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Tamasine Stretton
To: "bankssolutionsuk@gmail.com" <bankssolutionsuk@gmail.com>
Reply-To: Tamasine Stretton <tam_stretton@yahoo.co.uk>
Conjoined Wind Farms Public Inquiry - Witness Statement

The Mid - Wales (Powys)
Conjoined Wind Farms Public Inquiry

29th September 2013

Witness Statement

Opening Statement

I wish to object to the Carnedd Wen and Llanbrynmair wind farm proposals in SSA B, and also to Llanbadarn Fynydd, Llaithddu and Llandinam in SSA C, which are to be considered by this inquiry, as expanded upon below.

About me

Graduating with a degree in Zoology from Bangor University in 1999, I have since worked for Field Studies Council, Oxford University, Countryside Council for Wales and have been in my current post, with Montgomeryshire Wildlife Trust for eight years (Conservation Officer). Throughout my life, in a voluntary capacity, as well as through my paid work, I have carried out numerous habitat and species surveys, as well as being involved with habitat restoration work. I am a licensed bat worker and am training for my dormouse handling licence. I am the Montgomeryshire Mammal Recorder. I am passionate about living in a sustainable manner.

Reasons for objecting

Bats

Carnedd Wen's Non Technical Summary states that "*potentially negative impacts on bats will not be significant*". However, UK evidence of the impact of wind farms on bats is still being gathered; the wind farm industry is currently involved with the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs on a project to determine the impact of turbines on bats in Britain, with the research due to be published next year. However, research in other countries has shown that impacts on bats can be significant; a study in North-Western Europe showed that the impact was "*highest (5–20 [bats killed per turbine]) at the coast and on forested hills and ridges.*" and "*The species killed almost exclusively (98%) belonged to a group (Nyctalus, Pipistrellus, Vespertilio and Eptesicus spp.) adapted for open-air foraging.*" "*Bat species other than the open-air suite referred to above are usually not at risk at wind turbines, because they fly below the rotors, but are still killed occasionally (2%).*" (Rydell et al. 2010. Bat Mortality at Wind Turbines in Northwestern Europe. *Acta Chiropterologica* 12(2):261-274.). No application should be given permission without clear evidence that there will not a significant impact on these European Protected Species.

Other mammals

Whilst surveys can only tell you what species can be found on a certain date(s), it is important that these surveys are carried out in an appropriate manner, keeping abreast with new discoveries. The Common Dormouse (*Muscardinus avellanarius*) is now known to inhabit a much wider range of habitat than previously thought and is often very hard to find. The following publications show that the dormouse is certainly to be found in conifer plantations:

- Trout et al. 2012. Hazel dormice in British conifer forests and their ecology in a pine plantation during restoration to broadleaf. PECKIANA Band 8 pp.31–39.
- Sanderson, F. J. 2004. The population ecology and monitoring of the dormouse *Muscardinus avellanarius*. Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of London.

Pine Martens are dismissed as not being in the area, however since this primarily forest-dwelling mammal lives at very low densities in Wales, evidence of their presence is very difficult to find. Nevertheless, they are widely considered to be present in North and Mid Wales and indeed, a dead one was found on the road near Aberhafesp last year, providing clear genetic evidence for the first time in 40 years. There is likely to be good Pine Marten habitat within the forestry affected by these wind farm applications.

It is also extremely unlikely that there is only one Badger sett over the whole Llanbrynmair site.

Birds

In the Non-Technical Summary for Llanbrynmair, RES state: "*Overall, the study area as a whole is considered as nationally important in a UK and Welsh context for its breeding bird community.*" Whilst the applicants argue that impacts on these birds can be minimised, by carefully siting the turbines, and mitigated, much of the current available evidence suggests the contrary.

