

Wind energy? No thanks – we want to keep our nuclear option

By Michael Savage
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PA An aerial view of Hinkley Point, proposed site of the wind turbines

As soon as residents living near Hinkley Point, on the west Somerset coast, were told that a 12-pylon wind farm was planned for their rural idyll, opposition was quick to grow.

The community had lived side-by-side with nuclear power stations for decades, but many drew the line at the prospect of adding a dozen 300ft turbines to their backyard.

"I didn't know much about wind farms, but when they try to dump one in the area you represent, you find out about them pretty damn quick," said Anthony Trollope-Bellew, the Somerset county councillor who represents the area. "The more I found out, the less I liked them."

What followed was extensive low-level asymmetric warfare. Parish councils held long strategy meetings. Local politicians were brought on side. Wildlife experts were consulted on the damage to the local bat and bird populations. Testimony was heard from people already affected by turbines.

Eighteen months later the campaigners trudged into a village hall with their attack honed: landowners were condemned for allowing the deal to go ahead; the proposed location was lauded as "one of the few relatively unspoilt stretches of coastline left in Somerset".

"It would have been an eyesore," said Mr Trollope-Bellew. "The industrialisation of rural England is not a price worth paying for something that only works 30 per cent of the time. There are places in Somerset with a lot more wind than Hinkley Point."

Eric Gibbins, 80, spoke on behalf of Holford Parish Council: "There was a bat colony on the site. We listened to people who complained about noise. There was also the constant vibration in the atmosphere, you can't ignore that."

It is thought that British Energy swung the council by warning that its nuclear workers could be hurt if the turbine blades flew off the pylons and hit them. Planning permission was denied.

A second attempt to push for planning permission was expected from the developer, Your Energy, but never materialised. Now, a new nuclear facility is expected to be located where the wind farm would have stood. While there are murmurs of discontent over the disruption the building work will cause, there is not the same level of opposition as was stoked up by the onshore wind turbines. Mr Trollope-Bellew said: "People had been living with nuclear power stations since 1960 with no problems and the nuclear stations were less visually obstructive. It rather sums up people's attitudes."