

FELLS

Friends of Eden, Lakeland & Lunesdale Scenery

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Death by a Thousand Cuts

For over a decade the North West, and Cumbria in particular, have been threatened by wind farm proposals. Mercifully, we have led a number of successful campaigns, and have minimised the damage to our prized landscapes. However, in the last 12-18 months a new threat has emerged which, in its way, is just as sinister: The surge in small turbine applications.

Of course it depends how you define 'small'. Lancaster County Council have used a scheme for grading turbines according to height. It goes as follows:

- Very Small—25m (82 ft) or less to blade tip (power up to 12kW)
- Small—25-60m (82-197ft) - (power up to 500kW)
- Medium—60-90m (197—295ft) - (power up to 1000kw = 1MW)
- Large—90-130m (295—426ft) - (power up to 3MW)

They don't have a category for domestic, roof-mounted turbines. But just look at these sizes. 25m (i.e. 'very small') is three times the height of a two-storey house. The Lambrigg turbines are 74m high [243ft] - (43m hub and 31m blades) and Caton repowered are 90m [295ft] - (55+35m).

The dilemma we face is that planning applications have to be judged on individual merit and there seems to be no current over-arching policy about single small to medium turbines. Many councillors will make a mental comparison with big industrial-scale turbines and may decide that '*... 25m or 33m isn't too bad, so we will approve it*'. Of course this should NOT be the case because there has to be planning balance, i.e. the supposed benefits have to exceed the disadvantages. These small turbines have almost no general benefits—though they might supply some local electricity.

FELLS and Kirkby Lonsdale Civic Society submitted detailed objections to a 33m (108ft) two-bladed turbine at Hawkrigg (Old Town) on the B6254 Kirkby Lonsdale to Kendal road. It will be near the road and highly prominent. Soon after passing it, and just beyond Old Town, the 6 Armistead turbines will be in full view for 2 miles —hence cumulative impact. Mansergh Parish held an informative meeting to discuss this application and voted 14 to 4 against it with 5 abstentions but SLDC Planning Committee approved it by a single vote. Ironically, the turbine will be inside the new YDNP boundary if the Natural England proposals are adopted. Sadly, the owners of Hawkrigg were sold it on the basis of a 35% load factor—better than any turbine in Cumbria! A report by AEA to the Dept. of Energy & Climate Change in May 2009 gave the performance of 198 turbines this size as 8%!

In the last year we have had applications for 2 turbines at High Fell House and single turbines near Applegarth on the Middleton Fells, one near Orton, and one at Locha Farm near Arkholme. There have been 5 other separate scoping studies for 60m turbines near Barrow, and an application for 2 turbines near, Flookburgh. Malcolm Leadbetter studied this last application and sent in comments for FELLS but we did not formally object. Currently, there is an application in for a 66.7m turbine at the Moto M6 Burton Service Station and a request for a scoping study for a 25m turbine at The Hill, Tatham, inside the Forest of Bowland AONB. Finally, following the approval of Armistead, salesmen from an Irish company have been calling on the local farmers round the site trying to sell them 'small' turbines of their own.

You may feel we are making a fuss over nothing, but in reality, there is a real risk of turbine creep by default as no councils seem inclined to refuse these 'small' applications: A policy review is clearly urgently needed.

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The Duke of Westminster.
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The Lord Lieutenant of Cumbria
Sir James Cropper

Post-Cancun and all that

At the end of 2009 we were all submerged with propaganda about the Copenhagen summit—thousands of politicians, activists and media all debating climate change. You will also recall that it was freezing in Copenhagen which added a kind of surreal atmosphere to the debate. It was also the time of Climategate and the start of the bursting of the global warming bubble. Or was it? The orthodox group have been trying hard to fight back. Commissions have dismissed the dubious tactics of the Climate Change Centre at East Anglia with little more than a slap over the wrist. The new Government seems to have swallowed the climate change propaganda hook, line and sinker. This is backed up by publication of new reports (some from the Met Office) to soften up the politicians further. What has been especially notable for us, though, has been the sudden drying up of press releases from Friends of the Earth, Greenpeace and WWF. We didn't send many of these out as they are pretty predictable but I guess that before the General Election FELTS used to get at least 10 a week. Suddenly, after the election they all stopped! More recently they have resumed, extolling the virtues of the Green Investment Bank and exhorting us to ever greater carbon reductions, higher taxes and a hair-shirt life style.

Of course the outcome of Cancun was pretty much a flop but it has not stopped our politicians from rushing lemming-like over the renewable energy cliff. This is especially damaging to Scotland and Wales where, ironically, both Nationalist parties seem addicted to wind farms. One might have anticipated the opposite in a more rational world.



