblygiad hwn, a'i fwriad yn y dyfodol.

(Gweler Atodiad 1 ar gyfer y darn perthnasol o'r trawsgrifiad ar gyfer y cyfarfod ar 8 Mai ac Atodiad 2 ar gyfer y llythyr a anfonodd Cadeirydd y Pwyllgor Deisebau at y Gweinidog dros yr Amgylchedd, Cynaliadwyedd a Thai)

25 Mehefin 2008

Ystyriodd y Pwyllgor ymateb y Gweinidog dros Faterion Gwledig a chytunodd i:

- Gau'r ddeiseb gan na all y Pwyllgor fynd a hi yn ei blaen ymhellach.
- Ysgrifennu at y deisebwyr i'w hysbysu ei bod yn bosibl y gallant godi unrhyw bryderon drwy'r broses gynllunio statudol o ran datblygiad Fferm Wynt Dyfnant a Fyrnwy.

(Gweler Atodiad 1 ar gyfer y darn perthnasol o'r trawsgrifiad ar gyfer y cyfarfod ar 25 Mehefin ac Atodiad 3 ar gyfer y llythyr a gafodd y Cadeirydd gan y Gweinidog dros Faterion Gwledig)

Clerc y Pwyllgor Deisebau Gorffennaf 2008

Atodiad 1

Darn Perthansol o Drawsgriadau Cyfarfodydd y Pwyllgor Deisebau

10 Ebrill 2008

Val Lloyd: Moving on to, P-03-116, the last new petition—and you should not get too comfortable, as we have yet to deal with the existing ones—relates to Dyfnant forest windfarm. There seems to be a tension between the forest's rainbow trails and the siting of the industrial windfarm.

Michael German: I had a word with the Chair of the Sustainability Committee today, and I understand that it is shortly to undertake a review of TAN 8, which will include a review of the siting of windfarms. Although I am quite happy to hear the lead petitioner's case, I wonder whether we may be able to pass on this petition to the committee as it is undertaking a review of this issue anyway.

2.10 p.m.

Val Lloyd: That is a very sensible idea, but perhaps there is some way of our getting more precise information on this before passing it on to the Sustainability Committee, without having to ask the petitioners to come in to see us as they may be called in by that committee. Shall we ask the Members' research service to do that for us?

Michael German: Yes. The key issue—and I am only repeating what I heard this morning—is the level of felling that you have to undertake in order to set up a windfarm. You cannot just cut down three trees.

Val Lloyd: You cannot just drop it in. I am sure that the Minister will take that on board. That concludes that item.

08 Mai 2008

The next petition is **P-03-116**, Dyfnant Forest Wind Farm. We first considered this in April and we asked MRS to provide us with a paper, which it has with its usual clarity. I thank it for that. The papers are always very useful.

On page 4 of the MRS paper, it says:

'It is clear from letters from Ministers and officials that the Welsh Assembly Government has no plans to sell Forestry Commission land for the purpose of installing wind farms.'

Michael German: I thought that it was Government policy to use Forestry Commission land for windfarms. I thought that that was the whole strategy now—that windfarms would be located on Forestry Commission land.

Val Lloyd: I am just reading what is in the paper.

Michael German: I know; that is why I do not think that it is necessarily accurate, given what the Minister has said on this—unless there has been a change of policy. Could we clarify that, Chair?

Val Lloyd: Yes, we have to clarify it.

Michael German: I understand the points about horses, which I thought were interesting. We are on horses again; the paper states there is no knowledge of horses being affected

by windfarms. I know that the Sustainability Committee has been looking at this evidence. There was a view that this was what the Welsh Assembly Government was doing. Those locations were less sensitive than others, because they are on Assembly-owned land.

Val Lloyd: We will write to the Minister and ask about any actions taken in relation to this development consultation and so on, and about the policy.

Michael German: Yes.

25 Mehefin 2008

Val Lloyd: Thank you. We will take it forward that way.

Next we deal with the Dyfnant forest windfarm. It is a petition to rescind the decision to select Dyfnant forest for lease options for wind turbine development. It is very emotive, is it not? We have had a response from the Minister. Basically, the letter goes through the detail and says that:

‘Apart from the policy reasons described above, there is a binding contractual commitment between the Welsh Assembly Government and the developer’.

There is silence all around.

Andrew R.T. Davies: Where can you go with this?

Val Lloyd: I do not know; that is why I focused on that quote. It may not be possible to do anything. I left out the final part of the sentence, as well.

