

MONTGOMERYSHIRE LOCAL COUNCIL FORUM

OPENING STATEMENT – Public Inquiry

5th June 2013

I am Robert Robinson a Chartered Surveyor and Secretary to the Local Council Forum which represents a number of the Town and Community Councils in the local area affected by the proposals the subject of this inquiry.

A list of Councils who have made up the Forum's objection is contained within the written evidence.

The Forum would like to start the opening statement by quoting parts of the Transcript from what I said to the The Environment and Sustainability Committee of the Welsh Assembly on 12th January 2012 at the Welsh Assembly in Cardiff. I have also updated these statements to include more recent events.

TAN8 Guidance

By way of introduction to the subject we start by saying three things, which are the fundamental planks to where we are coming from.

First we are horrified, astounded and concerned that Assembly Members, either by themselves or by their Officials, did not understand the effects of TAN8 when it was approved. In 2007 when I joined Welshpool Town Council as Town Clerk and the first Wind Farm Application appeared, I looked at what TAN8 was about, and I stood up at a public meeting and asked 'Do you realise what comes with this (wind farms)?' I issued pictures of the infrastructure. I showed the Giant Pylon Line, the Hub and the Transport. I was laughed at. I am sorry, but if I can pick it up, and we are only Town Council's, why on earth did the Welsh Assembly not also pick up that situation at the time. We have had statements from the First Minister (and other Ministers) saying 'Oh we did not mean that'. I am sorry, but with something as big as this, that is a real concern to us. Somehow we are proceeding with TAN8 when the Welsh Assembly have openly admitted that, at the beginning the Assembly did not understand the affects of it. To us this is a good reason for TAN8 to be reviewed.

Localism

The second point is that there is a very strong feeling in Montgomeryshire about TAN8, as you know Sir, whether it is the pylons or the transport or the hub or the wind farms themselves. It could be argued that 2,000 people in Cardiff is not very many out of a population of 56,000 and this could also apply to the demonstration at the Livestock market. It could be argued that that the many public meetings held in Welshpool, Meifod, Kerry, Llandrino, Llandisilio, Llanfair Caereinion, Llansantffriad and many more only attract protesters and are a small percentage of the population. However, the feeling expressed by these meetings and gatherings are fully supported by the many surveys carried out door to door by Town and Community Councils. Some have higher percentages of objection where they are directly affected but even in Welshpool, where they are not so directly affected, the percentage of objections is around 80%.

A schedule has been made available and I attach to the written version of this opening statement an updated version with corrections to the percentages.

Transport

The third point refers specifically to the level of transport needed to implement the wind farms and infrastructure.

For example if there were to be 450 wind farm turbines in total it is generally accepted that this would generate 450,000 vehicle movements from the larger abnormal loads to the car and van of a construction worker.

The transport plan issued does not demonstrate that such transport needs can be managed without serious disruption.

A schedule showing an example of the effects of convoys alone is attached. This is serious stuff. Each convoy (I understand of 2 lorries and not 3 as in my schedule) would have abnormal loads of the length of 3 Tesco articulated lorries along with support vehicles. These would provide a rolling road block along our sub standard roads causing serious traffic delays. This could well put off holiday makers from coming and affect our economy. A cost which would be borne by the local businesses and not those who would have caused the problem.

I did take Cheryl Gillan (Secretary for Wales at the time) along an approved route for wind farm traffic. At one point she asked me 'when are we going to get back onto the actual route the lorries will take'. I said 'you are still on it'. She burst out laughing as my wing mirrors on both sides were brushing the hedges.

I was also told by a National Grid Officer that the convoys would be coming in quiet times, when asked when these were; the reply was 'school holidays'. We are a tourist area! This again shows the lack of understanding of what this all means to Montgomeryshire and the Shropshire borders. Finally, on this subject, I had a conversation with a Minister at the Welsh Assembly who informed me not to worry; the lorries would be on dual carriageways. I invited the Minister to come to Mid Wales to show me it as I would like to use it. The Minister has not taken up the offer yet.

I think that what I have said so far starts to show the reasons the Forum's objection to TAN8 as a Policy and start to show how flawed TAN8 is.

The North Wales Association of Town and Larger Community Councils has included in their written submission copies of letters from our MP and AM's supporting a review of TAN8 before making a horrific mistake which will, in the words of our MP, rape our Mid Wales countryside.

I have made available to you, Sir, a copy of the minutes of the Environment and Sustainability Committee of 12th March 2012 including the presentation made by Welshpool Town Council to that Committee as it holds much relevant information to the Inquiry and is in line with the Forum's position.

The Forum has not only presented its case, along with the Town and Community Councils in the area, to the Welsh Assembly but also direct to a Select Committee of Parliament. There have also been a number of petitions presented to both Parliament and the Welsh Assembly. This shows the commitment of the Forum to object to the proposals, not only the subject of this Inquiry but also to other Wind Farm Developments within Montgomeryshire.

In summary the evidence set out in the written submission has been approved by the Local Council Forum and sets out to show three main lines of objection with regard to this part of the Inquiry:

1. The first is that it is clear to the Forum that TAN8 is flawed due to the lack of understanding by the Assembly Members of what they were approving. This is evidenced by the varying statements from the Assembly. There was never any way that the level of development proposed could be on wooden poles as set out in Welsh Assembly answers to questions.
2. Secondly the scale of the developments proposed is way beyond that envisaged by the Welsh Assembly when approving TAN8. TAN8 refers to upper limits and not levels set as a target. Indeed the Welsh Assembly has made statements that the number of applications for wind farm development exceeds the upper limits of TAN8.
3. The third is that the developments are out of scale with the Mid Wales area and any benefits do not outweigh any advantages. When the overall effects of the developments are considered later in the Inquiry I will refer to the traffic implications and Tourism matters backed by surveys.

This, along with what must be one of the strongest public objections, forms the basis of our objection to this part of the inquiry. This is not only evidenced by the public meetings and demonstrations but particularly by a number of surveys carried out by Town and Community Councils.

As a final point, Sir, the so called 'consultation process' was not what many of our members understand a consultation to be. The Communities were presented with what was coming and then asked to put forward questions. The developers and government have not worked with the Communities and this has been a main reason for us ending up with the divide between the Developers/Governments and the Communities involved. We have clear evidence of this which will no doubt come out during this inquiry.

I will be presenting more evidence to the Inquiry on behalf of the Forum as the Inquiry proceeds with regard to each aspect of the Inquiry.

This concludes the opening statement of the Montgomeryshire Local Council Forum.

Thank you.

5th June 2013