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Y Gweinidog Tai ac Adfywio
Minister for Housing and Regeneration



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Ein cyf/Our ref CS/00885/13

William Powell AM
Chair Petition's Committee

committeebusiness@Wales.gsi.gov.uk

15th May 2013

Dear William

Thank you for your letter of 24 April with regard to a petition calling for a moratorium on wind farm applications.

A number of the petition's recommendations are directed towards Natural Resources Wales; this response is on behalf of the Welsh Government and not Natural Resources Wales. You may wish to contact Natural Resources Wales directly to obtain their views. However, it should be noted that, a number of the recommendations directed towards Natural Resources Wales, such as to undertake a review of Technical Advice Notes (TANs), would not be appropriate as they relate to issues which are not within their remit.

The Petitioner's response raises a number of issues which I will address in turn.

Health and Safety in Construction and Design of Wind Turbines

Incidents involving turbines are rare. The risks posed by wind turbines can and should be managed by their operators so that neither the workers involved in building or running them, nor members of the public, are harmed or put at risk of harm.

Separation distances, between turbines and other land uses (such as buildings, roads and railways), are considered within the planning and consenting process in order to ensure safety. The distance between wind turbines and buildings required, on the basis of expected noise levels and visual impact, will often be greater than that necessary to meet safety requirements.

Where appropriate, the Health and Safety Executive or the relevant local planning authority, depending on the particular circumstances, would be responsible for investigating incidents involving wind turbines.

Placement of Turbines in Rural Landscapes

Bae Caerdydd • Cardiff Bay
Caerdydd • Cardiff
CF99 1NA

Wedi'i argraffu ar bapur wedi'i ailgylchu (100%)

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Landscape and visual impacts are considered within the planning and consenting process. Wind turbines should be sited and designed so that adverse effects on landscape and visual amenity are minimised and the special qualities of designated areas are protected. Wind farm applications will usually require an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA). EIA is a means of drawing together an assessment of a project's likely significant environmental effects, including its impact on the landscape.

TAN 8: Planning for Renewable Energy seeks to minimise the affect across Wales of large scale renewable energy developments by identifying 7 Strategic Search Areas (SSAs). The SSAs are considered most suitable in terms of environment, technical issues and grid network. This approach seeks to safeguard our most important environmental priorities and minimise the associated grid lines required to meet our obligations under European and UK law.

Ecology and Biodiversity

Ecology and biodiversity impacts of wind farms are considered as part of the planning and consenting process. Planning Policy Wales (edition 5, November 2012) supported by TAN 5: Nature Conservation and Planning provides advice on protecting and enhancing biodiversity and geological conservation. Policy guidance is given for local planning authorities in considering any development proposal on how to consider environmental impact, so as to avoid, wherever possible, adverse effects on the environment. In addition, TAN 8 addresses the potential impact of wind turbines moving blades upon birds and bats. This issue is a common concern but, in most cases, will not lead to significant numbers of bird and bat deaths or injuries.

Wind farm applications will usually require an EIA; which assesses the effect of developments on the environment. In addition, developers should follow the industry's Best Practice Guidelines and work closely with organisations, such as Natural Resources Wales and the RSPB, to ensure that wind farm design and layout does not interfere with sensitive species or wildlife designated sites.

In 2011 the Welsh Government published "Practice Guidance: Planning Implications of Renewable and Low Carbon Energy" as a tool to support Local Planning Authorities in dealing with applications for renewable and low carbon energy development, including wind farms. This provides advice on what mitigation measures can be incorporated into the design of wind turbines and wind farms to mitigate potential impacts on local ecology.

Noise

Noise impacts are considered within the planning and consenting process. The guidelines for the assessment of wind turbine noise, as identified in TAN 8, are set out in The Assessment and Rating of Noise from Wind Farms - ETSU-R-97. These guidelines were accepted as the recommended method for the assessment of wind turbines by the UK Government in 2004.

We have been assisting the Institute of Acoustics and the Department of Energy and Climate Change on the production of good practice guidance to the application of ETSU-R-97 for wind turbine noise assessment. This good practice guide is anticipated to be published shortly.

Well designed wind farms should be located so that increases in ambient noise levels, around noise-sensitive developments, are kept to acceptable levels with relation to existing background noise. This can be achieved through good design of the turbines and by allowing sufficient distance between the turbines and any noise-sensitive development.

Flooding

National Planning Policy, and EIA Regulations, identify that any proposal for a wind farm development needs to consider potential impacts upon both hydrology and hydrogeology, and, where necessary, provide appropriate mitigation.

The Welsh Government's "Practice Guidance: Planning Implications of Renewable and Low Carbon Energy" provides advice on what mitigation measures can be incorporated into the design to minimise flood risk and surface water runoff.

Changes to planning policy are based upon clear and substantiated evidence, and my officials keep a watching overview for the need to revise planning policy. In terms of the preferred advice set out by Galar it is not clear what evidence underpins their figures.

National Planning Policy, in relation to protection of groundwater and flood risk, is robust and it is not proposed to endorse the recommendations put forward by Galar.

Review of Planning Guidance

TAN 8 provides an appropriate framework for the strategic planning of all forms of renewable energy in Wales. The Welsh Government has no intention, at the present time, to undertake a wholesale review of TAN 8.

In addition, it is for local planning authorities to set out local criteria, against which smaller scale renewable energy proposals outside of Strategic Search Areas will be evaluated, in their development plans. We have prepared a Toolkit 'Planning for Renewable and Low Carbon Energy – A Toolkit for Planners' to assist local planning authorities produce renewable energy assessments in support of their local development plans. The Toolkit offers a possible methodology which enables local authorities to develop a robust evidence base to assess the potential renewable and low carbon energy generation. The information can underpin renewable energy and low carbon energy policies in local planning authority's local development plan.

Community Benefit

We are currently working with the onshore wind industry to increase levels of Welsh investment and we will set expectations for economic and community benefit. We have agreed the broad principles under which onshore wind community benefits should be operated within Wales and an analysis of current community support arrangements is taking place. The Welsh Government and wind developers are currently participating in workshops to develop more detailed arrangements.

Tourism

A diverse range of factors influence the tourism industry. There is no concrete evidence to suggest that wind farms damage tourism. Although inconclusive, previous research carried out into the impact of wind farms on tourism in Wales has indicated that, for the majority of visitors, the existence of wind farms in the countryside does not have a major impact. Studies carried out elsewhere indicate that the impact of wind farms on tourism is minimal and, if they are properly designed and sensitively laid out, there is no reason to believe that renewable energy targets and tourism are incompatible.

The Welsh Government is in the process of commissioning research, on the economic impact of wind farms and associated grid infrastructure on the tourism industry, as part of

our forward research program. We anticipate that this work will be completed by early summer.

Moratorium on Wind Farm Applications

I do not support the recommendations put forward by Galar on the basis that national planning policy sets out an appropriate planning framework for renewable energy development in Wales and the effects of wind energy development are addressed as part of the planning and consenting process. We remain fully committed to our renewable energy policies in Energy Wales: A Low Carbon Transition, Planning Policy Wales and TAN 8. I will not support the introduction of a moratorium on wind farm applications.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'C. Sargeant', written in a cursive style.

Carl Sargeant AC / AM

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Minister for Housing and Regeneration