Bethan Jenkins: I guess that there is a general point that we can make about windfarms, in terms of the policy rather than this particular case. We can direct the petitioners as to the agenda behind this development, and the sustainable development agenda of the Government. That is all that we can do, I think, in this context.

Andrew R.T. Davies: I am aware from the papers that any application would involve a fully scrutinised consultation—this is not like the Rhyl flats situation, which is a different operation altogether. I would suggest that, whether you agree or disagree with the way in which renewables are delivered, there is an opportunity in the initial consultation process to raise any objections. That is reflected in the Minister’s response, and the line that he has taken. As a Petitions Committee, I am not sure how much further we can move this on, and I would suggest that there is little that we can achieve in keeping this petition open.

Val Lloyd: We could point out to the petitioners the issues that we have just raised—that although we cannot rescind the decision, there will be full consultation at the next stage. So, we will write in that way, and then close it.

Mr Sanchez: Sorry—are we writing to the petitioners?

Val Lloyd: Yes, we will write to the petitioners and point out the Minister’s comment in the penultimate paragraph that there will be a planning application and that they will have an opportunity to raise concerns and influence it, to some extent, so that conditions may be imposed on any planning consent that is granted. They may not be able to overturn it, but they will certainly have a strong input into the planning process.

Mr Sanchez: I suspect that the petitioners are watching us make this decision anyway.

Atodiad 2

Dyfnant Petition

This paper describes the petitioners' claims, and analyses the evidence available to support the petition.

Background

The petition document is proposed by the members of the Dyfnant and Vyrnwy Horse Riders and Carriage Drivers Association (DVHRCDA), supported by the British Horse Society, and seeks:

"to petition the National Assembly for Wales to urge the Welsh Assembly Government to rescind the decision to select the Dyfnant Forest, Powys, for lease options for wind turbine development".

The supporting statement notes the following:

The Dyfnant Forest Rainbow Trails are a nationally acclaimed equestrian tourism project. The network of newly constructed and designated trails offer a rich riding and carriage driving network in a safe forest environment; used by tourists and the local community.

The project has been funded by European ERDF2, Welsh Development Agency, Tourist Board (now Visit Wales), [Adfywio] (Rural Recovery for tourism) and fund raising from the Association [DVHRCDA] and Forestry Commission Wales.

The Partnership Agreement with the FC was meant to safeguard the project and formulate a strategy for its development to enhance the local economy. A large scale industrial wind-farm site would be an unnecessary hazard for equestrians. Horses can be frightened easily by the noise, blade movement, shadow and ground feel. Certainly people would not travel to ride amongst them and the whole essence of the project would be threatened.

The basis of the petition appears to be the fear of a perceived reduction in equine tourism if wind turbines are erected in the Dyfnant Forest.

The DVHRCDA's concern over wind turbines dates from at least December 2005, when details of an email show correspondence between Susan Wilkinson and Jan Roche, the British Horse Society's Development Officer in Wales. Jan Roche suggested that

Details of any riders who can state problems encountered while riding past turbines will all be hopefully of help.

According to a DVHRCDA leaflet (undated), the Association has 231 members.

The evidence

1. Fatalities, injuries and other incidents

The DVHRCDA requested that the British Horse Society (the largest equine charity in the UK) conduct a survey of its members about wind turbines and members' activities. However, the methodology of the survey and the quantity of respondents indicates that the results can only be considered as anecdotal evidence, and are not statistically viable (19 respondents affirmed that they rode near turbines). Without seeing detail of the questions and answers, it is not possible for Members' Research Service to comment otherwise on the survey results. The survey was used as part of the consultation process in amending the British Horse Society's policy on wind turbines.

The British Horse Society's policy in May 2006 was that turbines should be built at least 200m from bridleways and access routes. Its policy was subsequently amended to¹:

That, as a starting point when assessing a site and its potential layout, a separation distance of 4 times the overall height should be the target for National Trails and Ride UK routes, as these are likely to be used by equestrians unfamiliar with turbines, and a distance of 3 times overall height from all other routes, including roads, with the 200m recommended in the Technical Guidance to PPS 22 being seen as the minimum, where it is shown in a particular case that this would be acceptable. The negotiation process recommended in PPS 22 should indicate whether, in the particular circumstances of each site, these guidelines can be relaxed or need strengthening to minimise or eliminate the potential difficulties.

