

Hand-out by Hans Schreuder, Harbertonford, 7 November 2011

<http://www.thisiswesternmorningnews.co.uk/mind-panorama-ndash-listen-turbines-noise/story-13697583-detail/story.html>

It's a problem some North Devon residents now claim they face since the blades of 22 giant wind-turbines at Fullabrook began to turn.

Sue Pike's bungalow is just 600 metres from one of the 110-metre turbines at the new wind-farm and she says: "It is dreadful – the main sound is like a huge great cement mixer going around – then you get the loud whoosh and also whistles and hums.

"Altogether we have counted four different noises coming from it," she told the Western Morning News. "Back in the warmer weather when the turbines were being tested we couldn't open the bedroom or lounge windows – fortunately we are double-glazed so that helps cut out the noise – but we were stewing indoors."

Retired farmer Brian Pugsley has lived in the Putsford area close to the centre of the wind-farm all his 67 years and he says his thoughts on the development are "unprintable".

"It's affected everybody in a large area, but we're in the middle of it – you've got the drone of the motor and also the blade and its whooshing sound.

"I don't know how loud it was – but it just went on and on and was definitely worst when all 22 were going round," said Mr Pugsley referring to the recent turbine tests.

"It's not too bad indoors, but you can't go in your garden," he added. "I was born here – and some of the things I want to say now I've heard the noise wouldn't be printable."

After meetings with local residents ESB, the Irish-based owner of the wind-farm, has commissioned experts to undertake noise monitoring tests at some neighbouring properties.

The measurements recorded will be in addition to the formal tests which ESB must undertake as part of the conditions set out in its planning permission. But the company points out the research can only be undertaken when the wind farm is fully operational.

"ESB will continue to work closely with the local community – particularly our immediate neighbours and North Devon Council – to ensure we not only meet all conditions of the planning permission, but that we are able to discuss local concerns and take what measures we can to address issues," commented a company spokesman.

Local MP Nick Harvey is so concerned over noise complaints that he recently added a special online survey to his official website.

"This was launched three weeks ago after Nick visited residents up at Putsford who have been complaining about noise problems, vibration, loss of TV reception, flicker etc, now that the farm is almost completely operational," said Mr Harvey's press officer, Anthony Tucker-Jones.

He added that North Devon Council's Environmental Health Department was about to conduct site analysis at five locations in response to residents' concerns.

The results of Mr Harvey's online survey will be collated soon, but the site is still getting about two returns a day and his office says the response has been huge.

Local artist Christine Lovelock launched her own website (artistsagainstwindfarms.com) when plans for the development were first mooted: "The scale of this development was always going to be far too large," she told the WMN. "Now the 22 turbines are all up I would say it's worse than I ever thought it would be."

She added: "A lot of local people are very upset by the noise, but a lot of them are afraid to speak out because they are worried that will immediately reduce the value of their properties."

However, Sue Pike said she and her partner John were only too keen to voice their concerns...

"We reckoned our property had devalued by 20 per cent without the noise – we worked that out when they went ahead with the wind-farm," she said. "But, with the noise, it's going to be worse. And no one has ever talked about compensation. We feel we're under siege."

Bob Barfoot, chairman of the Campaign for Preservation of Rural England's North Devon branch, helped fight against the wind-farm and he commented: "At the public inquiry it was very clear from the evidence that the wind-farm would have massive landscape and visual impacts and that turbine noise would be a real problem. The inspector overrode all of these concerns..."

"But it was made clear at the public inquiry that the turbines would breach the accepted noise guidelines and now that the turbines are operating the local people are reporting problems, especially at night when it appears that the classic 'swish and thump' of 'amplitude modulation' is preventing some of them from sleeping with their bedroom windows open.

"The Fullabrook situation should be a lesson to us all," added Mr Barfoot, who is now preparing to rejoin the fight against a proposed wind-farm at Batsworthy Cross, also in North Devon.

Developers of that scheme recently decided to appeal against a North Devon Council decision earlier this year to refuse permission for the wind-farm, and Mr Barfoot says: "I hope the inspector at the forthcoming public inquiry will dismiss the appeal and save the people in the Batsworthy Cross area from the same sad fate as those living close to the Fullabrook turbines."

The newly completed Fullabrook wind-farm does find support in some areas... Barnstaple town councillor and Green Party candidate Ricky Knight says he's been to the site to hear the "so-called" noise and was left mystified.

"I have thought long and hard as to what they (people protesting against the noise) are talking about. I stood in a friend's garden near the turbines and essentially all we heard was the wind, birds and farm machinery. I was not able to discern any sound coming from the turbines.

"I am in receipt of criticisms (from people who don't like the wind-farm) but I get far more support from people who simply register confusion about this subject," added Mr Knight.

All eyes – and ears – will now be on Fullabrook on November 18 when the wind-farm is due to become fully operational.

ESB claims each turbine will have a three megawatt capacity and that collectively the 22 turbines will power 30,000 homes and help keep people warm. Ironically, local residents like Sue Pike and Brian Pugsley could be using some of that power in summer to run air-conditioning units.