

Pearl & Leslie Birch

Telephone: [REDACTED]

30th November 2015

FAO Ms Katherine King

The Planning Inspectorate,
3/18 Eagle Wing,
Temple Quay House,
2 The Square,
Bristol, BS1-6PN

Your Ref: EN020016
Our Ref: BFC_AFP035

Dear Ms King,

BRECHFA FOREST CONNECTION

We would be grateful if you would forward this correspondence to Mr M Broderick (which is substantially our oral submission on the above date) and ask if he would please formally include this in the procedure.

There will have been many submissions regarding WPD's proposed OHL project, covering various subjects. I made a submission a week ago and will try not to cover my previous points except in passing, but now I would like to tell you a little about the landowners and others who are opposed to an OHL and, some other points.

It seems somewhat incongruous to us that an early 20st century technology should be used to connect a 21st century technology to the National Grid!

We believe it is true to say that ever since WPD commenced its so called public consultations (we say so called because it has been more of a presentation of WPD's WANTS rather than a consultation, giving landowners the distinct impression they were being talked AT rather than TO), landowners, knowing that they were faced almost inevitably with the another wind farm, have unstood that the electricity produced would require a method of conveying it to the Grid.

Landowners should not be pressurised into agreeing to something with which they do not agree when there is an imminently suitable alternative. Wales is not the Arctic Circle were rocky terrain and permanently frozen ground make under-grounding impossible, or we may have had a different opinion. As it is landowners totally reject the idea of OHL and advocate under-grounding with all the advantages of more efficient supplies, virtually no effect on the visually beautiful scenery for tourists to enjoy, and better working environment for those who turn out in horrendous weather conditions to re-establish electric supplies when blackouts occur. All it takes is a little more money which can be obtained from any so called community fund to benefit those landowners directly affected.

The landowners affected are hard working folk most of whom work 365 days a year if they

have stock to attend and, 24 hours a day, sometimes in biting cold and dirty conditions in a birthing shed or other such environment, when, if a hot drink is brought to them use it to warm frozen hands and can only drink when the beverage is almost cold and more acceptable to their chilled palate. Even Christmas Day when others are in their nice warm homes enjoying family, friends and presents, stock husbandry comes first whatever the conditions.

Unfortunately landowners, some of whom also have a full-time job to make ends meet and some who are pensioners on limited means, do not have the where-with-all to engage legal council to fight our corner. Our only recourse therefore is to lobby the best we can for the support of political figures and the public. The DCO is a complicated matter (as evidenced by WPD's legal team) and beyond a lay-persons comprehension and so involves a huge amount of worry and stress. We have been trying to engage with WPD's project but feel excluded and IGNORED as LOW COST appears to be the only motive for the OHL application.

I say IGNORED because it appears to be just that.

WPD do not appear to understand that whatever Right they say they have brings with it RESPONSIBILITIES.

Since WPD's publication of the 'Route Alignment Options Report', for the 'Brechfa Forest Connection Project' in February 2014 in which a large number of pages bear the inscription "Final Alignment Routes", there does not appear to have been any significant notice taken of the input of landowners who have made it very clear to WPD that an OHL is not acceptable, but an underground solution is the one they wish to be undertaken.

This wish for under-grounding has been expressed by an MP, an AM, Carmarthen Council and the landowners at several meetings. The Landowners meeting in Pencader voted for under-grounding and was reported in the local newspaper; the packed to overflowing WPD consultation in Alltwalis demonstrated with a virtually 100% show of hands in the presence of WPD representatives that under-grounding was the only acceptable option; and a large attendance at a landowners meeting in the Carmarthen Mart with the local MP (that we understand was reported upon to WPD) again voted for under-grounding. THIS HAS ALWAYS BEEN THE MESSAGE TO WPD which they appear to have consistently ignored, EVEN TO THIS DAY.