The DVHRCDA has submitted a document produced by the Caithness Windfarm Information Forum (CWIF) that contains statistics on accidents relating to wind turbines. CWIF is an anti-wind farm lobby group, and its statistics have not been verified by Members' Research Service. Nonetheless, it can be inferred from the full version on the CWIF website² (covering the period up to the end of March 2008) that no fatalities have occurred in the general public as a result of wind turbine operations. Two injuries are listed to the general public as having occurred as a result of wind turbine operations: both were as a result of thrown ice in Germany. It should be noted that the inventory is compiled to record incidents worldwide.

An enquiry reply compiled by Members' Research Service includes the following information:

¹ The British Horse Society, *New wind farms guidance*,

<http://www.bhs.org.uk/content/Acs-ORR.asp>

² Caithness Windfarm Information Forum, *Summary of wind turbine accident data to March 31st 2008*, www.caithnesswindfarms.co.uk/fullaccidents.pdf

To demonstrate a causal link between rider accidents and wind turbines, an adequate sample size of incidents would have to be taken, comparing incidents in general with this near turbines. An official at the BHS informed me that there are currently not enough sites where rights of way and turbines meet for such data, of sufficient sample size, to be collated. Furthermore, both the BHS and an official from the Byways and Bridleways Trust indicated that they thought it more likely that bridleway use be abandoned by wary riders rather than continuing through a wind farm. The official from the Byways and Bridleways Trust said that he did not know of any horse riding accident directly attributable to wind turbines.

The DVHRCDA suggests that:

Information now available from Germany and USA shows that very many problems associated with shadow throw, flicker, and noise are inextricably linked to these [2-3MW] turbines.

Shadow flicker is frequently cited as a problem by anti-wind farm groups. The only official discourse on shadow flicker in the UK is contained in the Scottish Government's *Planning Advice Note 45*³, which states:

Under certain combinations of geographical position, time of day and time of year, the sun may pass behind the rotor and cast a shadow over neighbouring properties. When the blades rotate, the shadow flicks on and off; the effect is known as "shadow flicker". It occurs only within buildings where the flicker appears through a narrow window opening. The seasonal duration of this effect can be calculated from the geometry of the machine and the latitude of the potential site. Where this could be a problem, developers should provide calculations to quantify the effect. In most cases however, where separation is provided between wind turbines and nearby dwellings (as a general rule 10 rotor diameters), "shadow flicker" should not be a problem.

The same document contains information on noise that suggests that a wind farm at 350m would produce an indicative noise level of 35-45 decibels. For comparison, a quiet bedroom is rated at 35 decibels, and a busy general office is rated at 60 decibels. A comprehensive report about the assessment and rating of noise from wind farms was produced for the former Department for Trade and Industry in 1996⁴. The Welsh Assembly Government's *Technical Advice Note 8: Renewable Energy*⁵ makes no mention of noise or shadow flicker.

There is no substantive evidence available to suggest that "horses can be frightened easily by the noise, blade movement, shadow and ground feel", other than anecdotal evidence such as that submitted by the petitioners. As far as Members' Research Service has been able to ascertain, 'ground feel' is an unknown term in the literature associated with both wind energy and equestrianism. There has been no independently verified case of horse riders being injured as a result of being startled

³ Scottish Government, *Planning Advice Note 45 (revised 2002): Renewable energy technologies*, January 2002, <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/library/pan/pan45.pdf>

⁴ ETSU, *The assessment and rating of noise from wind farms*, September 1996, <http://www.berr.gov.uk/energy/sources/renewables/explained/wind/onshore/page21743.html>

⁵ Welsh Assembly Government, *Technical advice note 8: Renewable energy*, 2005, <http://new.wales.gov.uk/topics/planning/policy/tans/tan8/?lang=cy>

by wind turbines (although five responses to the British Horse Society survey claimed people had fallen from horses as a result of turbines, with three of these requiring hospital treatment).

2. *Sale of land*

A DVHRCDA newsletter dated December 2007 contained a request for all members of the Association to write to Assembly Members because:

We have learned that the Welsh Assembly Government has plans to sell off Forestry Commission forests to private enterprise, and to install wind farms on them. We believe this will destroy your Dyfnant Forest riding facility and many others.

It is clear from letters from Ministers and officials that the Welsh Assembly Government has no plans to sell Forestry Commission land for the purpose of installing wind farms.

3. *Effect on tourism*

The DVHRCDA quoted the former Minister for the Environment, Planning and Countryside as having stated that horse tourism accounts for £18 million of income to Wales. This figure is supported by a presentation available from the former Wales Tourist Board⁶.

