SUBMISSION FROM BRIAN HILL

(c) Planning and consents

- Is the planning system adequately resourced and fit for purpose?

Fit for purpose?
Most definitely not fit for purpose. The entire system of neighbour notification must be overhauled as a matter of urgency. The current reliance on newspaper adverts to inform affected people is a farce. Not everyone reads their local paper especially if their rural road network is blocked by snow and ice due to non gritting/snow clearance. I am not the only person in the country to first find out about a neighbouring turbine planning application after it has already received approval.

The current system where neighbour notification is only sent out if a neighbour is within 20m of the development site rather than 20m of the boundary of the land containing the development site results in the removal of the right to make representation in the form of public comment on such planning development.

The right to representation should not be dependant on the citizen buying every edition of a local paper(s) just to check that there might be a planning application which affects them.

Neighbour notification should be mandatory at a minimum for those adjacent to the land where wind turbine(s) are planned. Ideally within a defined radius of the development as well, say 1-2km.

Central planning at Scottish Government departments also seems to have a problem with the one hand not knowing what the other is doing. A request to the Directorate for the Built Environment for information on turbine numbers in planning vs. competed was unable to be answered except to direct to the UK DECC website. The information here however is lacking in information on many known completed, approved and in planning turbine applications. This was also the position in a request to the Statistics Unit of the Scottish Government who could not provide information from the planning application databases on the numbers of turbines in the planning process.

Naively I would have thought this sort of information was required to check on progress against targets. Apparently not.

Adequately Resourced?
Definitely not.
The planning system in many areas is totally overwhelmed by the sheer volume of on shore wind planning applications. This leads to pressure on the staff which leads to corners being cut and wrong decisions being made. An area which in many cases seems to particularly fail is that of proper regard to local wildlife.

Ironically this so called green measure is responsible for more habitat destruction and loss of affected species than any other type of development taking place in Scotland today.
(d) Access to finance

- What will the impacts be on consumers and their bills?

The population of Scotland has a far higher percentage reliant on electricity for heating due in part to the non availability of gas supply in many rural areas. The figures produced by the renewables industry showing the costs to the consumer of the renewables subsidies are based on duel fuel supply i.e. gas and electricity with gas being used for space heating. As such the electricity component is only a third of the bill at most.

So for the hundreds of thousands of homes in Scotland dependant on electricity those renewables subsidies have to be multiplied by three to show the amount a single fuel electricity consumer would be paying. The average family line taken by the renewables industry when discussing the amount of the renewables subsidies is a sham and designed to obscure the realities of the situation faced by the electricity dependant.

However, much of Scotland's population (I've seen estimates which put this at 20%), is reliant on electricity for space heating which, unlike using gas to heat their homes, is impacted by the renewables subsidies to a high degree. As the number of wind turbines being installed increases so the subsidies paid by the electricity consumer rises and it is the high electricity user who pays the most.

High electricity user through no choice of their own apart from the need to stay warm as they have no other method of heating their homes but to use electricity. And of course it is the Scottish energy consumer who regularly experiences the worst and coldest winter weather in the U.K.

The Scottish Government should not let political dogma and lobbying by the wind energy industry blind them to the realities of the effects of their policies on the poor of Scotland.

"It should also be noted that the direct and indirect cost burden of the energy levies falls disproportionately on poorer households, and there is every reason to suppose that the increasing number and costs of such policies has already contributed to the increase in the number of households in hardship or at significant risk".

"the total annual cost in 2020 will be over £13 billion, consisting of £8.2 billion of subsidy, and about £5 billion of additional system costs."

"... approximately one third of this cost would find its way through to bills for domestic consumers, and two-thirds would be paid by industrial and commercial consumers, with a large part of this being eventually being passed through to UK consumers in the prices of goods and services.

This would represent an increase on current annual domestic electricity costs of approximately £130, or 30%, over current costs for those households with a moderate electricity consumption of 3,300 kWh per annum."
However, for those who use electric heating we estimate the increase would be approximately £320 per annum on their space heating costs alone, before retail margins and VAT”.

Energy Policy and Consumer Hardship - Renewal Energy Foundation

If the government wish to continue their current policy on renewables they should grant aid the substitution of electric space heating with another method or be prepared to pay the renewables subsidy from general taxation rather than making the people who have the least funds pay for it.

At the very least considerably reduce the renewables subsidy

Or does the Scottish Government wish to see Scotland become the world leader in people dieing from hypothermia due lack of funds to heat their homes. It is a totally obscene situation where the poorest in Scotland have to pay with their lives for the richest to receive even more money.

The Guardian newspaper (no opponent of renewable energy in fact quite the opposite) has reported on the significant benefits that accrue to a very, very small portion of the community, that of the landowner class, from the dash for wind.

"Wind turbines bring in 'risk-free' millions for rich landowners" The Guardian Tuesday 28th February 2012

"Estate owners in Scotland – where 1,200 people own two-thirds of the land – have so far benefited the most"

"The boom in onshore wind power, likened to a "new industrial revolution", is being dominated by a small number of private landowners who will share around £1bn in rental fees over the next eight years.

Rental payments vary and are secret but, say property agents speaking in confidence to the Guardian, landowners can now expect £40,000 a year "risk-free" for each large turbine erected on their land. Those set to benefit include senior members of the royal family and the Forestry Commission in Wales and Scotland.

Analysis of onshore wind power investments suggests that the 13GW of energy anticipated by the government to be installed by 2020 will pay landowners upwards of £100m a year in total rents, on top of the EU farm subsidies they automatically receive for owning land.

According to agents in Scotland and Wales, competition for suitable land is escalating rents. Landowners can expect to be paid 5-6% of the annual turnover of windfarms, or around £40,000 a year for each large 3MW turbine. "They see windfarms as a new farm subsidy but they do not have to take any risk," said one agent. "Only 60% of development applications may go through, but the returns if they do get built are enormous."

Estate owners in Scotland – where 1,200 people own two-thirds of the land – have so far benefited the most. The Earl of Moray is thought to get about £2m a year in
rent from a 49-turbine windfarm on his Doune estate in Perthshire, while the Duke of Roxburghe stands to make more than £1.5m a year from his 48-turbine Fallago Rig development in Lammermuir Hills.

According to this analysis, the Earl of Seafield, Britain’s seventh largest landowner, would be paid around £120,000 a year from turbines on his Banffshire estate. The Earl of Glasgow, a Liberal Democrat peer, has 14 wind turbines on his Kelburn estate, so could earn upwards of £300,000 a year."

A large proportion of this money is coming from the renewables subsidies paid for by the electricity consumer. And as noted Scotland has a far higher proportion of electricity only consumers than the rest of the UK thus the Scottish population will pay disproportionately for it’s elite landowners to rake in the subsidy money.

Of course if we follow the money we will find it’s the same old faces getting the monetary benefits from the dash for wind as those collecting huge agricultural subsidies. And those faces throughout history have never cared about the impact they may have on the country of Scotland, it’s population, the planet and the species which inhabit it.

It is morally wrong to make the poorest people in the country living in fuel poverty pay for extremely wealthy land owners to become even more wealthy. I am ashamed to live in a country where still in the 21st Century as it was in the 18th Century the name of the game is robbing the poor to pay the rich. Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose...

Brian Hill
29 February 2012