

UNANSWERED QUESTIONS AND THE CONSPIRACY THEORY

When we first heard about the Cefn Croes proposals, we naively believed in the democratic process. We soon learned that at every turn, just as we thought we were winning the arguments, the goal posts were moved. Policies were being made to accommodate the Cefn Croes development. Inconsistencies in government policy occurred, and our questions remained unanswered. We began to suspect that Cefn Croes would be built, come-what-may. It gradually dawned on us that this was a decision taken in the early days of New Labour's Government. Was this in response to powerful lobbying from the BWEA and intense pressures from various 'green' groups to take a lead on Kyoto? Was ENRON's involvement significant?

How else can we explain:

- The fact that the Welsh Secretary, Paul Murphy, was either not consulted or his views ignored (he was known to be opposed to the scheme). How significant was it that he was replaced by Peter Hain, who is strongly supportive of wind turbines in Wales?
- Why was the detailed, totally convincing report by Ceredigion' senior planning officer to oppose Cefn Croes ignored by councillors and politicians? Why was Dai Lloyd Evans, Leader of Ceredigion Council, so committed to pushing the application through without delay and before all the consultee responses were received?
- Why was the Government's own statutory advisor on the countryside – the CCW – 'downgraded' so that its objection was not interpreted as such, and given less weight than the Ceredigion councillors' failure to object?
- Why had other smaller and less contentious wind power stations in Wales, on private land, been called in for public inquiries, but not Cefn Croes – which was the biggest onshore development to date, and the first on publicly owned land?
- Why could Sue Essex prohibit a bungalow within Ceredigion's Special Landscape Area (SLA), but not a massive industrial development with 300 foot high machines, covering nearly 8 square kilometres within that same SLA?
- Why did the Chief Executive Officer of Ceredigion County Council fail to tell us that we could challenge the councillors' actions through a judicial review? This failure to inform us within the time allowed for judicial review application extended to the Local Government Ombudsman, who was totally negative and unhelpful, and also to the National Assembly Minister for Local Government who replied to letters outside of the time limit. Why did the Ombudsman ignore our complaints that the councillors who approved the development against their officer's recommendation fail to justify their decision on planning grounds?

- Why were the MoD's objections to Kielder Forest and the extension of Llandinam permitted, but disallowed for Cefn Croes, which is also within a Tactical Training Area for low flying training down to 100 feet?
- Why did the West Wales Trunk Roads Agency raise no objection to the site entrance off the steepest, longest bend on the most dangerous road in Wales, the A44. It subsequently objected to the conversion of garages into houses in Ponterwyd, the nearby village on the same road, because it was near a bend. Why did demands for a full Traffic Impact Assessment fall on deaf ears?
- Why was there no recognition that Ceredigion already produces 50% of its electricity needs from renewables with a large hydroelectric power station and three wind power stations? This far exceeds the Government's targets.
- How can we explain the desperate measures taken by the Forestry Commission to avoid any adverse publicity about the use of its land in this way? The secrecy? The unminuted meetings? We note that the new Forestry Commission Chairman, Lord David Clark, was a Blair appointment – was he regarded as a safe pair of hands to push through the changes? A 'Tony crony' placeman?
- We do know that there is a very close relationship between the DTI and BWEA with staff swapping between the two on a regular basis. The BWEA is powerful, 'advising' the DTI behind the scenes. BWEA's lawyer, Marcus Trinick of Bond Pearce was instrumental in developing Planning Guideline 22 on wind energy, which enables more wind power stations to pass more easily through the planning system. BWEA is the organisation charged with influencing Local Planning Authority structural plans in order to weaken their rules governing wind developments. On the Bond Pearce website following our legal challenge, Marcus Trinick's statement implies that the judiciary had supported government energy policy. (See Developers chapter.)
- Between 2000 and 2002, there were instances where policy was being formulated through the usual process of consultation, review, and publication of White Papers. But there is within these papers and procedures the tacit acceptance that Cefn Croes would be built – this was in advance of the formal decision of approval. The review published by the National Assembly on renewable energy refers to targets that assume Cefn Croes and Camddwr will be built, as does the Performance and Innovation Unit (PIU) Energy Review.
- In the early stages of the Cefn Croes development process, when ENRON was the financial backer, ENRON bosses met with Trade Secretary Peter Mandelson and Energy Ministers Helen Liddell and Peter Hain from the DTI. This was at the time of the 'cash for access' scandals. Prior to that, Patricia Hewitt (the current SoS) had been head of research for ENRON's auditors, Andersen Consulting. Why, when the ENRON scandal broke, did the DTI continue to ignore repeated calls for a public inquiry? What were they afraid of?

