

Michael and Claudi Halsey

Mr. William Powell, Chair
The Petitions Committee
Welsh Assembly
Ty Hywel
Cardiff Bay, CARDIFF
CF99 1NA

8th June, 2015

Dear Mr. Powell

PETITION ON : LOCALISM IN PLANNING and INFRASTRUCTURE COMPENSATION TO THIRD PARTIES.

Firstly we are sorry to note that our letter of 16th March that was approved by your Committee on the 24th March for referral to the Minister, didn't appear to reach him until nearly one month later on 23rd April? Could you please advise why this happened as this was indeed unfortunate as we understand this Bill was heavily debated by WAG towards the end of April ?

Secondly, my colleagues and I, having taken some considerable time and effort to compile our detailed response (in point form for ease of reference) to the Minister's earlier letter of 23rd.February, were very disappointed to see his response failed to answer most of the questions and comments we had made. This we believe shows the contempt in which this Minister holds local communities in Wales in this respect. Not only has he failed to answer and give account to citizens with genuine concerns but only 2 days after signing his reply approved the proposed Garreg Lywd Hill Windfarm development against the many objections and overtures of our LPA (Powys County Council) and local residents. We refer to this again later in this letter.

In view of the disdain in which this Minister has treated our Petition to your Committee it hardly seems worthwhile responding to the hollow words he incorporates in his letter. However for the record and for the benefit of a wider and more receptive audience we would comment as follows:-

1. Economic, Social, environmental and cultural well-being

There is indeed a duty on the government to improve the economic, social, environmental and cultural well being of Wales and this cannot be achieved through imposing planning policies that override those of the Local Authority and

of the economic and social well being of communities. Designation of rural areas as Strategic Search Areas for wind farms or for housing development *without recourse to a proper local planning regime and taking into full account the local situation and local opinion* is a dereliction of that duty.

2. Consultation

We can see no assurance that consultation will be a meaningful exercise. The 'consultation' on TAN8 was a case in point where over **90% of respondents** (including some developers) objected strongly and in an evidenced manner to a concentration approach and to the inclusion of specific areas, particularly where these were remote from any transmission connection. *The views of this vast majority were utterly ignored with disastrous consequences of the situation in which we now find ourselves.* How can the public have any faith in the mandatory 'consultations' when these are mere box ticking exercises ? For consultation to be meaningful, empowering and engaged *communities respondents have to see that the majority and evidenced view can influence decisions.* There is nothing in the Planning Bill or in the reply from the Minister to allay concerns

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or cause any of our points to be withdrawn.

There is a serious disconnect between the proposed action, for example the requirement for a LPA impact report, and the implementation. How will this report be used? Will the LPA, in consultation with the local community, be able to reject or amend a DNS application and will this local decision be respected ? **Will local voices not only be heard but heeded ?**

Throughout England Local Authorities are being given ever greater powers, especially in planning matters. Wales is in danger of taking a seriously retrograde step and emasculating LPAs and giving LDPs ever more limited scope and weight. *It cannot be equitable to expect the people of Wales to have a lesser voice into shaping their future and their living places or to have major infrastructure projects imposed on their communities from a central authority who is not properly cognisant of the local environment and economy.* Even the proposals for Place Plans, welcome as this is as a starting point, are far diluted from that of the Parish or Neighbourhood Plan. A missed opportunity for true localism and one which will only alienate communities as they see how difficult it will be to have this adopted as SPG and how constrained it is in reality. By his own admission Mr.Sargeant confesses that Place Plans fall outside his Bill.

3. Compensation

We have a situation in Mid Wales where people are now facing living as close neighbours to windfarms, unable to sell their homes and move away if they wish either for personal reasons or because their health is suffering or business foundering. There are an ever increasing number of noise complaints arising from operational windfarms and health related issues resulting from sleep deprivation. ***Their only option will be to abandon their homes, if they can afford to do so.*** Tourism businesses, where owners have invested all their capital and energy but are dependent on visitors who walk or ride or just come for the unspoilt beauty and tranquillity of the surroundings will lose custom. Even a small drop in visitors, as predicted in the Regeneris study for the Welsh Government (2014), could be the difference between survival and closure. ***Without compensation, what will these people do? This is neither social justice nor a promotion of well being.*** The Minister provides no reasoning as to why the Environmental & Sustainability Committee and the National Assembly of Wales would **not** have voted in favour of tabled amendments that would ensure communities and individuals were properly compensated for losses they suffer as a result of imposed DNS applications. **Why did this happen? Could you please give us an explanation?** We will have situations analogous to that of HS2 except in Wales there will **not** be generous compensation for those who need to move away but cannot sell their homes.

We are in danger of centralisation of power in planning that will fail to achieve community cohesion and well being across the communities that make up Wales. ***There must be recognition of the considerable variations between communities and the inherently differing needs of the urban and the rural reflected in a genuinely local decision making process.***

Referring back to Garreg Lwyd Hill Wind Farm (GLHWF) proposed development, he has now approved this post-election, against the fervent wishes of PCC's elected councillors and the residents they represent.

Despite the Inspector's report warning this development will significantly and adversely affect the surrounding Welsh and Shropshire Hills Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, the health and well being of the nearest resident; 12 kilometres of Glyndwr's Way National Trail, create substantial harm to 3 Scheduled Ancient monuments of UK importance et al.–he still choses to ignore it ! Perhaps the most significant impact will be on the lives of those distressed residents unfortunate

enough to be presently living in close proximity to this windfarm.

Having had the sale of their homes blighted for several years, this now sets the seal on their inability to sell at the very least at full and fair market value—if they are able to sell at all? Whilst Ministers sit in their fine air conditioned quiet offices in Cardiff these local residents will be forced to endure at least 25 years of noise, loss of visual tranquillity to say nothing of the impact of the construction period . Existing windfarms demonstrate that virtually no permanent local employment results and any 'community benefits' are not a local economic driver . On the contrary income from tourists is anticipated to be significantly reduced also. Only large overseas energy firms will continue to make substantial profits at the expense of rural communities.

This whole exercise through your Committee we thought was meant to demonstrate the democratic accountability of the Welsh Government toward its citizens. As you can clearly see it sadly falls way short of the mark with regard to these issues that we and our other Petitioners have raised.

We await the courtesy of your Committee's response and that of Mr. Sargeant.

Yours sincerely

Michael A. Halsey

Claudi Halsey

cc(by E-Mail)

Mr. & Mrs B. Crawford

Mrs. A. Davies (Chair- CUP)

Mr.G.Davies (Planning PCC)

Mr.Chris Davies MP

Mr.Glyn Davies MP

Mr.Russell George (AM)

Mr.& Mrs.J. Sandford

Mr. Barry Thomas (Leader Cabinet-PCC)

Cllr.Avril York-(Planning PCC)

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son Jesus Christ that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life" John 3v.16