Apparently WPD, who in 2011-2012 contributed £443.4 million of profits to their American parent, seemingly has blackouts including one affecting 122K properties in Devon and Wales in the recent past. It is presumed this was mainly from OHL problems. It is understood that MP's on the 'Energy Select Committee' have been asking Managers of energy companies how they claim to be investing adequately in their networks when they are making such vast profits out of ever increasing customer Bills. It is also difficult for the layman to understand when an OHL seems to be the default cheapest solution --- FOR THEM! We should add here that in the short period of time we have lived in Wales we have already experienced several blackouts.

It appears to us that only landowners do the practical undertakings required to protect the landscape of Wales that other people only talk about. It is no accident that the countryside so admired by tourists is very closely associated with the activities of the landowners and it can indeed be argued that landowners are mainly responsible for the beautiful landscape of not only Carmarthenshire but the entire UK.

We believe that these landowners who produce foodstuffs and provide attractive countryside are National Infrastructure enterprises and the Brechfa Forest Connection project should not jeopardise two others.

Many landowners in Wales contribute to the 78% of foodstuffs that feed our entire Nation and due (in some cases) to the generations of their families, it follows that their activities are also predominantly responsible for attracting some 3.1 million visitors to Carmarthenshire last year contributing some £340 million to the Counties economy. This is part of the overall 11 million visitors to Wales annually spending some £1.75 billion. Apparently, some two-thirds come for holidays with the rest being day or business visitors. Of these visitors 1 million are international guests who spend around £400 million p.a. The service sector for these visitors obviously provides livelihoods for a huge number people.

One cannot countenance what would happen if in future visitors were to give their impressions of Wales as industrialised by pylons and poles. In other words NO REFERRALS in marketing parlance. Not only could it devastate tourism and seriously harm a newly self-determining Country, but devastate the jobs market and, possibly, result in a massive surplus of electricity. OHL could shoot turbines in the foot!!

By no stretch of the imagination can one envisage that visitors come to see the myriad of lattice pylons and wooden poles upon the Welsh landscape and in some cases it must be difficult to take a photographic image to exclude them. Wales has already been abused beyond all measure and needs to be stopped before its too late.

In the thousands of pages produced by WPD, I cannot find any reference to the impact of cutting down trees which seems to be contrary to 'Natural Resources Wales' statements that we should protect what we have and reduce de-forest-ation, as trees have the unique ability to provide Oxygen and capture Carbon. A 30 metre wide clear strip for under-grounding instead of a 100 metre one for OHL will save a remarkable resource. It has been said that without trees there will be no human inhabitation.

In our own personal circumstances, the area over which WPD want control has been literally hacked from unattended near wilderness in the last 3 years involving hours of toil in all kinds of weather using hand tools and a wheel-barrow, by my wife and I. We are both pensioners and I am now 73. It has been prepared so that our Alpacas spend their nights near the junction of two hedges sheltered from prevailing winds. There is no other place similar on our small property.

A swift word about WPD's Heads of Terms; they essentially are a statement of what they WANT. There does not appear any room for negotiation which contracts normally are. Also, the maps they provide have scales that do not appear to be correct or the boundary details thereon and so are difficult to assimilate. This has been reported to WPD previously.

Kindest Regards,

Leslie and Pearl Birch

Pearl & Leslie Birch

Telephone: [REDACTED]

1st December 2015

FAO Ms Katherine King

The Planning Inspectorate,
3/18 Eagle Wing,
Temple Quay House,
2 The Square,
Bristol, BS1-6PN

Your Ref: EN020016
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Dear Ms King,

BRECHFA FOREST CONNECTION

We would be grateful if you would forward this correspondence to Mr M Broderick (which is substantially our oral submission on the above date) and ask if he would please formally include this in the procedure.

If I may I would like to bring up a few points of information that may be of interest to the Examining Authority.

1.

I was somewhat taken aback last night when you asked if any member of the Press was present to witness proceedings, to discover that there were non.

