

Environment and Sustainability Committee

Inquiry into Energy Policy and Planning in Wales

EPP 57 Sarah Faulkner

19 September 2011

Committee Clerk
Environment and Sustainability Committee
National Assembly for Wales
Cardiff Bay
CF99 1NA

Dear Sirs,

National Grid - Mid Wales Connection Project

I am writing to outline to the committee how the Mid Wales Connection Project would affect me and why I am firmly opposed to the project. I am affected by the proposal for an electricity substation at Cefn Coch and overhead power lines along the Red Central, Red South, Green Central and Green South route corridors. My home is located within the route corridor outlined in blue on the consultation maps and due to the topography of the area I fear that the pylons and overhead lines would be very close to my house.

Firstly we have heard various concerning reports about the potential health impacts of overhead power lines. Our first child was born in June, so you can understand that we are horrified by the prospect of her being exposed to overhead power lines as there could well be an increased risk of her contracting childhood leukaemia. Several members of my family, including very young children also live in the Sarnau area and have similar concerns. National Grid have admitted that there is a link to leukaemia and therefore has a responsibility not to proceed with the project unless all health risks can be eliminated.

The project proposals have already blighted our home and those of other family members who live in the Sarnau Valley. We have worked hard to set up a home in the rural community where I grew up and have no wish to relocate. However the health risks from overhead pylons may force us to move over the border into England for the sake of my child's health. Local agents have indicated that properties affected by pylons suffer from a considerable decrease in capital value and in some cases become unsaleable. We live in a modest bungalow and the thought that we could not move on is very concerning.

For all of these reasons the prospect of power lines being erected so near to my home causes me considerable anxiety and stress. This was a particular problem during the final months of my pregnancy.

The valley where we live between Trefnannau and Sarnau (called area F4 on figure 7.1 in the Route corridor and substation siting study, document number 41517745) along which four potential corridors are located is unsuited to the development of overhead power lines and pylons on this scale for a variety of reasons:

- The Red central, Red south, Green central and Green south route options would have a major significant visual impact on the small unspoiled valley to the west of Sarnau. This is a shallow valley with no existing infrastructure, where the 50 metre pylons would be sky-lined for the majority of people living, working and visiting the area. They would be skylined when viewed from our house (The Poplars, Sarnau). We are very concerned that due to the topography of the valley the power lines would be suspended level with our bedroom and living room windows! They would be of such a scale that they will dominate views with a major significant negative visual impact.
- This valley is acoustically sensitive and tranquil, in still conditions we can even hear the voices of neighbours nearly 1km away! The pylons and overhead lines will buzz in certain weather conditions, particularly in damp weather. Low lying fog often sits in the valley for many days meaning there will be a significant noise impact which we would hear. Nothing can be done to mitigate this noise as it will come from an elevated source. Noise from the pylons will travel extensively throughout the valley causing us a significant noise impact. Due to the topography of the valley the cables could be suspended level to our house, The Poplars, Sarnau.
- This area is served by minor roads, mainly single track with some very steep slopes. Access for construction will be very difficult and disruptive. We would face considerable nuisance and disruption during the construction phase.
- The Sarnau valley is very rich in wildlife. Significant habitats include broadleaved woodland, wet woodland, large ancient hedgerows, semi-improved grassland, lowland meadows, permanent pasture and arable land. There are populations of species of conservation concern including skylark, curlew, lapwing, yellowhammer and nuthatches. The curlew is an Amber list species that is particularly abundant in Sarnau. The Lapwing is a red list species which breeds in the valley. The construction of power lines is particularly concerning for ground nesting birds as it has been proved that corvids and raptors use power lines as perching points that help them to take young and eggs from nests. Otters have also been seen in the valley.
- The Vyrnwy Valley is subject to frequent and considerable flood risk. This is a particular problem around Meifod. We question the logic of putting a development of this sort in a high flood risk area. During the winter many areas in the valley are inaccessible for many weeks meaning that emergency maintenance would be near impossible. During a flood event at Llansantffraid in early 2011 the River Vyrnwy completely washed away a section of main road. Would pylons and their bases be able to cope with regular extreme flooding events?

