

Russell George AM

Shadow Minister for Environment and Sustainable Development
& National Assembly Member for Montgomeryshire

Gweinidog yr Wrthblaidd dros yr Amgylchedd a Datblygu Cynaliadwy
ac Aelod Cynulliad dros Sir Drefaldwyn

February 2013

Dear Resident

Wind farms and the Mid Wales Connection Project update

A lot has happened since I last wrote to you in April last year and now seems like a good time to take a step back, look at what has been achieved and what still needs to be done.

National News

There continues to be a significant growth of wind-farm scepticism across the UK, as individuals, communities and organisations call on their respective governments to focus less on wind energy and look at other sources of renewable energy. One of the key elements in aiding that diversification are changes to the Renewable Obligations Certificates, which determine the level of public subsidy governments direct to a given renewable technology; for England and Wales that is controlled by the UK Government.

Many of you will remember the 10% cut in subsidies to onshore wind back in July. It was widely reported at the time that the Chancellor, George Osborne MP, wanted a more significant cut and I, along with many colleagues, agreed that it was time the state stopped propping up massive energy companies at the expense of our communities and our countryside. However, Energy Secretary Ed Davey MP seemed deaf to the opinions of the country and blocked a larger cut. That being said, politicians of all parties are coming together to add their voices to those of local people. The cabinet reshuffle prompted a flurry of press coverage and one of the main conclusions that commentators drew was that there is a new, wind-sceptic cabinet sitting in London. As recently as 3rd January, Planning Minister, Nick Bowles MP, acknowledged in a letter that opponents of onshore wind should not have their views ***“ridden over roughshod.”*** The new Secretary of State for the Environment and Rural Affairs is Owen Paterson MP, whose Shropshire constituency will be affected by the wind proposals concerning Montgomeryshire. In one of his first interviews as Secretary of State, he noted that some projects ***“depend on very heavy public subsidies that are intensely unpopular”***. The most relevant of the new appointments though, is John Hayes MP, a new minister within the Department of Energy and Climate Change. Mr Hayes has aired his views on wind farms very publicly and they are views very different to those of his predecessor, Charles Hendry MP.

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Substation Decision

In July, National Grid announced that their preferred substation site was Cefn Coch. I mentioned in my April update, the importance of staying united in the face of this decision and I have no doubt that National Grid has been surprised by the continuing solidarity of Montgomeryshire communities. I want to take a moment to thank and congratulate members of all local campaign groups for their commitment, determination and resolve that they have brought to this issue.

Powys Council's Legal Fight

In a clear show of democracy, Powys County Council has responded to calls from communities and has formally opposed five large wind farm proposals - **Llithddu, Carnedd Wen, Llanbadarn Fynydd, Llanbrynmair** and **Llandinam** - along with a 132kv power line from Llandinam to Welshpool. However, I am dismayed to learn that if Powys Council wants to continue to oppose all the large-scale developments drawn to the region by TAN8, then it will cost them nearly £3m to do so. At a time when councils are being asked to concentrate on delivering better services with fewer resources, it is shocking that Powys must set aside a whopping £2.8million when the views of local communities have been so powerful and united.

Powys Council Cabinet Member for Planning and Regeneration, Cllr Graham Brown, has appealed to both the Welsh and UK Governments to lend financial support to the Council's cause. There has to be a flexible and understanding approach from central government in ensuring local authorities are adequately equipped to respond to local residents' needs. Our MP, Glyn Davies raised this point to UK ministers during a debate on energy at the end of last year and restated it again when he questioned ministers earlier this month.

I too have challenged Welsh ministers on this issue. I have raised it in the Senedd with the Environment Minister, with the Finance Minister and at the start of this month with the First Minister, Carwyn Jones AM. However, the Welsh Government not only refuses to allocate further money to Powys County Council but blames it for its financial predicament because it chose to oppose the developments in the first place! If the First Minister and his Welsh Government believe that Powys Council should agree to inappropriate development simply because it cannot afford to legally defend its position, then this is clearly an affront to local accountability and local democracy.