I therefore telephoned the 'Carmarthen Journal' earlier today and informed them that these proceedings were going on about 100-200 metres from their offices. I was told that they had no knowledge of these matters. I asked why they had not followed up on stories, adverts, CCC website, Public Notices or even the Brechfa Forest Connection website to keep up with the latest news, but was provided with no clear answer.

2.

The Original 'Report into Underground Cable Costs, June 2013' does not appear to be displayed with the myriad of other documents to my left (Copy already provided for the Examining Authority).

3.

Carmarthenshire County Council

I am surprised that no representation has been forthcoming from the local politicians. On the print out from the Council website made today (copy already provided for the Examining Authority) it clearly states in various ways in no less than 4 places that (and I quote the first line) :---

"Carmarthenshire Planning Committee is calling for the power cables from the Brechfa West wind farm to be laid under-ground for their whole length"

4.

Would it be in order for the WPD team to introduce themselves and state their occupation so that landowners may be acquainted with them should the occasion arise and in so doing say whether they are farmers or landowners, as it has been said that the team understand landowners problems.

5.

An underground cable with the appropriate conduit size could enable later capacity increases to be made, possibly without disruption or objections, whereas upgrading an OHL with bigger poles and cables would involve both.

Kindest Regards,

Leslie and Pearl Birch

Pearl & Leslie Birch

Telephone: [REDACTED]

3rd December 2015

FAO Ms Katherine King

The Planning Inspectorate,
3/18 Eagle Wing,
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2 The Square,
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Your Ref: EN020016
Our Ref: BFC_AFP035

Dear Ms King,

BRECHFA FOREST CONNECTION

We would be grateful if you would forward this correspondence to Mr M Broderick (which is substantially our oral submission on the above date) and ask if he would please formally include this in the procedure.

We believe that the compulsory acquisition of a persons hard earned land should NOT be permitted. It is a massive disincentive to ordinary folk working their life away to obtain and maintain their bit of heaven. Should it become absolutely necessary this should be a last resort not a first. Saving a bit of money for a highly profitable business should not qualify if there is a viable alternative.

Rights come with responsibilities, and those responsibilities must include doing the utmost to mitigate the effects of a project upon the people that will be directly affected. In this case we do not believe that WPD have given much thought to mitigating the effects of this project upon landowners and so we believe compulsory acquisition should be refused.

It appears to us that the WPD have not helped landowners to engage with this project, especially the technical aspects, but quite the opposite, and if we may we'd like to acquaint the ExA with some of the difficulties to which we refer.

1.

When we took up residence in our new home on 1st September 2012, we had no inkling about any proposed wind farm or grid connection or we would not have purchased the property.

When this was mentioned to a WPD representative at one of the consultations, we were told that our solicitor should have done a more thorough job of searching. We do not believe that the information was readily accessible to searches especially in the area in which we live.

2.

Some months after we took up residence, a WPD representative ventured up our driveway. He had been directed to us by the owners of the property next door, were he had asked them to confirm that our house and land belonged to Derlwyn Farm, half mile along the

main road. Remarkably, WPD did not know we existed. The visiting representative showed us a map with several highlighted properties whose owners, apparently, he was still trying to find. He recorded our details.

3.

This resulted in correspondence directly from WPD regarding the connection project and we attended some public consultations.

4

As time has passed, the mass of information generated by WPD has been almost impossible to assimilate, particularly relative to ones own property. I can't imagine how many person hours were used to compile the reports, but for affected landowners it was impossible to study them closely, or have the time to do so, especially in the confines of the local shop or any other place where they were displayed. At the consultation in Alltwalis I suggested that a tabulated document be produced to help landowners by using their property name and listing the pertinent section numbers in documents alongside. At least two of the WPD representatives present agreed that this was a good idea, but I have not noticed that such a table has been produced.

5.