The recently released 'State of Nature' Report, a collaboration between 25 UK conservation and research organisations, highlights just how badly our habitats and species have fared and the urgent conservation action which is needed to reverse these declines - "*60% of species have declined over the last 50 years and 31% have declined strongly.*" This report states that Golden Plover "*has declined by more than 83% in Wales in recent decades.*". With such dramatic declines, we should be doing all we can to arrest and reverse this trend, not adding to their difficulties.

Research into the impacts of wind farms on Golden Plover in Scotland concluded: "*The results provide evidence of significant avoidance of wind turbines by breeding golden plovers to a distance of at least 200 metres. Furthermore, wind farm sites appear to support lower densities of golden plover than predicted by the distribution model for sites without wind farms.*" (J. W. Pearce-Higgins et al. Assessing the cumulative impacts of wind farms on peatland birds: a case study of golden plover *Pluvialis apricaria* in Scotland. Mires and Peat, Volume 4 (2008–2010), Article 01.)

Forestry

The suggestion that the complete removal of conifer plantations will benefit wildlife is not necessarily the case. All public forests in Wales have a 'Forest Design Plan'. Each one of these plans explains how the forest is to be managed and why, over a ten year period (reviewed at five year intervals). As well as the commercial forestry operations, these plans look to conserve and enhance important species and habitats; much great work for wildlife has been achieved by the Forestry Commission over the last 10 years or more.

This includes much peatland restoration work in previously afforested areas; for example:

<http://www.forestry.gov.uk/forestry/!NFD-7VYKVD>

See also Forestry Commission Research Note - Restoring afforested peat bogs: results of current research. May 2010.

Therefore, the assertion that these wind farms will undertake habitat restoration habitat in these forested areas, that would not otherwise happen, is erroneous as much of this work may take place anyway. What's more, to date, there has also been widespread failure of the mitigation measures connected with large-scale wind farms to compensate for the loss of key species and habitats.

Carbon sequestration

"Welsh soils represent a significant store of carbon, currently estimated at 410 million tonnes, of which approximately one third is in the form of peat (ECOSSE 2007), despite the fact that peat deposits occupy only 3% of the surface area of Wales." (UK National Ecosystem Assessment: Technical Report)

Whilst much of the upland areas affected by these wind farm proposals are already heavily modified, either through agriculture or forestry, there is still a significant amount of deep peat; for example, at least 60% of the proposed Carnedd Wen site. The construction of these wind farms on peat will dramatically compromise their ability to capture and store carbon, exacerbating the very thing that these wind farms are supposed to help; i.e. global climate change.

The quoted carbon figures in the wind farm developer's documents do not take all the factors in to consideration. For example, the 'tool' used by Carnedd Wen only considered the carbon emitted during manufacture of the turbines & their concrete foundations. It did NOT include the materials (including cement - manufacture of which is the 3rd largest, man-made CO2 emitter!) for ancillary structures, steel reinforcement for foundation bases, materials for extensive roadworks and new power infrastructure, the shipping and transport or the losses to ecosystem services (including the release of CO2 caused by these operations).

Flooding

I am no expert in flooding, but it is clear that laying millions of cubic metres of concrete on our water catchments and floodplains (which the required electrical infrastructure will do) will increase the risk of flooding. Try taking a sponge and pouring a jug of water over it, then replace the sponge with the same sized lump of concrete and pour a jug of water over it - the water now has nowhere to go and will soak everything around it.

Closing Statement

The evidence provided above only deals with a few examples of the potential impacts these wind farms could make. There are many more reasons why permissions shouldn't be granted, such as impacts on tourism, house prices and transport, which no doubt are being emphasised by others. I am not against wind farms, but for too long they have been hailed as THE answer; there is no such thing. Wind energy can be utilised in places but should not be concentrated into areas that are remote from sources of demand and are not served by, or in proximity to, existing infrastructure. The only way we can truly address our impact on global climate change is to take a strategic long-term view, drastically reducing our energy demand, as well as using a suite of renewable energies, the focus of which should be on micro-generation.

Tamasine A Stretton (Miss)