

Response to Wind Turbine Developments

Whilst it is important that the Society does not become a one-issue organisation, we feel that the Scottish Government's targeting of the mainly rural County of Berwickshire for the generation of renewable energy from onshore wind turbines poses a major threat to our welfare, heritage and amenity. In response, we have formed a sub-committee to debate the issue and to draw up a strategy for responding to wind turbine planning applications.

Although Berwickshire has not officially been designated in its entirety as a Special Landscape Area (SLA), the County is without question an area of great landscape value on which much of our local economy depends. Scottish Borders Council (SBC) understands this and has tried, on the whole, to protect the County from the excesses of Scottish Government policy. Two spectacular failures of decision-making have been the recent overturning by Public Inquiries of Fallago Rig and Drone Hill on Coldingham Moor (an extremely prominent site very close to one of the most scenically outstanding coasts in Britain). Both windfarms are now under construction. Developers are now also moving rapidly down from the hills to more densely populated areas along the A1 corridor (Penmanshiel, Blackburn, Quixwood, Brockholes, Monashee, Blackmains and many more).

The Society has no objection to discreetly placed turbines which do not dominate the landscape, singly or cumulatively, by their height or by their noise and vibrations. However, many of those already erected, and the 1000 more currently proposed in the Scottish Borders, are structures on a truly industrial scale, many measuring 126.5m (415ft) tall. For comparison, the Big Ben clock tower is 96m (316ft). We agreed to attempt to rebalance the Scottish Government's policy by encouraging the development of other renewable energy technologies and of energy saving programmes. We are already engaging directly with developers and with MEPs and MSPs. At the recent Communities Against Wind Turbines Scotland conference, it was agreed by MSPs that the full business case for renewable energy generated by wind turbines would be fully discussed in the Scottish Parliament. A debate took place on 1 December 2011.

As a Society, we realise the financial benefits offered by developers are

attractive to cash-strapped Community Councils. However, it must be remembered that the money offered is trivial compared with developers' profits, and the financial gains for communities must be balanced against permanent loss of amenity and damage to the local economy (not just for 25 years). This County is particularly dependent for its prosperity on tourism and on the spending power and support for businesses and trades of those who have chosen to settle in what was once a very special rural area.

Berwickshire Civic Society members are encouraged to ensure they are fully informed about developers' proposals and that, where they feel it is appropriate, they exercise their democratic rights and raise their objections with their elected national and local representatives. Objections should be made initially at the Scoping Stage before the developer lodges a Proposal of Application Notice (PAN) with SBC. Once an application is advertised in the press and online by SBC, the formal planning process begins and there are only 21 days in which to comment (for or against) to Scottish Borders Council. If no more than four objections are received a Council official may pass the application under "delegated powers" rather than putting it before the full Planning Committee for scrutiny.

Members should reflect on the fact that if only a portion of current applications are approved then there will be NO portion of the landscape of Berwickshire that is not dominated by industrial scale wind farms. This will damage both local economy and heritage. A dynamic part of our economy depends upon incoming retirees, commuters and visitors. Losing say 10–20% of these would impact on local business, especially in building, retail and services. Scottish Chambers of Commerce actually think the damage to the Scottish economy will be more widespread. We have reservations about some of the processes of planning. They are complex, depend heavily upon internet access and in some cases are poorly designed to involve those likely to be affected. However we do feel that in the majority of cases our planners and their committees are taking thoughtful decisions, but that these are threatened by the interventions of the Holyrood administration, notably at Fallago Rig and Drone Hill. We need to support local planners and local democracy in every way we can.

Those of us concerned with the 'green' agenda should reflect on the

increasing evidence that wind turbines are an inefficient way of meeting this agenda. The John Muir Trust reported that at times of peak demand wind farms produced under 10% of planned output. In Scotland, big snow dumps tend to coincide with periods of high pressure and still air. The turbines require substantial back up from nuclear and carbon sources. Members should also reflect on the fact that THERE ARE ALTERNATIVES. Micro-renewables such as solar panels and tidal power can be delivered in ways that are in scale with the landscape. MEP Struan Stevenson calculates that diverting all the money spent on subsidies to wind farms to house insulation and energy conservation would bring carbon savings in excess of the minimal gains from wind.

R J Morris

STOP PRESS

Protesters Pack Parliament

Berwickshire Civic Society joined other community groups from across Southern Scotland to hear the Holyrood Parliament debate wind turbines. Local MSP John Lamont (Con.) supported the view that Berwickshire had reached saturation point. Paul Wheelhouse (SNP) *observed* that Scottish Borders already produced enough wind energy for 72,000 homes, despite having only 52,000 houses and *so thought we had* done our bit. He seemed reluctant to criticise the Holyrood government's over-concentration on wind power. Christine Grahame (SNP) in a courageous speech outlined the learning process which had brought her to oppose the irresponsible proliferation of turbines.

All who spoke *were concerned about* the cumulative impact of over-concentration and the damage to 'landscape signature', to local economies and to health and welfare. Most condemned the Klondyking activity of multinationals, often using small local companies as a front.

