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The Editor,

Carmarthen Journal

Dear Editor,

When economists evaluate new major projects such as wind farm developments, they would normally use cost benefit analysis to decide if such proposals are in the public interest. There are currently 3 developments (involving 59 turbines) being considered by Carmarthen Council and the IPC so let's start by looking at the benefits. Clearly the developers would expect to make profits, something that is more or less guaranteed, regardless of how inefficient or unreliable is this technology. Secondly Carmarthen Council can expect to receive thousands of pounds in business rates. Thirdly there could be some short term extra employment and the 3 projects are expected to produce several hundred jobs for around 2 years. Once operational, of course, there would be a few maintenance jobs. Also there would be a few thousand pounds available for local community councils and a larger sum for landowners. Finally, it is argued that these extra wind farms would contribute to providing clean energy as part of the U.K.'s obligation to meet renewable energy targets and thus combating global warming.

When looking at costs, economists usually look at not just building costs but also what they call external costs i.e. burdens carried by those people who are affected in their daily lives by such developments. A major cost would arise due to congestion on local roads over the 2 year construction phase. Being generous, let's assume each turbine involves 5 journeys with super loads so it could involve around 300 traffic halting events. There are also a host of other costs which, due to limitation of space, cannot be explored here in detail, but the most serious one is the impact on tourism. The potential for expansion in this area is highly significant and vital but even the current substantial provision would be under threat. This in turn would have an impact on other local businesses who supply tourist firms. Costs such as the effect on property prices would be another negative impact, even if sales can be achieved at all. Then there are issues around the detriment on quality of life for local individuals. The enjoyment achieved through unspoiled tranquil countryside has been valued by a recent national survey as an annual average of £300 per person - lacking other amenities, local inhabitants would put a much higher figure on it! Other factors such as stress caused by noisy vehicles and noisy turbine operation should also be considered.

A political scientist might ask the question "Who benefits directly from building these wind farms?". In terms of people it has to be those living in England. Tiny Wales already has, per 100 square kilometres, 2.4 turbines compared with 0.5 turbines in much larger England (The Times, (16/06/11) . Five of the border counties in England have no wind farms at all. Wales, however, has already met its wind based targets, producing, over all, 3 times its energy needs. So it would seem that Wales bear the costs and the England get the benefits. Of course there are plenty of hills and wind in that border country but does anyone care?

Yours sincerely,

Ted Razzell