

Wind Farm Ecocrimes

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Ecocrimes are being committed in rural Wales. The £35 million Cefn Croes wind farm near Aberystwyth will provide 39 turbines supplying enough electricity for 40,000 homes, covering 1% of Wales' current electricity needs. Nearby, in Camddwr, £200 million will build 165 wind turbines, each more than 100 metres tall, as one of the world's biggest wind farms.

The benefits touted are economic development in a deprived area, reduction of greenhouse gas emissions to help prevent climate change, and a shift towards social acceptability for 'green energy' sources. The jobs created will stop people moving from the area, thereby revitalising the local economy, providing funding for cultural and community projects, providing opportunities for the young, and helping to preserve the Welsh language in this area where it still dominates English. The project sounds idyllic, helping the environment, people, and culture without much effort.

Well, £235 million of effort. And effort which will destroy part of a devastatingly beautiful environment. The intrinsic value of nature and beauty, even landscapes which result from centuries of human activity, cannot be priced, particularly when we do not necessarily know what is there. A wind farm project in Mynydd Hiraethog, Wales was scuttled in 2001 when a protected bird species was discovered on the site. Amazing what we find when we deign to look. One Camddwr local suggested that 'In the name of environmentalism, we destroy a beautiful environment'.

This effort, though is hardly environmentalism. Large-scale technical projects? Monoliths visible across a long distance? Relatively centralised operations requiring additional systems to transport the electricity for use? These statements sound familiar. They apply to electricity plants run by nuclear power and fossil fuels. In fact, it appears that in our rush towards megascale windpower, we are making exactly the same mistakes as we have made in the previous energy generation. Why go big when small works better?.

For example, rather than trying to meet X% of Wales' current electricity needs through wind power, why not invest that money into reducing Wales' current electricity needs by X%? Hundreds of simple and effective means exist. Five quick examples are turning off lights and electrical appliances when not needed, air-drying laundry rather than using electric dryers, improving home and office insulation, a small wind turbine and photovoltaics for each house, and installing street lights which use solar power linked to batteries.

Each individual item on its own is small. Added up, they have an immense effect. Especially when completed for an area the size of Wales. A wealth of knowledge and expertise exists in places such as Ireland, Canada, and Barbados illustrating that the smaller, sustainable approach works.

The challenges are changing people's behaviour and ensuring that the energy solutions do not cause other harm. One example of the latter would be the use of solar cells or insulation which have an intensive energy and environmental cost to produce. Implementing smaller scale solutions is difficult and requires commitment, but surely sustainability, averting climate change, and creating a healthier environment for future generations are worth a bit of effort?

And the jobs, economic development, and cultural preservation so important to this part of Wales? The point of sustainable energy solutions (rather than only renewable energy) is, well, solutions for energy which are sustainable. But sustainable overall. Therefore, solutions should be local, small scale, and community run. You not only satisfy energy needs, but you develop local knowledge, increase community awareness and spirit, and increase disaster resilience, amongst other advantages. You become a national and international example of what a community could do with respect to energy sustainability. You sustain your community in the long term through innovation, self-help, and pride, not just until people get bored of a couple of wind farms and drift away ten, fifteen, or fifty years later. Not easy, but feasible and worthwhile.

But do people prefer an easy, get-rich-quick scheme which wrecks something irreplaceable or do they prefer to think seriously about the problem and to develop real, not band-aid, solutions? Unfortunately, people often prefer immediate cash rather than taking the time and (pardon the pun) energy to think beyond their own generation. And when the former chairman of a key political party is also one of the wind farm developers, you meet a corrupt but influential power structure which cannot be defeated by lobbying for a community to invest in itself.

So for the sake of immediate profit and for looking good by doling out cash for perceived green energy, we create the antithesis of green energy. While the Camddwr project will potentially stop low-level military training flights in the area—another energy-wasting and environmentally damaging government activity—that benefit is a hefty price to pay for a solution that does not address the fundamental problem. We simply use too much energy.

Rather than scrambling to produce a vaguely-acceptable supply, we should target demand. Rather than focusing on one aspect of energy, we should be creating sustainable communities. Rather than building bigger and more expensive ecoprojects, we should be examining what our “need” truly is and how long-term these “ecoprojects” truly are. Admitting the answers may not be easy. Enacting proper solutions may require sacrifice. But we have a responsibility to ourselves and to our environment to demonstrate what can be done so that others may emulate. To do otherwise would be criminal. Time will tell whether or not the only life-sustaining planet we know is as forgiving to ecocriminals as we are to ourselves.

If you have any comments or feedback about **Wind Farm Ecocrimes** please contact Ilan Kelman at his email address ilan_kelman@hotmail.com (mailto:ilan_kelman@hotmail.com)

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