Wind turbines and houses — stand-off distances

- Much 'heat' is still being generated by the issue of stand-off distances but not much light. Lord Reay's Private Members Bill should get its second reading in June and before the summer recess. However, the Government are showing little sign of wanting to endorse such an approach.
- Carmarthen County Council have recently agreed to stipulate a 1,500m (about 1 mile) stand-off distance to be incorporated into their Unitary Development Plan. This is the first council to do this unilaterally but they may still be blocked by the Welsh Assembly Government.
- PPS22 (para 22) allows councils to stipulate a distance between RE schemes and homes but none seem to do so.
- A recent report examined the flicker problem (Parsons Brinkerhoff, Update of the UK Flicker Evidence Base) but only endorses the PPS22 Companion Guide recommendation that the nearest homes should be no nearer than 10 rotor diameters, and only refers to it as 'best practice'. Can you trust a wind farm company to follow best practice?

The great subsidies bonfire

Perhaps one of the most unexpected and surprising events in the past few months has been the reduction by many governments of subsidies for renewable energy.

The Netherlands: In an change of face, The Netherlands is to slash its renewable energy targets as well as reduce its solar and wind subsidies. According to the Financial Times Deutschland, the government states the subsidies are unaffordable. The plan is to cut subsidies from €4 billion annually, to €1.5 billion. Holland thus becomes the first European Union country to abandon the mandated target of producing 20% of its domestic power from renewable sources by 2020.

Spain slashed payouts for wind projects by 35% while denying support for solar thermal projects in their first year of operation. This latest round of Spanish cuts followed announcements in November that payouts for solar photovoltaic plants would be cut by 45%.

France announced a four-month freeze on solar projects and a cap on the amount of solar that can be built. These measures and others continue a retrenchment that saw industry payouts cut twice last year.

Germany announced it may discontinue the solar industry's sweetheart tariffs in 2012. This latest announcement follows a surprise reduction in 2009 and another reduction to start in 2011.

New South Wales, Australia's most populous state, slashed by two-thirds the revenue that homeowners who had installed solar panels would receive from 60 cents per kilowatt-hour to 20 cents.

The UK Government are reviewing various aspects of Renewable Energy Certificates (ROCs) and Feed-In Tariffs (FITs), and has already announced significant reductions in FIT values for photovoltaic arrays—but will they be willing to reduce their value for on-shore wind farms? That is where most of the damage to communities and our precious landscape is being done. Only time will tell but I suggest you don't hold your breath too long!

News Round-up

CLAUGHTON MOOR

The Public Inquiry for the 20 turbine application scheduled to start on May 10th was cancelled after Community Wind Power withdrew their appeal. The FELLS Consortium Rule 6 Party were already well advanced in their preparations under the leadership of Tim Sarney. CWP gave the reason for their withdrawal as their wish to concentrate all efforts on the 13 application due to go to Lancaster City Council (probably) on June 6th. Due to the lateness of the withdrawal, The FELLS Consortium have made an application for costs for direct expenditure already committed. Sadly we cannot recover costs of volunteer time.

Objections continue to mount against the 13 turbine scheme, very much in line with the larger scheme. Natural England have maintained their strong objection as also have CPRE, the Ramblers Association, Lancashire Wildlife Trust, and several other bodies. Lancaster County Council landscape and ecology experts have also objected, while RSPB are maintaining their objection unless better information is provided. The Environment Agency have withdrawn their objection subject to certain conditions.

LONGFIELD TARN

E-ON have again delayed the submission of this key application adjacent to Kirkby Lonsdale. It is now expected in mid-year. They have also reduced the number of turbines from 9 to 8 and have moved them somewhat further up the low hill. LandscapeFirst, the local opposition group, continue to fight robustly against this scheme and no one can have missed their latest poster campaign.

Good support against this scheme has been forthcoming from Tim Farron MP and Davis Morris MP. The former wrote to E-ON suggesting that they ought to withdraw the proposal due to the sensitivity of the site.

LANCASTER UNIVERSITY TURBINE

The revised application for a single 101m (331ft) turbine (down from the 2-turbine scheme rejected last year) was approved by Lancaster City Council planning committee on April 4th by 12 votes to 7. The Officer recommended approval. FELLS sustained their objection as one home is just 260m from the turbine with several others within 500m.

NATIONAL PARKS BOUNDARY REVIEW

The results of the public consultation together with revised proposals for changes to the YDNP and LDNP boundaries have now been published. They were considered by the Board of Natural England at the beginning of March. FELLS suggestions that the western boundary of the YDNP should include the Kendal Low Fells and Hutton Roof Crags were not accepted. However, they have extended the boundary westward so that it now runs along the Old Scotch Road from Killington to Kirkby Lonsdale. A small area near the Rugby Club has been removed. These revised proposals will now go for consultation to the locally affected councils. Perhaps the most surprising result was the high level of support for the extensions. Of 1147 responses about the Lune Valley extension, 808 (70%) agreed, 165 (14%) disagreed and 174 (15%) were unsure or unable to comment. Agreement for ALL areas ranged from 68% to 78%.

DO RENEWABLE POLICIES CREATE JOBS?