The DVHRCDA has produced plenty of evidence of media and advertising promotion, including posters, newspaper articles, and articles in journals such as *Forestlife* (the Forestry Commission's quarterly publication) in Spring 2006, *British Horse* in July/August 2005 and *The Native Pony* in August/September 2005. However, no evidence has been provided to indicate or approximate the amount of revenue brought into the area by the forest trails. The Wales Tourist Board (as it was in June 2005) commented:

In practical terms... we can contribute (probably 50%) to marketing work you (or outside agencies contracted by you) wish to engage in... We would however wish to see some sort of income flowing in to the group from membership or subscriptions in order to maintain the sustainability of the project in the long term.

In a letter to the Minister for Rural Affairs, dated 10 November 2007, the DVHRCDA asserted:

⁶ Wales Tourist Board, *Developing strategy, market focus, partnership delivery product development*, undated, <http://www.countrysidecreation.org.uk/events/Activity%20Tourism/Wales%20Tourist%20Board.pdf>

Regular research has proved that it pulls in tourists from as far away as Kent. It generates much needed and very real economic benefit for this area.

In a letter to the Petitions Committee, dated 31 March 2008, the petitioners also state:

Through our regular events we have successfully demonstrated that our Rainbow Trails are a beneficial addition to the local economy, bringing visitors and income to the area which no group of turbines will do. Indeed our 'tourists' will be driven away.

and...

It has been proven elsewhere that horses and wind turbines simply do not mix. Horses do not get used to the turbines, and in particular visiting horses are seriously affected by coming across them, with consequences very dangerous to the rider. The result is that riders do not go where turbines are.

Members' Research Service has not been able to determine any proof that horses and wind turbines do not mix. The use that horse riders choose to make of different facilities is likely to be influenced by a number of factors, of which the presence of wind turbines may be one. The DVHRCDA claims that 65 per cent of the respondents to the British Horse Society survey that expressed an opinion would not take their horses on holiday where turbines are present.

Glasgow Caledonian University was commissioned by the Scottish Government to produce a report on the effect of wind farms on tourism in Scotland⁷. The following conclusions are relevant to the petitioners' case:

- Scottish tourism depends heavily on the country's landscape, with 92 per cent of visitors stating that scenery was important in their choice of Scotland as a holiday destination, the natural environment being important to 89 per cent of visitors.
- The potential problem is that many people find that man made structures such as pylons and wind turbines reduce the attractiveness of a landscape. It is logical to assume that reduced quality of an important feature could reduce demand to some degree which in turn may result in either reduced prices for tourism services or reduced numbers of tourists or both. Any loss of expenditure will lead to a reduction in economic activity and result in a loss of income and jobs.
- However the tourism industry itself requires a reliable supply of electricity and climate change threatens radical changes to our valued habitats and wildlife, and may irreversibly alter the very landscape that visitors value so highly. Wind turbines are an established technology readily available in today's market place, able to supply electricity whilst reducing the effects of our energy usage on climate change. Sensitively located, renewable energy can also bring social and economic benefits to communities and to local businesses. Government is required to evaluate all the issues including landscape, tourism, security of supply, the impact of climate change internationally (which is

⁷ Glasgow Caledonian University, *The economic impacts of wind farms on Scottish tourism*, March 2008, <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/214910/0057316.pdf>

indisputably large and negative), and the public financial support implicit in the renewable obligation of the energy industry. To develop appropriate policy requires an understanding of the significance of each of these elements.

- Over time hostility to wind farms lessens and they become an accepted even valued part of the scenery. Those closest seem to like them most.
- Overall there is no evidence to suggest a serious negative **economic** impact of wind farms on tourists.
- In total, three-quarters of people felt wind farms had a positive or neutral impact on the landscape:
 - 39 per cent of respondents were positive about wind farms,
 - 36 per cent had no opinion either way, and
 - 25 per cent were negative (including 10 per cent who were strongly negative).
- The results confirm that a significant minority (20% to 30%) of tourists preferred landscapes without wind farms. However of these only a very small group were so offended that they changed their intentions about revisiting Scotland.
- There appears to be a diminishing marginal loss of value associated with increasing size of wind farms. In effect, it appears that once there has been an intrusion into the scenery, the effect on the value of the landscape of expanding the size is relatively small.
- The **Maximum** total impact on employment and income for Scotland... is **211 Full Time Equivalent Jobs** (equivalent to 0.1% of tourism employment in Scotland) *equivalent to £4.7m of Gross Value Added* at 2007 prices... It is important to reiterate that this is a **worst case scenario**.

