

BETHAN JENKINS AC / AM

Aelod Cynulliad Plaid Cymru - Gorllewin De Cymru
Plaid Cymru Assembly Member - South Wales West

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Jane Davidson AM
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23 March 2010

REF: BJ-JDMESH-PPSPT-23-03-2010

Dear Jane,

Re: Prenergy Power Station, Port Talbot

I am writing to you to register my strongest objection to Prenergy's plans for a biomass woodchip-burning power station in Port Talbot. I know the proposal is now at appeal, with the matter to be decided by you.

Like you, I am committed to finding renewable solutions to our energy demands. I believe, as does the Welsh Government, that this makes sense for our economy as well as for our environment.

However, I have several, practical objections to the Prenergy proposal, which I shall outline:

1. **It will make worse Neath Port Talbot's pollution levels.** The area, as I'm sure you know, registers the highest number of PM10s of any local authority in Wales. A recent report from the Commons Environmental Audit Committee found that as many as 50,000 a year suffer early deaths as a consequence of air pollution – placing great pressure on the NHS. The Prenergy plant is not an 'instead of' solution. It is an 'as well as' problem. That means that existing levels of pollution will not be reduced elsewhere. Instead, carbon emission levels will be added to by burning at this station;
2. **There is no guarantee of regular supply.** The volume of woodchip that the Prenergy plant will require each year is roughly equal to the USA's entire annual output, around three million tonnes. Even the world's largest producer, Australia, manages only five million tonnes annually. It makes for a precarious supply chain;

3. **There is no guarantee that woodchip can be offloaded at Port Talbot.** During a recent meeting with Corus, it was made clear that the steel maker has no spare capacity at its docks facility to allow for offloading by other businesses. This is crucial to the economic viability of the project and must be considered before permission is given. Otherwise, any operator will have to land at other ports and transport by road over the remaining distance, considerably negating any environmental benefit that the plant may bring;
4. **There are alternatives being considered for the area.** Corus told me at the same meeting that it is looking at a range of renewable projects for energy generation at its Port Talbot site. Not only does it have the land capacity to make this happen, but it is designing these projects with the express purpose of reducing the emissions it produces, rather than the Prenergy project which, as I have said above, would add to pollution in the area;
5. **There are considerable safety concerns among local people.** The application would include a series of warehouses roughly equal to the volume of two Liberty Stadiums, and they are within a few hundred yards of residents' homes. Biomass like woodchip does not need a spark or a flame to ignite. Under certain temperatures and conditions, it is susceptible to spontaneous combustion. In addition, it is incredibly hard to put out. It needs to be spread out and then doused with considerable quantities of water. Most fire brigades prefer to let them burn themselves out. In 2005, a fire in Hendy, Carmarthenshire that contained a fraction of the woodchip that could be stockpiled in Port Talbot burned for three days, and fire officers admitted that they were helped by torrential rain. It goes without saying that such a fire could not be allowed to burn for such a long time, or on such a scale at Port Talbot.
6. **There is overwhelming opposition to this proposal locally.** When the matter came before the local authority, councillor voted overwhelmingly against it. This vote reflects the level of local opposition to the plant, and I hope that these strong local views will be taken into consideration when you deliberate the appeal.

Lastly, I would like to register a note of concern. I see in recent data provided by the Welsh Government on Wales' electrical generating capacity that the Prenergy biomass plant is already marked down as an energy provider. This has been interpreted locally as a signal of Welsh Government intent over this project. Are you able to give me reassurances that this application will be heard fairly, with all aspects of the project given consideration – particularly its suitability to the Port Talbot area – so that I may pass them on to concerned constituents who have contacted me on the matter?

Kind Regards,

Bethan Jenkins AM South Wales West

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