Hardly a week passes without some kind of press release from Government extolling the 'green' job-creating virtues of renewables schemes. However, these claims have been challenged. In March 2009, a 53 page report from Spain's Rey Juan Carlos University concluded that for every renewable energy job created, 2.2 jobs on average would be lost. Also, each job created cost almost £500,000 in tax-payer subsidies. An equivalent study examining the UK scene was published in March 2011 by Verso Economics. Although the approaches are somewhat different, the conclusions are very similar to those of the Spanish study. It found that *'...in the UK 3.7 jobs are foregone elsewhere in the economy for every job created in the renewable energy sector'*. The Jobs balance is about even in Scotland but even there no net job gain is seen despite the intense support from the Scottish Executive. The report estimated that 'measurable policies to promote renewables' were costing the UK about £1.4 billion each year. The report cites other studies from Germany and the EU, all of which found a similar negative effect.

AGM NOTICE

FELLS 11th AGM will be held on Thursday 21st July in the Parish Room in Kirkby Lonsdale Institute building commencing at 7pm.

The agenda will include an update on the past year's events and will pass on the latest news on projects in the pipeline.

The meeting will be followed by a drink and light refreshments

We extend a warm welcome to any members of local opposition groups

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FELLS is pro-renewables but believes that every application has to be assessed on its financial, landscape and amenity costs.

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An Armistead post-script

Defeating the Armistead wind farm proposal was always going to be very difficult—a fact recognised by FELLS from the outset. The main reason for this view was the publication of the Cumbria Wind Energy Supplementary Planning Document in the autumn of 2007. This publication, produced by the County Council and adopted by all the District Councils (except Barrow) was based on an analysis of landscape character types in Cumbria and a report on the Landscape Capacity to accommodate wind farms. It identified the triangle of land from the Killington Services on the M6 and bounded east, west and south by the A683, the M6 and the A65 as having ‘moderate’ capacity and capable of accommodating a small wind farm of up to 5 turbines.

Once out in the public arena, this acted as an invitation to developers to trawl the area for suitable sites. The County Council were almost obliged not to object to the scheme as it complied with what they had published, and the SLDC officers also recommended approval. Despite that, our elected councillors rejected the scheme by 12 votes to 2. So democracy prevailed—or did it? Sadly, no.

Banks Developments appealed the decision and a public Inquiry (PI) was held in Kendal Town Hall in April 2009. FELLS joined with other opposition groups based in Old Hutton and Gatebeck and formed the Countryside Protection Consortium of South Lakes (CPCSL) to fight the PI. Sadly, the Inspector allowed the appeal. CPCSL then filed for a Statutory Appeal in the High Court as we were advised that the decision was flawed. This went to the Court in June 2010 and we lost. Our subsequent requests to go to appeal were refused and so Banks, the developers, emerged victorious.

So why did we lose? As you can see from above the policy dice were loaded against us from the start, but other factors also contributed. Firstly, Government were manipulating planning rules and guidance to favour renewable energy schemes. Secondly, this was our first full PI. FELLS had taken part in the Whinash PI but only as a bit-player. Thirdly, for Armistead, we should probably have made a bigger effort to hire a good barrister. In the event we relied on an experienced landscape expert to act as our lay advocate. He did a good job but (as our solicitor for the High Court said) - ‘...having good coordination of your evidence is no substitute for real advocacy skills’. Fourthly, we spent £6K on a series of video montages (live images in which the rotor blades actually turn) for projection at the PI. Similar ones at Whinash had quite an impact but at Armistead, though well done, the impact seemed minimal and the Inspector hardly took note of them. Fifthly, we should have taken up the issue of noise and loss of visual amenity much more vigorously from the start. We didn’t do so because of the intense pressure at the time and a feeling that it was not a key issue. After all the site was between two National Parks and visible over a vast area and we felt that ought to clinch it.

So, a sorry outcome, but we need to end on a positive note. CPCSL did, after all, manage to stop the Sillfield wind farm proposal just 1.5km from Armistead. If that had gone ahead we would have had a 9 turbine wind farm rather than 6.

Also, we had **superb support** from FELLS members, including our patrons, and massive support from hundreds of members of the public who contributed over £75,000 over 30 months for the combined Armistead, Sillfield and High Court battles. Open Gardens (Rigmaden Park, Whittington Hall, Whelprigg, and Casterton Manor), Auction of Promises, and a series of appeals have taught us all just how much value local people place on the South Lakeland landscape, and how right we were to fight to the ‘wire’ to try and prevent it happening. All this experience has also helped other opposition groups to avoid making the mistakes that we did. So a hard lesson, but not all wasted. Perhaps best of all are the friendships that have blossomed in the last two years, many of which will persist well after the Armistead wind farm has become an irrelevance.

**IF ANY MEMBER WOULD BE ABLE TO HELP AS MINUTES SECRETARY
ON THE FELLS COMMITTEE, PLEASE GET IN TOUCH OR E-Mail;
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