[emboldening as in original document]

The Wales Tourist Board commissioned a study entitled *Investigation into the potential impact of wind farms on tourism in Wales* in 2003⁸. The study provides some quantitative information:

- 78 per cent of respondents had a neutral or positive view towards wind farm developments.
- 22 per cent of respondents claimed they would be likely to avoid parts of the country with wind farms, while 66 per cent would not.
- 51 per cent of respondents agreed with a statement that wind farms spoil the look of the Welsh countryside.
- 68 per cent of respondents claimed it would make no difference to their likelihood to take holidays in the Welsh countryside if the number of wind farms increased. A further 9 per cent claimed any impact would be minimal.

The following points of principle also emerged:

⁸ NFO Worldgroup, *Investigation into the potential impact of wind farms on tourism in Wales: Summary report*, October 2003, http://www.industry.visitwales.co.uk/upload/pdf/Windfarms_research_eng.pdf

- The view of 'key players'⁹ was that wind farms should be very carefully sited and not in areas which were deemed to be particularly 'sensitive' to their development. Although there was some variation in defining these areas, consensus centred on National Parks, Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, and Sites of Special Scientific Interest.
- Most organisations that expressed an opinion believed that the impacts of wind farms on tourism were negligible, although such views were based on anecdotal evidence.

Forestry Commission Wales

The DVHRCDA has a grievance with Forestry Commission Wales, because it feels "badly let down by their lack of support to the group and their breach of partnership agreement". Although this is tangential to the petition, a brief synopsis of some of the information supplied is provided here.

Forestry Commission Wales has a concordat with both the British Horse Society Cymru and the British Driving Society in Wales. The purpose of them can be paraphrased as being to:

Strengthen the collaboration between Forestry Commission Wales and the Societies in promoting responsible equestrian access to, and increasing the number of safe horse carriage driving routes in, Welsh Assembly Government woodlands.

There are numerous clauses that illustrate the expectations of both organisations in the concordats. Perhaps most relevant to this section are:

[The Societies] will recognise and respect the needs of Forestry Commission Wales managers to regulate and implement multiple use of Welsh Assembly Government woodlands.

and...

Both organisations will consult each other over developments with potential impact on either organisations' interests.

The DVHRCDA and Forestry Commission Wales also have a partnership agreement, dated 17 February 2005. The description of the agreements is:

The development, management, and support of Dyfnant as a sustainable riding and carriage driving resort, through the provision of vehicle parking facilities, waymarked hard and soft horse riding trails and a carriage driving route. These facilities will then be marketed for local and national use, providing opportunities for locally based businesses to develop horse tourism products.

⁹ 'Key players' included the Welsh Development Agency, the Countryside Council for Wales, the Environment Agency, the Welsh Assembly, the Wales Tourism Alliance and the National Trust.

The roles and responsibilities of the two parties are described. From the limited evidence available, it is not evident that the present situation with regard to the leasing of land to wind energy operators transgresses the roles and responsibilities of Forestry Commission Wales. It should be noted that the agreement:

Is solely a licence to undertake certain agreed operations

and...

Any and all Forestry Commission decisions regarding the management of its land which could impact on the site shall be subject to discussion with the [DVHRCDA]... however the Forestry Commission's decisions shall be final.

The text of a speech given by Ian Forshaw (Director of Forestry Commission Wales (FCW)) at the opening of the Dyfnant forest trails in June 2005 notes:

We recognise the importance to the Welsh economy of horse tourism and are delighted to be involved with this project which is already bringing visitors into the area. It is also helping with local regeneration on a wider scale. These unique trails and facilities are the culmination of three years hard work by members of the Dyfnant and Vyrnwy Horse Riders and Carriage Drivers Association and FC Wales staff. This is a shining example of what can be created when a successful partnership is formed, and I hope that it will be an encouragement to other groups who may consider taking forward similar ventures.

The Forestry Commission issued a press release on 24 June 2005 that coincided with the official opening¹⁰.

The DVHRCDA has requested updates on the Dyfnant forest wind farm proposal. For example, draft minutes of the annual joint meeting between FCW and partners on 19 September 2006 note that Felicity Wills should remind Jon Westlake to inform the DVHRCDA about developments in Dyfnant as soon as possible. Felicity reminded Jon in an email dated 29 September.

No further information on contact between the petitioners and Forestry Commission Wales has been provided apart from a letter in November 2007. In response to letters and emails to the First Minister, the Minister for Rural Affairs, and the Minister for Environment, Sustainability and Housing, the Forestry Commission responded to Mr And Mrs Trueman on 29 November 2007.

