

Western Morning News

WIND FARMS NOISE FEARS

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'WIND FARMS NOISE FEARS'

A medical survey today throws the spotlight on how the noise from wind turbines can have an unbearable effect on people living next to them.

And it points to how low frequency noise is making some people's lives so miserable with headaches, sleeplessness and anxiety that they are booking into B &Bs or taking a holiday just to get away.

One couple - Colin and Kathy Bird, from St Eval, Cornwall - have gone to far as to save £1,000 and move to Malta for a month.

The report by a Westcountry doctor comes as the Government rolls out plans for up to 1,000 turbines in the South West.

And that has led to a prediction that up to 10,000 people could suffer side-effects.

The report reveals that of all the people questioned near the Bears Down wind farm at Padstow, 93 per cent said their lives had been adversely affected. The same number experienced headaches and 70 per cent had problems sleeping and suffered anxiety.

The report comes as leading barrister John Campbell prepares the UK's first court case in Cumbria to try to get wind turbines there declared a statutory nuisance.

At the same time an eminent physician, Dr David Manley, who has conducted several surveys at Cornwall's St Breock and Bears Down sites, warns that low-frequency noise can make "people's nervous systems go wonky".

The questionnaire was carried out by Plymouth GP Amanda Harry, who is campaigning against wind farms in Cornwall. The findings are detailed in an article she has written for the Western Morning News today.

The Government is promoting wind power to try to produce 10 per cent of the UK's electricity from renewable sources by 2010. In the South West, that target has been raised to between 11-15 per cent.

But speaking to the WMN yesterday, Dr Harry warned: "People truly are suffering. And I think a lot of doctors will soon start seeing the effects of this, as it's going to increase. People will start to realise what is causing their complaints and we'll see the effects in the surgery."

Her comments are supported by Dr Manley, who has spent eight years studying low-frequency noise from wind turbines.

He said yesterday: "I'm concerned about the effect the noise has on people mentally and physically. It's a noise you cannot hear. People's nervous systems start to go wonky."

He described seismometer readings of ground-borne vibrations at Bears Down, which has 30-metre turbines, as "horrendous".

And he warned that the new generation of 60-metre turbines earmarked for the Westcountry could have dramatically worse effects. "The bigger the turbine the bigger the noise because the blades are going at about 100 miles an hour, which causes disturbance the equivalent of an aircraft propeller - except that the noise from the turbines goes on and on," he said.

He added that all his studies had arrived at similar conclusions about the effects on people's health.

"Wherever there are wind farms you have people suffering," he said.

He also claimed that the predicted 1,000 turbines for the South West could equate to 10,000 people suffering side-effects such as migraines, sleep deprivation and anxiety.

The issue is set to come to the fore with a legal test case in Cumbria where people living between 600-800 metres from the 60-metre turbines in the village of Askham complained of headaches and nausea. Barrister John Campbell is representing three couples at Kendal Magistrates Court in a fight to get wind turbines near their homes declared a statutory nuisance under the Environmental Health Act.

He said: "There are a number of complaints of sleep disturbance, headaches, and migraines that are driving people mad. They say it's a pervasive thump, thump noise from the blades."

He said that if they won the test case, which is expected to take several days, the turbines would either have to be stopped or

removed.

Meanwhile, one couple living in a residential caravan near the Bears Down site have saved up £1,000 to go to Malta for a month because they say they cannot cope with life next to the turbines in winter when the winds are high.

In desperation last year, they booked into B &Bs in Newquay at Christmas.

Kathy and Colin Bird took early retirement through ill health from their jobs in Coventry as they sought a quiet life in Cornwall. Then they moved into their caravan in 2000, before the wind farm was built. But Mrs Bird now says: "It's just a throb when the wind is up - it's like the sound of a car going by with the stereo blaring, but it doesn't pass."

Matthew Spencer, chief executive of the South West Renewable Energy Agency (Regen) yesterday disputed whether the noise from turbines was the cause of their health complaints.

He said: "People may perceive that is their problem, but the turbines are not very noisy. Nothing has been proved about the health effects, but I would take these initial findings with a pinch of salt. These are arguments that people who are opposed to wind farms use."

He pointed out that travelling at 40mph would create a noise of 55 decibels at 100 metres while a wind turbine produced a noise of 35 decibels at 350 metres.

He said there was no evidence that the new generation of larger turbines planned for the South West would be a problem. "They are becoming less noisy as they are being developed," he said.

He added that the guidelines for the turbines were that they should not be within 400 metres of people's homes, and that noise had not proved a problem in the eyes of planners.

National Wind Power, which owns and operates the Bears Down wind farm, yesterday failed to respond to a series of questions put by the Western Morning News.