- The Energy Minister's 'minded to approve' statement was an indication that the Cefn Croes decision had been made five months before it was officially ratified. This was in advance of collation of all the information and responses that the DTI was meant to be weighing up carefully. In a BBC Wales current affairs programme 'Dragon's Eye' broadcast in January 2002, Brian Wilson justified not calling in the application for a public inquiry thus: *'asking for a public inquiry simply kicks an issue into touch for another period of time, and certainly if we are serious about renewables, and wind power in particular, then we have to get some of these projects going and really having public inquiries about every one of them serves overall simply to delay the development of renewables.'* This demonstrates the determination to push Cefn Croes through the planning system come what may.
- Why did the Energy Minister and his Secretary of State (SoS) at the DTI reject the recommendations of their own civil servants and fail to permit a public inquiry? Why was this report upon which the decision was made exempt from the Freedom of Information Act? This surely runs counter to Labour's policy of 'open government' and 'accountability'? What were they frightened of? The truth?
- Geraint Jewson of RDC received the 'Developer of the Year' award at the BWEA's September 2002 conference, for being the first developer to 'bring in' the first Section 36 wind power station application. This arrogant triumphalism was two months before the legal challenge was to be heard. Were they not jumping the gun?
- In 2000, a civil servant at the DTI opined that land-based wind turbines were 'dinosaurs'. Why is New Labour continuing to pursue a technology which widely regarded as out of date and inappropriate?

We witnessed sustained attacks on anti-wind campaigners from all quarters - not just from the BWEA, but smears from the Energy Minister, Brian Wilson and Peter Hain, the new South African raised Welsh Secretary who replaced Paul Murphy. Surely, conduct unbecoming for Government Ministers? NIMBY (Not in My Back Yard) was an insult used freely, forgetting that here in rural mid Wales, we do not have backyards as such. Our 'backyards' are SLAs and ESAs. We regard our adjacent hills as landscape treasures for everyone to share and enjoy. Unlike developers and politicians we have no vested interests, other than trying to save a finite resource of great beauty and value to society for future generations. For this we were vilified.

We find it insulting that the Cefn Croes decision was made in Whitehall by an Energy Minister from Scotland and an Australian-born SoS at the DTI, neither of whom showed enough interest to visit the site and see the area.

It is interesting that there are no turbines of this magnitude or numbers in National Parks, Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, or the beautiful hills of the Chilterns and the South

Downs. Surely, this is recognition that people do not want to look at them, so why dump them in mid Wales – equally beautiful but without the protective designations? Did Government and the developers think they could quietly get away with it because there are few people and therefore they anticipated little opposition?

The government's Environmental Policy is totally inconsistent. Whilst professing support for a reduction in greenhouse gas emissions, it continues to promote private car ownership (ref. Patricia Hewitt at the NEC Motor Show on the success of the British car industry) and recreational aviation (Alistair Darling is pushing for more airports because '*people want cheap air flights*'). It is known that the exhaust from aeroplanes is highly polluting and a major contributor to greenhouse gas emissions. Aviation fuel is exempt from the taxes imposed upon other fossil fuels.

The Government has singularly failed to develop an integrated transport policy. It fails to implement energy efficiency and conservation measures in buildings. Why does the Government not give grants to ordinary people for solar panels and other energy-saving measures such as low energy light bulbs.

Through carbon emissions trading, the government supports giant coal-fired power stations in China and in the Third World. Why not export solar panels, solar tiles, even wind turbines if they are so wonderful, rather than trade dirty carbon emissions, which will only exacerbate global warming?

Throughout this long haul, we have always maintained that allowing the Cefn Croes development to go ahead would set a precedent in many ways, which would allow developers a much easier and swifter route through the planning systems. So it has proved.

As a result of the decision, confirmed in the High Court, we must now expect that new developments will be:

- In excess of 50 MW and decided by the DTI, not locally.
- On publicly owned land, especially that managed by the Forestry Commission.
- In Tactical Training Areas used by the RAF for low-level flying.

Designations which should protect against inappropriate developments such as local SLAs and the national ESAs can now be ignored, as can SSSIs, SPAs, ICOMOS registered sites and Historic Landscapes. Changes to the planning laws ensure these can now be overridden, in the 'national interest'.

A single sentence in Labour's 2001 Manifesto under 'Rural Life' says;

'Labour is determined to protect Britain's landscape and wildlife'.

If however, New Labour is determined to promote land-based wind turbines in remote and beautiful areas, the above manifesto commitment will be proven to be absolutely worthless.