

GALAR *Community Volunteer Group*

Attention of the Petitions Committee

Monday, 01 December 2014

Dear Sirs,

Ref. P-04-533

Members of GALAR would like to express our thanks to the Minister for addressing the five points raised in our evidence to the committee on the 8th. September 2014. We would apologise that the Minister feels we are addressing issues not in the original petition, but would point out that the Welsh Assembly Petition System is word limited, and on complex matters it is hard to encompass the full range of requests the petitioners are seeking to be addressed. (Please note, as petitioners we feel this is fair and a balance is needed to restrict the petition to those potentially affected).

Adhering to the same notation:

Item 1. The Minister does not agree in referenda as a way of consulting the public, and indeed the petitioners are not asking that any such referenda be binding, but it would at least inform the planning committee of local feeling.

This is a matter mainly affecting rural communities. Until the recent past these communities had pubs, schools and post offices/stores where community matters had a chance of being disseminated. This local communication can be no longer counted on. The multiplicity of applications means that beyond legal notices, little effort is made to report applications.

The Minister represents Alyn and Deeside one of the most densely populated areas of Wales, It would be inconceivable that a planning notice posted by a planning officer could be missed in an area where there are over 500 people per sq.km. Rural Wales has far less population per sq. km. and a higher percentage of retired. What may be acceptable in the Ministers Constituency is not acceptable in rural areas. The Town and Country Planning(Development Management Procedure) (Wales) Order 2012 does not differentiate between those in rural areas, and those in areas, such as his own, well endowed with community facilities, and population numbers.

Wind farm developers are bound by planning legislation to inform members of the public in rural areas of proposed developments. The multiplicity of single turbine

applications are creating wind farms much closer to communities, and with greater impact on rural dwellers.

If referenda is to be denied to rural dwellers by the WAG, then we would ask NRW, to propose an alternative which recognises the shortcomings of the present system, the impact on Welsh minorities; and the perceived bullying by both the planning authorities and landowners.

Items 2 & 5 refer to grid connection, and as the Minister suggests we would be obliged if the committee took evidence from National Grid. If possible, we would like the opportunity to question the National Grid on these matters by submission of written questions through yourselves, when the National Grid responds.

Items 3 & 4 Relates to the removal of turbines which are no longer financially viable, either through breakdown, at the end of their mechanical life, or by the removal of subsidies. Such turbines cannot be simply abandoned. The Minister quite rightly suggests that it can be made a condition of planning by the local authority, but this choice assumes that due diligence is undertaken by the council into the multiple agents and landowners and their financial viability and responsibility. The multiplicity of applications bring the day of subsidy reduction or cancellation ever closer. Devolvement of energy to Wales is the ambition of all the main parties, when it is only logical that subsidies of local energy will fall upon the new devolved exchequer to finance. Applications at the moment are on shifting financial sands, the only sure value is the land on which the turbine stands.

It cannot be reasonably expected that local council's should underwrite removal, or ratepayers pay for the taking away of a turbine and the renovation of the land. Therefore, we ask that each application should have a removals charge against the land on which the turbine stands, or that NRW, having responsibility for planning legislation for these structures, should assume responsibility, at the planning stage, for costs that occur later, (should the landowner or agent fail to meet their commitment).

Conclusions Local accountability set out in Item 1 is not addressed by the Town and Country Planning Act. Residents in rural areas feel that turbines are being imposed upon them by arrogant planners and bullying landowners. Farmers have always been regarded of pillars of the community in rural areas, this is no longer so. NRW are not in command of the situation, and there is no planning as to the numbers or positions of turbines. Direct notification to rural residents of the type size and position of an application, and if this is a single or a future multiple submission is little to ask; and in the absence of local referenda the very least NRW can do.

We are content that items 2 & 5 are referred to the National Grid.

Items 3 & 4. It should be made clear, and a condition of planning, that at last resort removal of turbines can be undertaken by the CC with a charge against the landowner and their property.

Yours faithfully

J. Shepherd Foster

GALAR Community Volunteer Group