

Opening remarks by ASWAR to first session of the Inquiry

ASWAR would like to welcome you Sir, to Rugby and in our opening address, I would like to set out briefly the historical context of this called-in appeal and suggest there is a simple way that would save us all much time and money, though whether we should take it is another matter.

The local community has been fighting for over five years. In that time we have been threatened with three wind turbine applications. An enormous amount of time, effort and money has been spent by the community, informing planners, demonstrating, holding numerous rallies, monitoring the views of those going to the speculator's eleven hours of exhibitions, having a mass picket of the Churchover exhibition, being interviewed eight times on local and midlands radio, being interviewed on BBC Midlands TV, writing objection letters, providing quotes to numerous newspaper reports and international articles, giving addresses to the council officers and councillors, creating a well regarded website and preparing for events like this appeal.

The community has truly become a beleaguered victim of the company RES, wholly owned by the giant corporation McAlpine.

ASWAR and Churchover have led the fight within Warwickshire, though we are pleased there is now another Action Group called WASTE well organised around Wolvey.

A significant recent development has been the creation of another Action Group across the border, in the Leicestershire village of Cotesbach. Their leaders have registered already to speak with you and it is worth noting that they have as strong a mandate from their community as we do in Churchover with over 90% against.

At a Cotesbach village meeting of 60 concerned people three months ago, 95% voted against these turbines, with only one person in favour and two abstentions.

What everybody talks about, that I suppose should be called 'The national political climate around wind', has been dramatically transformed in the period since RES's first turbine application was rejected by the Rugby Planning Committee. Which they appealed at the last moment, and was immediately called-in by the Secretary of State, after ASWAR's lobbying through our MP.

Together, national figures and the 300 or so Windfarm Action Groups around the country, have achieved this fundamental change, by convincing the politicians to change tack and start questioning the 2008 Climate Change Act.

We have the creation and implementation of a Manifesto promise to do away with on-shore wind turbine subsidies, and it seems now a drastic reduction for solar subsidies as well.

We are proud that we had the forethought to have 'Against Subsidised' in our name and this recognises the importance of economics in this debate, though we are well aware that the Inspector is not allowed to take account of things, like an increase in energy poverty from subsidies, regressively paid for, through all our increasing electricity bills, at this Inquiry and we will not waste the Inquiry's time arguing about renewable energy policy.

It is of course not all about subsidies and it has perhaps surprised us all, that David Cameron had that Westminster flash of inspiration - that the people matter, that Democracy counts.

He appointed a Secretary of State to be in charge of planning policy, who is a champion of localism, as is our local MP, Mark Pawsey.

So since Greg Clark's June 18th announcement, no longer is it only a question of defining the colour of grey on the spectrum of black and white by technical planning considerations, formulated between planners and the expensive advisors and lawyers.

We now have a policy involving the people.

"No on-shore wind turbines can be built without local community backing".

It trumps everything. It is that simple! We could all go home.

Nevertheless ASWAR does not want a similar situation as we had with the local planning committee voting to not discuss further, nor add more than one reason for rejection. That was done because of reassurances by the case officer that one reason was good enough – the objection from NATS was unassailable. That was poor advice.

So we will set-out our technical planning case against these monstrous, inefficient, intermittent and costly turbines, that are 5 times the height of

our church spire of our settlement, mentioned in the Domesday book of 1000 years ago, that is set on a hill overlooking one of Warwickshire's most beautiful meandering river valleys, with high quality agricultural land all around, that has the villages of Churchover and Cotesbach at its centre, holding back the creeping urbanisation from Rugby and Lutterworth.

It could be simple if we just agree the fact that every Parish Council either side of the border has objected and by every possible measurement there is a lack of local community backing for this appeal, irrespective of the technical planning arguments for or against.

We could all save ourselves a lot of further time and money by a report of these facts and a recommendation of rejection of this appeal to the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government Greg Clark, who with the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change Amber Rudd, has been quite clear that he wishes to implement the Tory Manifesto, along with the Chancellor who wants to reduce the green subsidies down from the independent Office of Budget Responsibility's projected figure for 2020 of £9 billion per year.

The other side have said that the Secretary of State does not mean what he has said. ASWAR believes that is rather presumptuous and that RES should have pulled the Appeal back in June.

But now that they have continued it, the community calls for common sense with a speedy rejection of this appeal on Local Backing, as well as Heritage, Landscape, Noise and Amenity reasons.