

CMCC 240807 PI/MONA

Planning Inspectorate Examination EN010137: Mona Offshore Wind

Cefn Meiriadog Community Council MNOW-SP036

Written record of oral presentation made to Open Floor Hearing (OFH1) 19/7/24 by Councillor Martin Barlow

The population of the community of Cefn Meiriadog is 359. Those 359 people have the same net zero aspirations as those in any other community with an awareness of climate change and the need it has brought for renewable energy solutions. In other words most are wholly in favour of it.

However, as well as their sense of the need for net zero, like most people they have a sense of justice, and at present a strong sense that justice is not being done to their community.

In a letter dated 7 July 2023, the then Welsh Government's Minister for Climate Change wrote: "While it is clear to me that we need new infrastructure to achieve our net zero commitments, we also need to ensure that our approach to new grid infrastructure is developed with the minimal impact on the environment and on communities".

Planning Policy Wales, edition 12 of Feb 2024 states:

"Each place will have its own unique characteristics, history and identity, based on how people have and will interact with the landscape... The intrinsic value of a place to people or communities is particularly important, which may be due to aesthetic, cultural, spiritual or historical reasons".

Similar sentiments about the need to protect communities, as I am sure everyone here knows, are expressed in most if not all planning policy documents, whether coming from local authority, the Welsh Government, or the UK Government which will determine the outcome of the current case.

There was an extraordinary moment on Wednesday, therefore, when the Applicant and the representative of Awel y Môr were discussing issues where areas of land might be subject to conflicting claims by the requirements of the Mona, Awel y Môr and National Grid developments. Such was the complete absence of any sense that land was being talked about where people's actual lives and livelihoods were involved, that it brought to mind, the European powers' divvying up of Africa in the 19th century, the so-called 'scramble for Africa' of 1884, or, to take a more contemporary example, Russia and Norway's current sparring over Arctic mineral exploitation, where at least no actual people are involved.

The sense of injustice I have referred to above comes not only from facing a project which will mean a 65,000 square metre construction placed in low-lying open farmland in a rural landscape. However inappropriate they might think the Mona substation is to its proposed location, I think everyone accepts that some developments must take place, sometimes unwelcome large-scale ones which a community would otherwise prefer to avoid.

The sense of injustice comes rather from a community of just a fraction over 5 square miles, so barely two-and-a-quarter miles long and the same wide, having imposed upon it five large substations and associated infrastructure, two of them of extremely large scale, certainly in relation to the landscape in which they are being built or are proposed. Three of these - Dong, Gwynt y Môr and National Grid, are already built, of which one is now seeking to double its size. A fourth, Awel y Môr is consented, and Mona we are discussing presently. A sixth planned substation we must ignore for the time being while being reasonably certain it will arrive in due course.

Proportionality is a principle which is frequently applied to justice and related matters. Underlying the deep sense of injustice I have described, then, is the utter disproportionality of the siting of five major substation in one small, 5-square mile community of 359 people, one whose sense of identity is essentially bound up with its rural, agricultural and historical character. Inevitably each successive development is located in a progressively more highly visible location, Mona's proposed substation site being a prime example of this.

Secondly, and equally disproportionately, the community of Cefn Meiriadog is being made to bear the entire burden of the impact of these very major developments, where other communities remain unaffected or minimally affected by them. In essence, the cumulative effects of all the projects mentioned above falling on one community penalise Cefn Meiriadog in a highly disproportionate way. Cumulative impacts of Mona and Awel y Môr are, I know, an issue under discussion. However if logic dictates that the cumulative impacts of Mona and Awel y Môr be considered, logic should also dictate that the long-term cumulative impact on the landscape and community of all the substations and their associated infrastructure be considered.

It is counterfactual I know, but I would suggest that if the planning application for the original National Grid substation some 15 years ago had been for five substations in different parts of Cefn Meiriadog, that is a National Grid substation twice the current one's size and the Dong, Gwynt y Môr, Awel y Môr and Mona substations - that application would have been rejected as wholly inappropriate.

Likewise, I suggest that if the UK had, like many other countries do, bodies tasked with taking a strategic view of energy infrastructure development across specific regions or areas, such a body for north-east Wales, or north Wales as a whole, it would not countenance the siting of five substations (with more to come) in one 5-square mile rural community. Russia's

current highly targeted destruction of Ukraine's electricity generation capacity would suggest they have a point.

I stated that the community's sense of identity is bound up with its rural and agricultural character. While the infrastructure developments in question and others over the past two decades might have opened the door to some aspiring developers to describe, for their own purposes, Cefn Meiriadog as being 'semi-industrial', in fact the community consists largely of farms and smallholdings, together with three small settlements not even qualifying to be described as hamlets. A relatively high proportion of the 180 households which constitute the community of Cefn Meiriadog are those of farming families. That farming community is a bastion of the Welsh language and Welsh-language culture, and the continuing loss of agricultural land and the sense of a loss of identity cannot but undermine that. More generally, the changes to its essential character and identity are inevitably making it a progressively less attractive place to live in, to send children to school in, and to walk, cycle, run, ride and drive in.

I know that there are people in the community who are hoping for a miracle, that the commitment expressed in many planning documents to protecting small communities, combined with the patent inappropriateness of a 6.5 hectare, 15-metre high substation being placed on open farmland in a rural landscape, especially considering the cumulative effects involved, will surely lead to the development being rejected. Cefn Meiriadog Community Council, on whose behalf I speak, and many other residents, are more pessimistic and from past experience and a sense of the need for self-preservation, limit themselves to the hope that, if the project is to go ahead, the community is protected through stringent conditions, restrictions and requirements for mitigation being placed on the development for all aspects of it which will affect residents, the community, and the landscape in which they live their lives.