I am also opposed to the project for the following reasons:

- I question whether the energy generated (and carbon saved) justifies the building of the extra infrastructure required for the grid connection. Many on-shore wind farms can feed in to the local grid using smaller 132kv lines. This one is different - it requires a huge addition to the grid infrastructure. Both the substation and the pylons will require thousands of tons of concrete, steel and aluminium. All have high energy/carbon requirements. On top of this huge amounts of fossil fuels will be used for transport and construction, not to mention the carbon released by felling trees and uprooting hedges. To build a 20 acre substation and 50 kilometres of 50 meter tall 400kV pylons seriously undermines the environmentally viability of the project. RenewableUK ("The voice of wind & marine energy") say that the first thing they look for when planning a wind farm is a nearby grid connection. This one (according to National Grid) is as far away from any existing grid connection as it is possible to get - barring Lands End!

- The proposed wind farms are not an efficient way of generating renewable energy. During still and very cold weather the turbines do not turn. They consume energy from the grid when they are not generating. The turbines would have a limited lifespan; however the grid connection would have an impact on the area for many years to come.
- Many of the proposed wind farm locations are on peat bogs which are important for carbon storage and sequestration. This undermines the benefits of generating renewable energy in these locations.
- The environmental impacts of the grid connection must be explored within the EIA for the proposed wind farms.
- Renewable energy projects (e.g. farm scale renewables) in east Montgomeryshire and Shropshire cannot connect into the grid. Therefore there is no benefit to these communities.
- National Grid appear to be proposing connections in an ad hoc manner without a clear strategic plan for connections to the grid. There is already an adequate 400kV grid connection to the north of the TAN8 wind farm areas at Trawsfynydd. Until an adequate strategic plan is developed the Mid Wales Connection Project must not go ahead.
- Small businesses in the area are reliant on tourism and visitors to the area who come here because of the high quality landscape. The village shop, pubs, hairdressers and other businesses would be adversely affected if visitors no longer come to the local caravan parks during the summer season.
- The Sarnau valley is wholly agricultural with a range of existing enterprises. The land is under a mix of permanent pasture and arable for forage crops. Agriculture is important to the economy of the valley with many residents deriving their main incomes from agricultural enterprises.
- The management of pylon bases poses significant risks, management challenges and additional costs for farmers. They are an obstacle that must be manoeuvred around, adding to the number of tractor movements and therefore to costs (i.e. diesel) and to the carbon footprint of farming. A significant weed burden could develop under the pylon bases in an arable setting leading to additional costs of chemical control. Cables could hang as low as 7.6 metres above the ground and are known to sag in hot weather. Low hanging cables would pose a health and safety risk to the operators of telehandlers and some larger machinery such as self-propelled maize harvesters, combine harvesters and tipping trailers which are frequently used in the valley.
- We are concerned about the impact on the historic environment. Mathrafal Castle and its surroundings are of national importance to Welsh culture, the Vyrnwy valley hosted the National Eisteddfod in 2003. Mathrafal Castle is associated with the Princes of Powys and is a Scheduled Ancient Monument (SAM code MG044). The current proposals would damage the historic and cultural setting of the site as well as the wider area. The Eisteddfod made a positive contribution to the local economy.

I would also like to express my concern about the way National Grid and their consultants have conducted the consultation exercise. It has been cynically designed to pit communities against one another by asking people to choose between locations for the substation and pylon routes. It has arrogantly started from the position that the connection must go ahead. The consultation leaflet did not contain route maps and did not make it clear that they intended to construct pylons and power

lines in the area. People are encouraged to fill out a biased response form. It does not allow you to state your objection to the project, the questions are leading, there are no contact details and the consultation end date is not on the form. An electronic copy of the form that you can type into is not available, people are told to use an online response system, hardly appropriate for such a rural area with poor broadband coverage.

If a connection is required in this area it must be laid underground, as is common practice in other European countries. We would be much less likely to object to an underground connection. We accept that this would lead to environmental impacts during the construction phase. However, in our view, this is far outweighed by the removal of long term impacts that would be associated with the pylons and overhead power lines. The overheard option is being pursued purely on a cost basis with total disregard for the impact on local communities. National Grid is a private company with shareholders. Therefore the costs of undergrounding this connection must be built into the total project costs and born by their shareholders and consumers.

These proposals would ruin the landscape and economy of Montgomeryshire and that is why I object to all of the current proposals. This is a sensitive area and is totally unsuited to industrial development. We are sending a clear message that we do not want this development in this area!

Yours faithfully

Mrs Sarah Faulkner