

Ymgyrch Diogelu Cymru Wledig Campaign for the Protection of Rural Wales

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1st February 2021

BY E MAIL

Dear Minister,

I am writing on behalf of CPRW to ask you to take urgent action to call in the proposals for Uskmouth Power Station which are due to be considered by Newport City Council (NCC) on Wednesday 3 February (planning application 20/0748). This proposal would if granted allow potentially toxic, non-recyclable plastic waste to be imported mainly from various locations in England and incinerated in Newport next to the sensitive and unique Gwent levels, as well as several residential and rural areas. We are particularly concerned that the long term impact on the Gwent Levels has not been properly analysed.

The incinerator would actually emit more Co2 than the coal fired power station which has been closed for several years. It would also emit a range of toxic chemical emissions on a site within metres of the heart of the Gwent Levels. The applicants already admit a damaging impact from associated development on the landscape of the Levels. All this would be far too high a price to pay for “cheap and dirty” electricity, made partly from plastic waste which should be disposed of where it is generated. Allowing it to be incinerated and blown as an aerosol across the Gwent Levels and Newport is potentially in contradiction with WG policies on climate change, air pollution, incineration, and waste. The consideration of this proposal by NCC has only been possible because the applicants argue that this should be treated as a change of use at a power station that formerly burned coal but has been closed for several years. **In all other respects this application meets the criteria for a Development of National Significance (DNS) and CPRW hope you will agree that it should be considered thoroughly and properly by the Welsh Planning Inspectorate under those procedures**

We are also alarmed by the way NCC have handled this application. CPRW sent the enclosed objections to the change of use and the required environmental permit last May to Newport City Council and Natural Resources Wales. Our letter to NCC at the pre-application stage was detailed and stated in boldface that **“we are writing immediately to state our organisation's main objections formally, for consideration now and later if and when a full planning application is received.”** NCC did not acknowledge our objection but posted

Ymgyrch Diogelu Cymru Wledig Campaign for the Protection of Rural Wales



it on a pre-application stage website. NRW did acknowledge receipt of our separate objection to granting a permit to use waste pellets to fuel the power station, but have not been in touch with us subsequently to discuss our objections, which were also given in detail. **CPRW's arguments against the proposals stand, including our view that the application should be treated as DNS or called in to be resolved by the Welsh Government.** We also sent copies to Lesley Griffiths last June asking for WG intervention.

Given the care we took to contact WG, NCC and NRW with our detailed concerns 8 months ago, we are astounded that NCC's recommendation to the Planning Committee makes no reference to CPRW *even having submitted an objection*, despite the very clear statement we gave them quoted above. It also appears that NCC have treated all earlier objections (which were posted on a website with a different number, received before the application formalised their application) have been similarly and deliberately disregarded. The officers' paper to the Committee gives an entirely misleading impression by stating that (only) 1 objection was received from neighbours in addition to the RSPB response. They also state that "no response" had been received from Nash Community Council. However, like CPRW and Friends of the Earth Cymru, their objection was submitted earlier and can actually be found on NCC's earlier website (19/1313) where we have counted a total of at least 20 objections, none of which are referred to in the officers' report. **This is a serious breach of the basic principle that objections should be fairly considered by the planning authority, who have misrepresented the scale and range of objections to the Planning Committee.**

The handling also shows that NCC were not prepared to engage with objectors at all, but are looking for the easiest route to accommodate the wishes of the applicant regardless of the impacts on Welsh Government national policies, the environment and local communities. We believe that very few people beyond those directly consulted knew that the formal application had been submitted. No attempt was made by NCC to contact many objectors at the preliminary stage to give them an opportunity to state whether they confirmed their objections or wished to amend them. Hence there were no further letters from local residents (bar 1), CPRW and FoE Cymru and only a letter from RSPB who had to be directly consulted as their Reserve is within 100m of the site. After failing to alert earlier objectors to the commencement of the formal stage, NCC compounded their error by ignoring all the earlier objections and advising their Planning Committee wrongly that virtually none had had been received. The NCC planning officers' report shows this clearly.

Finally we are disappointed but not surprised that having stated correctly in their initial scoping assessment that "a nil use would be the correct baseline for assessments" rendering

Ymgyrch Diogelu Cymru Wledig Campaign for the Protection of Rural Wales



the application as DNS (see para 3 of our initial objection), NCC have entirely reversed that judgement apparently because a well-endowed applicant has taken legal advice which the Council has declined to question or challenge. Uskmouth coal fired power station has been closed for several years and no Council should yield to a threat to re-start coal combustion in the teeth of the Climate Emergency, when coal is being legally phased out in Wales as well as the rest of the UK and beyond.

For the reasons above, and those in our attached objections, we respectfully ask the Minister to call in the application so it can be properly considered under the DNS framework designed for large scale power generation in Wales. This would also be consistent with the decision which the First Minister took in June 2019 when rejecting the proposals for an M4 bypass partly because of its potential damage to the Gwent Levels.

Yours faithfully

Mr Jonathan Colchester
Chairman
CPRW