

Western Morning News

RESIDENTS DEMAND TO BE HEARD ON TURBINES

Date : 10 Nov 2004

Residents of a Westcountry parish earmarked for three 100-metre high wind turbines have called for a survey of the area to determine peoples' views on the controversial plans.

Around 30 parishioners turned up to a heated public session which opened Buckland-tout-Saints Parish Council meeting last night.

It was one of two meetings last night at which the controversial proposals for a site at Goveton, near Kingsbridge, were discussed -- the other was a meeting of Kingsbridge town council.

At Buckland-tout-Saints Parish Council, chairman Ernest Fleck said three of the council's five members had declared an interest on the contentious issue and with just two members left the council would not have a large enough quorum to discuss the topic.

Resident Diane Ranwell said it was "a waste of time" because the council could not represent residents.

Mr Fleck said residents would have a say at a public meeting planned to take place in East Allington village hall on November 25.

Residents called for a survey or petition to take place before the meeting to gauge public opinion and find out exactly how many people were against the proposal.

Residents also said the figures could be presented at the meeting, expected to be attended by Npower, which has bought forward the turbine proposals, and South Hams District Council planners.

Parishioners also suggested a vote should be held at the East Allington meeting. Mr Fleck, who will co-chair the debate, urged residents to have their say and attend the meeting and said he would look into whether or not a vote could take place.

Some residents were angry that the parish council had been asked whether an Environmental Impact Assessment could take place in the area eight months ago.

Residents asked why they had not been informed at the time but the parish council said there had not been a planning application and the discussion about whether the assessment should take place could be viewed in the minutes of meetings.

Meanwhile, members of Kingsbridge Town Council decided opinions were too split for them to take a view.

Mayor Bob Freeman said he had spoken with representatives from three of the parish councils which would be affected by the turbines. He said, "All of them were split. We thought there would be a massive majority against it but in fact they were divided."

Coun Freeman suggested any action by Kingsbridge Town Council should be postponed until after the November 25 meeting when the true feeling of parishioners would be revealed.

Coun Eric Johnson said representatives from the parishes had informed him they intended to consult with areas in Cornwall which had been affected by wind farms.

Coun Ken Trowse said: "If this plan is passed and we don't make the stand it could set a precedent."

He said any number of local beauty spots could soon house wind turbines.

Coun Eric Heavitree said: "I don't think we will all see it from here and I don't think Cornwall is suffering from having them down there."

Councillors voted unanimously to await the outcome of the meeting on November 25.

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HOUSE PRICES WILL FALL, WARN SURVEYORS

Date : 10 Nov 2004

House prices in the Westcountry will be hit in areas where windfarms are built, a snapshot of the housing market by the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors (RICS) has revealed.

Nationally, 60 per cent of chartered surveyors with experience of house transactions near to windfarms reported that they negatively affect house prices, with most saying the biggest impact is at the time of the planning application.

That figure rockets to 77 per cent in the Westcountry - the highest of any UK region.

Among the surveyors who said that house prices were reduced by proximity to a windfarm, most gave the visual impact as the biggest cause for concern. Next was the general fear of blight, suggesting that concern over the ability to sell-on a property played a part.

Some surveyors across the UK said that windfarms added to the value of agricultural land, but none of the surveyors in the Westcountry reported such an increase - with 42 per cent stating that windfarms detracted from the land's normal value.

The RICS warned that the precise effect of windfarms on property values was still far from clear.

Matthew McKaig, the South West Regional Director of RICS, said: "While this survey gives us an insight into windfarms' effect on residential and agricultural values, it will not be possible to measure the true impact of new sites for some years to come."

Despite this, a MORI poll commissioned by Regen SW, the renewable energy agency for the South West of England, to examine public attitudes to renewable energy in Devon, found 71 per cent of rural residents who were questioned supported the use of wind power in the county. There was a similar level of support for biomass power.

Matthew Spencer, chief executive of Regen SW, said: "Devon has a name for being the hardest county in England to get public acceptance for new renewable energy schemes. This poll suggests that this reputation is unfair."

Mid-Devon Gazette

TURBINE PLAN CAUSING BAD BLOOD AMONG NEIGHBOURS
Date : 9 Nov 2004

A Bow woman says that plans to install wind turbines at neighbouring farms are 'pitting friends against friends'.

Pam Coles, of Winslade Farm, is opposing plans by Renewable Energy Systems (RES) to put up between 10 and 19 turbines on land between Bow and North Tawton.

RES has already approached farmers in the area to offer money in return for hosting the turbines, which could be up to 101 metres in height, on their land.

And Mrs Coles says that she is being 'pulled in two different directions', because she understands that the farmers, many of whom are good friends, would find it hard to turn down a large fee.

But at the same time, she is part of a campaign which is vehemently opposed to RES's plans.

"It's an awful, awful feeling," Mrs Coles told the Gazette.

"I know exactly where the farmers are coming from. I know many of them very well and one in particular I actually went to school with.

"I'm being pulled in two different directions, it's a terrible situation.

"The plans are pitting neighbour against neighbour and friend against friend."

RES, a division of major international construction firm McAlpine, is researching the possible environmental impact of the proposed turbines before taking the plans any further.

It hopes to gather support for the proposals by holding public meetings throughout November in the villages of Spreyton, Bow and North Tawton.

If approved, the wind farm would feed electricity into the national grid equivalent to the annual needs of all the homes in Okehampton, Crediton, and the villages in between.

Despite Mrs Coles' opposition to the turbines, she says she realises her chances of stopping them are negligible.

"Once these things get started, they are very hard to stop," she said.

"But we aren't talking about little turbines, 101 metres is huge; they are monsters."

Mrs Coles is not the only local resident upset by the plans.

An opposition group was set up in August to fight off the possible development.

RES project engineer Rachel Ruffle says that the farmers were under no obligation to sign up for the plans and that it 'isn't going to make them millionaires'.

"I don't really understand that point of view," she said.

"We have four farmers involved with the project at the moment and they all chose to be involved, they weren't forced.

"It's completely their decision at the end of the day and the amount of money we are talking about certainly isn't going to make them millionaires.

"But it is hard to make a farm sustainable these days and we are offering a secure, year-round income, that can only be a good thing."

With regards to the impact of the turbines themselves, Rachel said: "We are consulting the local authority, English Nature, English Heritage and the Environment Agency.

"The results of these surveys and assessments will affect the technical design, size, number and location of the proposed windmills.

"We want to help the environment, not harm it."

RES has arranged three information days during November, during which local residents can examine and discuss the plans with company officials.

They will be held at Spreyton Parish Hall on Monday, November 22, from 2pm to 8pm, Bow Parish Hall on Friday, November 26 from 2pm to 8pm and North Tawton Town Hall on Saturday, November 27 from 10am to 3pm.

For more information on the plans, go to www.den-brook.co.uk