The plans WPD have provided to landowners do not appear consistent and have contained a mixture of information. For example, in the 'Route Alignment Options Report Feb 2014' (Figure 15 Section D1) and other plans obtained from a consultation, our property was shown within grid-lines 44/45 west/east and 30/31 south/north, but plans subsequently sent to us by WPD showed our property within grid lines 243600/244200 west/east and 216000/216300 south north. This was reported to WPD three times by telephone, the last on 1st June 2015, and Nia Wyn Davies called back on 2nd June 2015 with an undertaking to look into the matter. We then received a letter from WPD dated 12 June 2015 with thanks for our call admitting that the grid references on 3 different plans did not match and, on the plan included with that reply it now showed our property to be somewhere within 244200/244800 west/east and 230700/231000 south/north. A insignificant difference and hardly being careful.

6.

On the revised plan from WPD just mentioned, the boundaries shown in red denoting our land remain incorrect, even on the HoT's documents.

7.

Plans being provided by WPD bear such inscriptions as "Scale:- 1:2500 @ A3 but the plans are not actually to scale and to make any assessment of the areas being discussed in letters, it involves the plans having to be scaled and a calculation made to interpolate areas of land etc. we do not wish to be condescending, but such skills are not normally within the scope of the ordinary person.

8.

On the subject of scaling, we have endeavoured to interpolate the area of our land that WPD wish to have Rights over and it equates to about 450 sq mts (about eighth of our Alpaca paddock), an enormous area which is about one eighth of an acre of our 3.3 acre garden and totally encompasses the area in which our Alpacas spend the night shielded from the prevailing winds at the junction of two hedges. We have no other such area on our land so this deprives our animals of shelter. We calculate that this area is about 3.4 times larger than a single pole with stays would require and, we don't know what our land is to be used for.

9

The next point of confusion to landowners are the changes in nomenclature on the various plans.

Again in the 'Route Alignment Options Report Feb 2014' (Figure 15 Section D1) and other plans, they show the project route sections as A to E with our property in section "D1".

However, in the 'Overview Report Nov 2014' and other plans, the designations were changed so that our property is now in route "Section C" sub section 5, with the Report explaining, and we quote, "To help you provide feedback on the proposed scheme we have split the route into three sections (A, B and C). These rearranged sections contain sub sections 7, 2 and 10 plans respectively. We would suggest that there was nothing wrong with the original designations and, far from making understanding easier, the new ones have had the opposite effect leading to further confusion. We further suggest the perceived waste of time in trying to reconcile the new designations has caused any feedback from landowners to be severely curtailed.

10.

This re-designation has led in no small measure to the confusion we have experienced ourselves in regard to one of the 122 parcels of land of unknown ownership. We had not realised that the change in designation to Section C was related to a parcel possibly adjacent to our property and so we did not recognise the fact immediately as it was not designated D217 as we would have expected. We are now taking steps to find out about parcel C217.

11.

We wish to state that we am not at all impressed with WPD's attempts to locate the owners of the 122 parcels of land. An A3 document taped to street furniture is inappropriate, especially when for example one is placed 30 metres from a main road down a side lane where only farmers and tourists drive through (lane past Nant-y-Boncath) or near the redundant old Afon Gwili bridge (only an access to a couple of properties and now used for parking). Sending a circular to the landowners affected soliciting information with a map of their immediate area would seem to have been more appropriate in the circumstances. We would have been impressed if WPD had not located six landowners, but 122 seems to be more than unreasonable. It should be understood that landowners, approached in a reasonable way, have a wealth of information about their locality and generally know who owns what. All land is owned by someone and this should be respected.

12.

In the thousands of pages produced by WPD, I cannot find a binder referring to the likely impact on the human beings affected by this proposed project in terms of their dashed dreams, sleeplessness, worry, stress, reduction in property and amenity values and, and having to invest valuable time and scarce resources to make their voices heard.

Kindest Regards,

Leslie and Pearl Birch