

Uncertainties Emerge following Approval of Den Brook Wind farm

A public inquiry into whether 9 x 120 metres high wind turbines are to be erected in mid Devon's Den Brook valley achieved little for reviving local confidence in the developer Renewable Energy Systems (RES).

Inspector Andrew Pykett has given RES a green light for the development but the company was unable to persuade the Inspector that noise is not an issue with the scheme.

Throughout the four years this proposal has wriggled and twisted its way through the planning process, RES has refused to budge from its mantra 'no noise nuisance'.

But the Den Brook Judicial Review Group (DBJRG), with assistance from two of the Country's leading experts in wind farm noise, raised significant doubts in the mind of the Inspector.....

DBJRG's detailed analysis of RES' own data has persuaded Inspector Pykett to impose unprecedented and potentially restrictive conditions to control noise impacts that are becoming increasingly commonplace with wind turbine developments.

RES fiercely opposed imposition of the conditions proposed by DBJRG's noise expert, Mike Stigwood. But the Inspector wasn't having any of it; dismissing RES' protestations as unrealistic.

RES now has to demonstrate their scheme can meet strict limitations designed to protect neighbours from excessive noise and sleep disturbance.

"I rather think RES will be hammering their calculators over the coming weeks in order to determine whether or not the scheme remains viable and sufficiently profitable to attract private sector financing," commented Mike Hulme who has spearheaded DBJRG's noise impact investigations throughout the lengthy saga.

"I know most people in the area are extremely disappointed the development has been approved this time around, but the Inspector has at least tried to provide satisfactory protection from the noise impacts that RES has consistently sought to sweep under the carpet; whether he has succeeded is still an open question, and we are working through the conditions with this in mind. DBJRG's legal advisors recommend all householders surrounding the site to ensure they have legal expenses insurance to cover a noise nuisance action in the event a noise problem arises.

The planning inquiry heard more than two working weeks of often complex and detailed arguments. Consequently, there is much to scrutinise within the Inspector's decision report. Mr Hulme told our reporter that it may take a while for DBJRG's team to closely examine the finer details of the decision and that any resolution for how to proceed will depend very much on the results of this close examination. He also pointed out that the campaign had been extremely draining on active members of the group.

"However," he said, "some rather worrying revelations, resulting from a Freedom of Information (FOI) request I made more than two years ago had come to light since the

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Inquiry closed. These were published in the Sunday Times last weekend and we will need to consider them in the context of the planning approval. Documents released only a week ago show how the Government department concerned with renewable energy development suppressed recommendations, from its own commissioned consultants, that night-time noise limits for wind farm developments ought to be lowered by up to 8 decibels in order to provide adequate protection against sleep disturbance and possible consequential damage to health”.

“Since the article was published my phone has barely stopped ringing with enquiries from national newspapers wanting to know more and people worried about proposed wind farm developments in their locality. We will, of course, need to look at this in the context of the Den Brook approval. On the face of it, the Inspector may have been unable to approve Den Brook if the recommendations had been adopted rather than suppressed from public view”.

Further details and the released FOI documents are posted on the DBJRG’s website at www.denbrookvalley.co.uk .

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