There was criticism of the local planning system, although it was pointed out that local planners and democracy had been frequently over-ruled by Holyrood – e.g. Drone Hill and Fallago Rig, but local objections had apparently been upheld in the constituencies of the First Minister and his Finance Secretary.

There was much talk of community involvement without saying what this meant. There was a tendency to see nuclear power as the only alternative to the wind turbines and not enough talk of tidal and solar power, and none of energy conservation. There was welcome talk of environmental justice and fuel poverty. The Minister, Fergus Ewing, acknowledged the concerns and said he would return officewards to 'think again'.

Berwickshire is central to a massive political debate. Cumulative impact is a major issue. Has the County already 'done its bit'?



**Joint Berwickshire Civic Society/
Berwickshire Naturalists Club visit
~ 20th June, 2012**

It is not too often that the President of the Berwickshire Civic Society also happens to be the President of the Berwickshire Naturalists Club, but that is the case at present, *writes Ian Maitland Hume*. To mark this happy coincidence in 2012, I think it would good if both organisations could share an event and so we plan to have a joint get-together on one of the Club's Field Trips. Many members incidentally are also members of the Berwickshire Naturalists, so such an event may help to strengthen links between the two societies.

The day proposed will be **June 20th and we shall start off by meeting at the Polwarth Thorn**, which has long been of interest and concern to the Society. We shall then go to Marchmont via Polwarth Kirk. At Marchmont it is hoped we can visit the house and we shall also look

at what remains of Redbraes Castle, which might also be of interest to the Society. There will be an entry fee of £6 per person for Marchmont House.

Nearer the time a reminder will be sent to members, particularly giving details of plans for the rest of the day, which may include a visit to Greenlaw Town Hall and the Tower of the kirk. If the weather is kind to us, it should be an excellent occasion for our enjoyment.

*Ian Maitland Hume
President of Berwickshire Civic Society*

MEMBERSHIP SUBSCRIPTIONS

Last year the annual subscriptions were increased to:

individuals:	£12.00
couples:	£18.00
companies:	£20.00

If you pay your subscription by standing order - and we are grateful to members who do, it normally saves us a lot of admin. work - please could you check that you have asked your bank to increase the amount you pay. Several are still coming in at the old rate.

Keep Berwickshire Tidy Campaign 2012

Every Spring the Berwickshire Civic Society runs the Keep Berwickshire Tidy Campaign with the aim of giving the County a thorough clean-up before the early May Bank Holiday.

This year clean-up week is during:	w/c Monday 23 April
and judging is the following week:	w/c Monday 30 April

If any members would like to join our team of judges please get in touch with Gregory Lauder-Forst, Tel. 01289 386779. Your support would be much appreciated, and it is a good opportunity to explore the County!



Mouth Bridge

A Civic Society Battle Honour

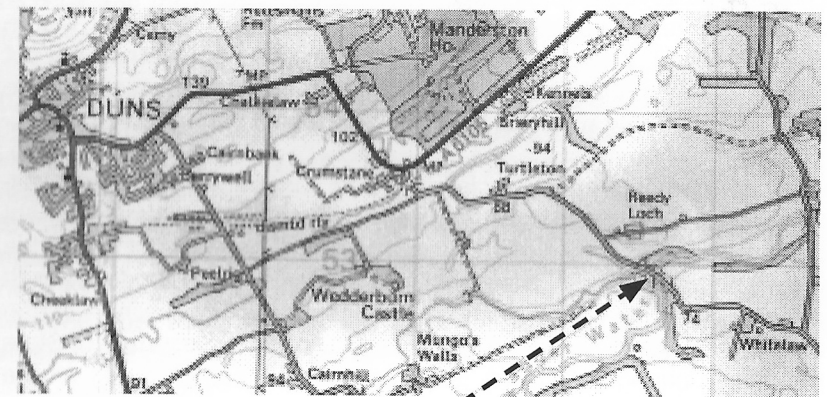
Mouth Bridge spans the Blackadder Water a short distance down stream from its confluence with the Langton Burn or Verta. It was built around 1795 - no one is quite sure exactly when, as it bears no date. In the days before the Whitadder was bridged west of Chirnside, Mouth Bridge carried the main road from Duns to Berwick which previously had gone across the Mouth Ford. In a county which, due to its turbulent history, does not possess a wealth of old buildings, Mouth Bridge is an important part of our built heritage.

As a Category B Listed Building it was the responsibility of Borders Regional Council who in 1977, by their own admission, realised its geriatric state; did they place a weight or width restriction on the bridge, or speed limit? They did nothing, despite the fact that 32 ton vehicles from the recently opened Craigswalls grain depot were regularly using the bridge. In September 1983 they reacted. They closed the bridge.

The question of what to do with what one Councillor called 'a silly little

bridge' was now debated by the Council. The Roads Department produced a list of five options of which No.3 was 'to demolish'. The Council voted for No.3. The correspondence columns of the Berwickshire News erupted in horror. 244 people signed a petition against such vandalism, and later on a further 446 signatures were added.