There has been a recent positive development, which I think will prove very helpful to me in fighting this issue further in the Assembly and that is a petition lodged by local constituent, Mr John Day. Only this month, he has formally submitted a petition with the National Assembly's Petitions Committee, calling on the Welsh Government to provide '**substantial additional financial support**' to Powys Council to help it defend its position in the upcoming public inquiry. This petition is currently on the Committee's webpage, which can be accessed through this address: <http://tinyurl.com/PowysPetition>

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The petition is open until 10th April and it is gathering more and more names every day. I would urge you to sign this petition and make your views known.

This is helpful because the Committee will have to examine this petition in greater detail and make formal recommendations. It may call ministers to give evidence and challenge them to justify the stance they have taken in this regard.

Public Inquiry

As I mentioned above, due to Powys County Council objecting to five large wind farm developments and associated infrastructure, the Department for Energy and Climate Change have initiated a conjoined public inquiry to examine all six applications in more detail. It is expected that the inquiry will sit and begin formal proceedings in early June. I have called for the consultation to be held in Welshpool, as have a number of local campaign groups, as it is important that the hearing be as accessible as possible for people.

As this letter was going to print, a pre-inquiry meeting is taking place in Llandrindod Wells on 18th February. This is an opportunity for local politicians, key opposition groups and their legal teams to understand the processes and procedures of the inquiry and how it will operate.

Costs to the Police & Ministry of Defence

A point which has been raised with me a number of times is the costs to the police of monitoring and attending National Grid events and of escorting vehicles transporting wind turbine components. I wrote to Dyfed-Powys Police in October and again in December but unfortunately as this letter went to print, I have yet to receive a response. I am grateful to the police for ensuring that National Grid events were managed safely but I am frustrated that senior officials within the Force appear unwilling to reveal the true extent of the costs of National Grid seemingly using local police as a private security firm. Further, I am aware that the Royal Air Force has nearby bases in North Wales and just across the border in England and that Mid Wales is frequently used as a training ground for flights. With this in mind, I have written to the RAF and to Defence Secretary, Philip Hammond MP, asking about what implications the erection of turbines will have for the Ministry of Defence. The RAF has passed my query onto a technical team who will respond in due course and I am awaiting a response from Mr Hammond.

A New Alliance

I would like to report that a group of leading wind farm campaign groups and local community organisations have come together to prevent the industrialisation of Mid Wales by launching the 'Alliance Fighting Fund', a single bank account with HSBC in Welshpool to which members of the public can donate. The Alliance has instructed a very experienced barrister to act on its behalf in the upcoming public inquiry and has a strong track record of acting in extended cases such as this. Member groups will continue with their own fundraising activities and aim to feed money back to the Alliance. If you would like to donate to the fighting fund account, you can do so online or by cheque with these details:

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Account Details: "Take the Power Back" (Sort Code: 40-46-07; Account Number 21522736)

Please make cheques payable to "Take the Power Back" and send them to:

Mr Richard Bonfield
Alliance Co-ordinator
Lexington Court
Kerry
Newtown
SY16 4LU

I have also learnt that the *County Times* will be very generously donating a page a week to the cause. So if you are aware of any fundraising events taking place or if you are planning to organise an event yourself, please make sure you keep Richard Bonfield informed on 07977 039912.

Below is a list of all current Alliance members and their contact details:

Organisation	Email	Contact
Conservation of Upland Powys	phil@llanfair-learners.co.uk chairman@cupowys.org	Phil Robinson Alison Davies
STOP Windfarms and Pylons	stopgroup999@gmail.com	Michele Lloyd
Montgomeryshire Against Pylons and Windfarms	joysisley@gmail.com montgomeryshireap@gmail.com	Joy Sisley Jonathan Wilkinson
Rhiwcynon Against Pylons	geoff180@gmail.com	Geoff Weller
Valleys Against Destruction (Abermule Group)	rees227@btinternet.com	Jane Rees
Mochdre Action Group	mike@weriog.mid-wales.net	Mike Brennan
Llansanffraid Action Group and Community Council	digbydavies@aol.com	Digby Davies
Shropshire North Against Pylons	charleswgreen@msn.com	Charles Green
Cambrian Mountains Society	annwest@spamarrest.com	Ann West
The Rainbow Trails Project Dyfnant Forest Llangadfan	stephenwilson07@btinternet.com	Sue Wilkinson
Trannon Residents Against Power Plans	vivienne.green@tycoch.net	Vivienne Green
Country Guardian	amkelly@greenbee.net	Angela Kelly
Llanymynech Action Group & Community Council	pylongroup@btconnect.com	Martin Clare
Campaign for the Protection of Rural Wales	peter@cprwmail.org.uk	Peter Ogden
Rea Valley Against Pylons	steve@consoft.co.uk	Steve Elliot
Bwlch-y-Cibau & Peniarth against Windfarms/Pylons	pylonswilkinson@hotmail.co.uk	Sarah Wilkinson
Campaign for the Protection of Rural England (Shropshire)	selbymartin@btinternet.com	Selby Martin
Mid Wales Arts Centre	cathy@midwalesarts.org.uk	Cathy Knapp
Montgomeryshire Federation of Women's Institutes	Rees227@btinternet.com	Jane Rees

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Dyfnant Forest Wind Farm

There has been a development with the Dyfnant Forest wind farm application as Scottish Power Renewables have published its draft Environmental Statement and is consulting on updates to the proposed project, currently at the development stage.

The Rainbow Trails Project campaign group is currently compiling its response which needs to be submitted before 15th March. If you have any queries about the consultation process or would like further information, then please contact Rainbow's Alliance representative, Sue Wilkinson, directly on the details in the above table.

Looking Forward

So what happens next? Well, it is vital that we keep up the momentum. Make sure your friends and neighbours are involved and have a look at my website and the websites below to see what you can do. Montgomeryshire Against Pylons have on their website a list of 10 things you can do to help out, from volunteering to responding to consultations. The Sustainable Life Festival was bigger and better last year than in 2011 and I have no doubt that it will be just as much fun this year. Finally, do get involved with any of the groups listed above because it is vital that all our communities make their voices heard.

Next month, I am hoping to meet with John Hayes MP, Minister of State for Energy, in London. He has direct responsibility for renewable energy deployment and grid policy and I will be using this meeting to discuss the Conservative Party's national policy towards wind turbines and grid infrastructure. I hope it will be an opportunity where we can both exchange open and frank discussion on these important issues for Mid Wales.

The most important public event will be the public inquiry hearing which will begin this summer. I have not had the exact dates confirmed yet but I will be writing to you again closer to the time with more details. The inquiry will be generating a lot of media coverage locally and nationally, so it will be extremely important to have a significant public presence each day the inquiry sits. As we get closer to the start of the inquiry, Glyn Davies and I will be encouraging as many people as possible to attend to show solidarity and strength of purpose, therefore please try and do all that you can to help.

The campaign shows no sign of slowing down, in fact, it's growing. Across the country people are realising that wind energy and the infrastructure that comes with it is not sufficient to solve Britain's energy needs and the cost to wildlife, the environment, public health, house prices, household bills and the landscape, heavily outweighs any perceived benefits. I am continuing to fight in Cardiff Bay, Glyn Davies in Parliament. So let us all keep going; the tide is turning but we have not won yet!

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With kind regards



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PS – If you have received this information via a third party and would like to be on my mailing list to be updated directly, then please do contact my Newtown office on 01686 610887.

Campaign Websites:

Bwlch-y-Cibau & Peniarth against Windfarms/Pylons	www.brawd.org.uk
Cambrian Mountains Society	www.cambrian-mountains.co.uk
Campaign for the Protection of Rural England (Shropshire)	www.cpreshropshire.org.uk
Conservation of Upland Powys	www.midwaleswind.co.uk
Montgomeryshire Against Pylons	www.montgomeryshireagainstpylons.org www.facebook.com/MontgomeryshireAP
STOP – (Against Pylons and Turbines)	www.facebook.com/stop999
Together Against Wind	www.togetheragainstownd.com
TRAPP	www.trapp-online.org

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