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### **Blowing ruin across the land**

**Wind farms give only an illusion of green power.**

**They blight the landscape and are woefully inefficient, says the daughter of the late poet laureate**

Frieda Hughes      Published: 15 May 2011

***Hughes says wind farms have turned parts of Wales into an alien landscape (Richard Stanton)***

A few days ago I was riding my motorbike from Aberystwyth to Newtown in Mid Wales through some of the most beautiful countryside imaginable, when my eyes were suddenly met by a hillside of wind turbines near the village of Llandinam.

The 103 turbines are each 149ft high and transformed the view in front of me into a field of prison bars; my eye could not separate the landscape from the physical evidence of man's imposition on it. They grotesquely disfigured the view.

Knowing nothing about wind turbines, I used to imagine that they were a good idea. But while staying with relatives on the outskirts of Halifax a few years ago, I was dismayed to discover that the enormous picture window in their attic bedroom no longer framed the view over the unblemished Yorkshire hills that I was accustomed to, but a wind farm.

It industrialised the horizon and was instantly depressing. No creative thought could wander that previously scenic vista; instead the turbines acted as anchors, preventing cognitive reasoning.

As a child I had lived in Yorkshire with my father, the late poet laureate Ted Hughes. I loved the barren areas where evidence of man did not feature, but now turbines protruded like homeless bits of aeroplane. I couldn't understand why nobody had prevented this vandalism.

I moved to Mid Wales in 2004, returning to my Welsh Hughes roots, and I am dismayed to find

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the number of wind turbines steadily increasing here too.

Parts of Mid Wales are so unspoilt that in 1972 the Cambrian Mountains were due to become a national park. Bizarrely, local authorities and landowners blocked the proposal on the grounds that it might increase the number of visitors to the area.

Now as then, Wales is hugely dependent on its tourist industry, so it seems ridiculous that this extraordinarily beautiful countryside is being permanently disfigured in front of our eyes by the very policy makers who are supposed to be its custodians.

Vast subsidies (a mind-numbing £1 billion a year for the past five years), without which wind farms wouldn't exist, have encouraged cash-strapped local authorities to allow them to be built, even though the ecological and setup costs of turbines far outweigh the benefits.

A friend who farms here tells me that two years ago he and his neighbours were offered an annual payment of £3,500 for each turbine on their land. Rather alarmingly, according to his accountant, the farmer's untimely death could possibly allow the turbine operators to claim this land under a sort of squatter's rights arrangement.

For the new-generation turbines, some landowners can receive an annual income of between £15,000 and £20,000 a turbine — it's more profitable than breeding sheep.

The advocates of this technology gloss over the fact that it is unreliable. Last year Welsh wind farms produced only 19% of the theoretical maximum energy they could generate. In calm weather, wind turbines across the British Isles can remain stationary for weeks, and up to three months of the year they will produce almost no power at all. If they were a car, or a fridge, or a computer, you would never buy one.

When the wind does blow it can endanger the national grid — in April, six wind farms in Scotland were paid up to 20 times the lost revenue to turn their turbines off because the grid could not absorb the glut of electricity they were generating.

The electricians who recently rewired my house have studied the figures; they tell me the economics of wind turbines versus solar panels don't stack up, and cannot understand why anyone would promote turbines.

The painter who has been decorating every room in my house tells me that he recently worked on a wind farm of 39 turbines, each 328ft high, at Cefn Croes, on the way to Aberystwyth from Newtown. Being an inquisitive sort, he asked one of the energy company executives responsible for the development how useful the turbines were. The man told him that if the power in Aberystwyth went down — and it is not a very large town — then the entire wind farm would power only one light bulb in each house.

Nonetheless, Wales, specifically Mid Wales, is earmarked to become one enormously ugly supplier of unreliable energy to the rest of Britain. This is spelt out in TAN 8, a technical advice note updated by the Welsh assembly in 2005 without public consultation. (We should not forget

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that the Welsh assembly also allowed the apparently unnecessary flooding of Welsh valleys to supply water for Birmingham.) “You have to tell them about TAN 8,” cried one of my furious landowning neighbours only the other day, when he found out that I was writing this article. Others want me to regale you with facts and figures too numerous to write about here, in the belief that you will be as horrified as they were when they read them.

TAN 8 identifies several more areas of Wales where wind farms to supply Britain with power can be sited. Three of these do not have access to the national grid and so require several miles of transmission pylons and a substation or hub to be built.

The hub will cover 20 acres of countryside with electrical wiring and power boxes, and is to be placed down the road from me, or, alternatively, slightly further down the road from me and the thousands of other people who do not want it — or the health concerns it raises.

Consultations abound to decide at which of the two suggested sites the hub should be placed, and for us to beg fruitlessly that the power lines be buried. But this discussion should not be happening at all — we should not be hosting disfiguring turbines that require pylons and a hub in the first place.

Under the plans, existing turbines will be replaced and new turbines measuring between 361ft and 479ft high will be erected, although a recent application proposes building turbines 606ft high (the Post Office Tower is 620ft). The turbines will stand in blocks of reinforced concrete the size of Olympic swimming pools and will be audible more than a mile away. Mid Wales alone is destined for more than 840 turbines in total.

Many of us live in the Severn Valley, an area now earmarked for transmission pylons through to Oswestry, which will connect Welsh wind farms to the national grid, turning a historical area of stunning natural beauty into an industrial conduit of dangerous power cables and multiples of the Eiffel Tower’s hideous siblings.

To take the pictures for this article, the photographer drove me to a wind farm near Dolfor, not far from Newtown. The sight and sound of the blades thrashing was more disturbing than I had expected. The noise of each turbine was a jet engine preparing for takeoff but never leaving the ground. One of them was squeaking. This was an alien landscape.

The valley behind us, back towards Dolfor, unrolled its colours in the chill afternoon sun like a stained glass window; we are so lucky that such a beautiful place exists. Except that if you live in Dolfor, your view would be the wind farm where we stood.

On the way home we passed a rash of signs along the roadside saying “No hub in Abermule” and “Say no to pylons”. In a field by the roadside stood an articulated lorry trailer painted white, and, in enormous letters on either side so it could be seen from both directions, were the words: “Welsh assembly, we’re no mugs, keep your pylons and your hubs.”

When I moved here I was concerned that, being so beautiful, Mid Wales might become too heavily populated, but if we do not stop the turbines, pylons and the hub, I will not have to worry

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— nobody will want to live here. Not even us.

To find out more, visit [www.midwaleswind.co.uk](http://www.midwaleswind.co.uk)