¹⁰ Forestry Commission, *Tourism gold at the end of the rainbow*, <http://www.forestry.gov.uk/newsrele.nsf/WebPressReleases/8091F525DB6D48C68025702600486ADE>

Atodiad 3

Y Pwyllgor Deisebau

Petitions Committee

Jane Davidson AM
Minister for Environment, Sustainability
and Housing
Welsh Assembly Government
Cardiff Bay
CF99 1NA

Bae Caerdydd / Cardiff Bay
Caerdydd / Cardiff CF99 1NA

Our ref: PET-03-116

13 May 2008

PETITION - DYFNANT FOREST WIND FARM

This petition was considered by the Committee on 8th May and concerns the proposed wind farm in Dyfnant Forest. It has been submitted by the Dyfnant and Vyrnwy Horse Riders and Carriage Drivers Association who have an agreement with the Forestry Commission to use the Forest and its trails for horse and carriage riding.

The Committee resolved to ask you to clarify the Government's policy with respect to building wind farms on Forestry Commission land, which I understand to be within the Assembly Government's estate. I should also be grateful for any information you can provide about this particular site and consultation that has taken place with relevant stakeholders regarding the proposed wind farm development.

Yours sincerely,

Val Lloyd,
Chair, Petitions Committee

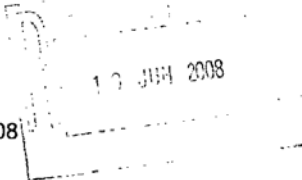
Atodiad 4

116

Elin Jones AM/AC
Y Gweinidog dros Faterion Gwledig
Minister for Rural Affairs

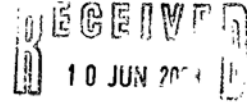


Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru
Welsh Assembly Government



Eich cyf/Your ref
Ein cyf/Our ref EJ/00496/08

Val Lloyd
Chair
Petitions Committee



ASD

9 June 2008

Dear Val,

I refer to your letter dated 13 May 2008 to Jane Davidson, Minister for Environment, Sustainability and Housing (reference PET-03-116) in respect of the National Forest Estate Windfarm Programme (NFEWP) which has been passed to me to reply because I am the Minister with responsibility for forestry which includes the NFEWP.

The Welsh Assembly Government's strategy for renewable energy reflected in Technical Advice Note 8 (TAN 8) outlines 7 Strategic Search Areas (SSAs) in Wales where developers can seek to develop windfarms to contribute towards meeting the Welsh Assembly Government's 2010 renewable energy target of 4TWhrs per annum. Much of the land within these areas is owned by the Welsh Assembly Government who are able to dispose of this land and it is managed on their behalf by Forestry Commission Wales (FCW). Ministers instructed FCW to proceed with tendering these areas for windfarm development in 2005. FCW developed and managed the NFEWP procurement process, the results of which were approved in principle by Ministers in October 2007. Dyfnant Forest is within SSA B and was therefore included in the tender.

During the procurement process, FCW asked bidders to provide their proposals for community consultation and these have been scored against the British Wind Energy Association best practice guidelines. Bidders were scored on how they intended to incorporate feedback from the local community into their proposals during the consultation process and were also asked to provide FCW with a method statement setting out the constraints and drivers considered in designing the layout for the wind-farm. This statement and the layout were evaluated by technical advisors.

Five of the 'options to develop' on the FCW-managed estate have now been completed, one of which is SSA B which includes Dyfnant forest. The successful bidders have entered into a legally binding contract with the Welsh Assembly Government which will provide them, following the successful commissioning of the wind power system, with a lease which will enable them to operate over a 25-year period. Apart from the policy reasons described

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above, as there is a binding contractual commitment between the Welsh Assembly Government and the developer, it is not possible to rescind the decision to select Dyfnant forest for windfarm development.

It should be noted however that all of the successful bidders will have to make a planning application to the relevant planning authority prior to any development taking place. Any developer submitting an application will have to show as part of their application what impact the proposed development will have on the area. The statutory process will also give interested groups and individuals the opportunity to object to or raise concerns about the application. Should consent be granted, it may be subject to conditions.

I am satisfied that the Assembly Government is acting within its powers on this matter and that its actions fully accord with its published policy of increasing the amount of energy generated from renewable resources and that all formal consultation procedures will be adhered to by the relevant parties concerned when appropriate.



Elin Jones AC/AM
Y Gweinidog dros Faterion Gwledig
Minister for Rural Affairs