Your Chairman wrote to the Secretary of State - then George Younger - to our MP - then Archie Kirkwood, who wrote to Michael Ancrum the Minister for Home Affairs at the Scottish Office - all of whom seemed to have written to each other and, as a result, Borders Regional Council were told to stay their hand until a Public Local Inquiry was held.



Mouth Bridge

No one could remember the last time that a Public Inquiry had been held in Duns and so Berwickshire District Council, in whose Council Chamber it was to be held, had no idea how many of the public might turn up and so very few chairs were provided. When on 29th November 1983 the doors were opened, the press of people anxious to attend quite overwhelmed the seating and the proceedings were delayed while the building was searched for more. It was a case of standing room only for many. The Reporter was clearly much impressed by this example of local interest which cannot have done our case any harm.

The Society's case was led by your Chairman supported by, amongst others, Professor Hendry of the Department of Civil Engineering in the University of Edinburgh, Mr Robert Smith, Director of the Association for

the Protection of Rural Scotland and Mr John Gerrard, Technical Director of the Scottish Civic Trust. Between us we managed to make Borders Region look fairly foolish, egged on by a room full of support.

As part of the proceedings, the Reporter was taken for a tour of the local by-roads which could be affected if Mouth Bridge was 'stopped-up'. This was organised by our Society, and I cannot believe that even the most urban of Reporters cannot have been surprised by the number of combines on these narrow roads in November and the squadrons of tractors which 'just happened' to impede his progress.

We had to wait seven months for the result of the Inquiry, but it was worth waiting for. Banner headlines in the Berwickshire News said it all 'Mouth Bridge Reprieved'. A letter to the Chairman from Michael Ancrum set out the result officially 'that listed building consent for demolition should be refused and 'stopping up' order on the road was not confirmed'.

Hardly had members of the Society stopped congratulating themselves, when someone went down to the river and discovered to their astonishment and incomprehension piles of boulders dumped at each end of the bridge which would have stopped a tank. Your Chairman's correspondence to St Andrew's House - to a new Secretary of State, Malcolm Rifkind - began all over again. As did Borders Region's assault on the Secretary of State to get him to change his mind, particularly about 'stopping up', on the grounds that they could not afford to mend the bridge.

And so the matter dragged on into 1986. On 20th August, almost two years since the Public Inquiry, your Chairman wrote again in exasperation to the Secretary of State; 'I would draw your attention to the action of Borders Region who have placed a Public Notice in the local press announcing their intention to stop up the road crossing Mouth Bridge permanently, not only to vehicles, but to pedestrians as well. This Society cannot understand how a decision of the Secretary of State, arrived at after consideration of the finding of an expensive Public Inquiry, and so recently confirmed, can be so arbitrarily disregarded and set aside and we ask for your urgent intervention to uphold your authority in this matter'.

This seemed to do the trick and a second Public Inquiry, under a different Reporter, was ordered for 19th October 1987 to be held in Duns. As

before it was extremely well attended and our Society had the support of Professor Hendry, A.P.R.S and the Civic Trust. Whereas the 1984 Inquiry was reported in great detail on a full page of the Berwickshire News, not one word of those proceedings received a mention, nor was the fact that the Inquiry had even taken place. Had someone nobbled the Tweeddale Press? I have often wondered.

The Report, when it arrived in August 1988, ran to fifty-six pages, but the conclusion was short and to the point; 'that the stopping up order should not be confirmed'. Victory again, but this time we were wary of too much celebration too soon. And we were right. Absolutely nothing happened for months, except that the area of the bridge became more and more decrepit and the Berwickshire News published a photograph captioned "Basra - after the battle"; and the road remained blocked.

In December 1988 a demand was received from the Scottish Development Department for detailed costings for the repair of the bridge, to be produced within twenty one days - a period which contained both Christmas and New Year. Despite this astonishing request on a technical matter upon which no member of our Society was qualified to express an informed opinion, a three page reply was returned within time pointing out that at both Public Inquiries expert advice by Professor Hendry, supported by A.P.R.S and the Civic Trust, had estimated the cost of repair for vehicle use at £50,000, whereas the estimate from Borders Region was £187,000.

Another year went by with little progress to report. In December 1990 your Chairman wrote to Lord James Douglas-Hamilton, Minister of Home Affairs, asking him to persuade Borders Region to accept the Secretary of States's offer to them of grant aid and to encourage his Historic Buildings people 'to attend more expeditiously to their consideration of the tenders for work on the bridge which had been in their hands since July'.

We were not the only ones to be frustrated. In January 1991 the Chief Executive of Borders Region wrote a furious letter to the Scottish Development Department complaining that Listed Building Consent had still not been given six months after it had been applied for and that as a result tenders could not be accepted. For once we seemed to be on the same side.

On 15th March 1992, nine years since the bridge became an issue, Mouth