

Noise concerns once again foremost at Den Brook Wind Farm meeting

ASPECTS discussed at the Den Brook Community Liaison Group's meeting on Thursday, May 12 at Spreyton included widespread concerns about West Devon Borough Council's agreement to significantly weaken longstanding noise pollution controls for the Den Brook wind turbines, says Mike Hulme, who represents Spreyton Parish Council on the Den Brook Community Liaison Group.

Mr Hulme, who is also a member of the UK Independent Noise Working Group and Den Brook Judicial Review Group, said the nine 120 metre-high turbines are currently under construction and the neighbourhood's concerns were clearly uppermost on the agenda, once again.

He explained that present at the public meeting were representatives from Sir Robert McAlpine's corporate wind farm developer, RES (Renewable Energy Systems Ltd), along with West Devon Borough Council's Environmental Health Specialist.

He writes, following the meeting: "Effective, appropriate and, what's more, unprecedented wind turbine noise controls had been sought, indeed demanded by the surrounding communities before a senior Government Planning Inspector gave the go-ahead for the nine industrial scale wind turbines at Den Brook back in 2009.

"The Inspector, taking account of extensive expert acoustic and meteorological evidence funded by generous donations from the neighbourhood and further afield, specifically imposed firm noise limits and associated conditions on one of the South West's largest industrial wind turbine developments to-date.

"Since then, and to its everlasting shame and that of the wind industry, RES has attempted numerous strategic and in some cases underhand ploys clearly aimed to covertly overturn and significantly weaken the Inspector's considered and carefully specified noise controls.

"There is, of course, a direct correlation between income derived from industrial wind turbines and levels of noise pollution imposed on surrounding neighbourhoods. In basic terms, the more electricity and thus income and subsidies generated, the more noise pollution is likely to be emitted from the turbines on surrounding communities.

"In 2013, for example, RES proposed use of its own

in-house designed software, allegedly developed for automating assessment of the wind turbines' noise levels at neighbouring households.

"But, and despite requests from acoustic experts engaged by the Den Brook neighbourhood, RES point-blank refused to release its software code.

"Nevertheless, a leading and truly independent, world-respected Cambridge physicist and acoustician was engaged to interrogate RES's software.

"Dr Malcolm Swinbanks discovered that the Den Brook developer's proposed 'automation' procedure both covertly and significantly reduced measured wind turbine noise by unaccountably 'losing' up to 50 per cent through the software's processing procedures.

"Shortly after, RES withdrew its proposal claiming the procedure had never been intended to be precise.

"The latest fiasco centres on a 'scheme' devised by the Den Brook developer for filtering noise complaints. The filter, it appears, holds a somewhat less than obvious potential for excluding legitimate noise complaints.

"More worrying perhaps is that the local planning authority appears to have unwittingly swallowed RES's unexplained, and indeed extremely complex, mathematical manipulation of measured noise data hook, line, and sinker; and this despite repeated representations from the surrounding neighbourhood pointing to serious and significant shortcomings with the filtering procedures.

"In short, RES, in conjunction with wind industry contractor, the Institute of Sound and Vibration, appears to have persuaded WDBC's Environmental Health specialists to exclude particularly intrusive aspects of wind turbine noise from all amplitude modulated noise compliance assessments undertaken following noise complaints.

"Such unjustified exclusion may well throw out and so unlawfully exclude otherwise genuine and legitimate noise complaints from being properly assessed.

"What's more, unwarranted rejection of legitimate noise complaints could potentially lead to uncontrolled sleep disturbance with all the attendant liabilities and well documented long-term implications for people's health.

"At an earlier meeting, as comprehensively reported by the "Crediton Courier"

(February 26), both RES and WDBC had been formally requested by the Community Liaison Group to provide a written explanation of just how the RES-scheme affected the specific noise controls imposed by the Government's Planning Inspector.

"However, rather than answer the question asked, RES and WDBC issued a joint statement addressing an entirely different question of their own making.

"Nevertheless, a variety of disturbing shortcomings with the latest scheme were put before the developer and the council's Environmental Health specialist during the May meeting.

"The 'elephant in the room' was of course the mathematically obscured and complex 'filter' which, perhaps unsurprisingly, lies at the very heart of the council-approved scheme.

"A brief run-through of the scheme revealed two principal and quite distinct potential flaws:

- Firstly, a particularly intrusive aspect of wind turbine amplitude modulated noise, technically known as the higher harmonics of the fundamental frequency, is to be excluded from all noise measurements undertaken for compliance assessments.

- Secondly, the scheme appears to take account of only one wind turbine, whereas Den Brook is scheduled for nine, 120 metre-high, industrial scale wind turbines.

"After a lengthy discussion, the meeting resolved and requested that a detailed, worked example of the scheme should be provided by WDBC such that real-world noise data is applied to enable thorough examination of the scheme in light of the potentially serious flaws identified since it was approved by the local planning authority.

"Moreover, the Den Brook developer was formally requested to provide comprehensive written details of exactly how amplitude modulated noise emitted from all nine of the Den Brook turbines is to be properly and precisely assessed by a scheme which appears to have been formulated only to assess noise impacts from a solitary wind turbine.

"It is sincerely hoped, this time, that developer RES and West Devon Borough Council provide the surrounding Den Brook communities with straightforward, clear and truly informative answers to the widespread concerns raised

during the meeting."

FROM RES

RES said it is aware that local resident Mike Hulme has made a number of statements regarding the noise protection measures which will be implemented at Den Brook Wind Farm.

It says these were also raised by Mr Hulme at the meeting of the Den Brook Wind Farm Community Liaison Group on May 12.

RES says it completely refutes Mr Hulme's allegations that noise controls at Den Brook have been weakened.

It continues: "This matter has been carefully considered by acoustics experts through the lengthy planning and legal processes that led to the approval of the Den Brook project.

"Mr Hulme's latest concerns relating to noise issues at Den Brook were thoroughly considered by the High Court and were roundly rejected – his case was so weak that he was not granted leave for any further appeals.

"The view of the noise experts associated with this case is clear – that the noise measures being implemented by RES offer the best protection possible for nearby residents should there be any noise impact.

"RES has also made clear its commitment to ensure that any potential instances of noise impacts that may occur are fully investigated.

"Whilst RES understands that Mr Hulme has concerns about the wind farm, his suggestion that RES has acted irresponsibly and not in the best interests of the local community is wholly unfounded.

"The benefits that Den Brook Wind Farm will bring to the local communities around it are already being seen with almost £2 million invested in the local and regional economy during the construction of the project so far.

"RES has delivered a new link road at Whiddon Down and once the wind farm is operational, a community benefits package worth in excess of £2.25 million during the operational lifetime of the wind farm will become available.

"This includes the Local Electricity Discount Scheme which offers local homes, commercial and community properties within 2.3 km of the turbines an annual discount of £108 off their electricity bill, every year, for the lifetime of the wind farm."