

Adam Psmith—turbines in the channel

WE ARE ALL FOR renewable energy and low-carbon technologies but not at any cost. There are too many wind turbines erected as political statements in wholly inappropriate places. These may never recoup the (non-renewable) energy used in their manufacture. The Atlantic Array falls into different category.

Atlantic Array^{*see footnote}

The plan is to put 350 wind turbines in the Bristol Channel midway between the Worm and Lundy and have them working by 2016. Be in no doubt, you will be able to see these monsters. They are designed to produce 90% of the domestic electricity consumption of Wales, according to developers RWE-nPower*.

So will this work?

It has a much better chance than most land-based schemes. The wind flows faster over the sea than over the land. The sea is relatively smooth, there are no ploughed fields or trees or mountains to slow it down. The world's largest operational off-shore wind farm is at Thanet off the North Foreland, Essex. It started generation in September 2010 with a nominal capacity of 300MW. Atlantic Array is five times the size. This is a big deal.

Made in Wales?

Mostly not. At Thanet only 20% of the construction contract went to British firms. The big cost items are the tur-



bines—but they aren't made in Wales.

Engineers Mabey Bridge (First Severn Crossing) have a brand new factory at Chepstow dedicated to manufacturing turbine towers, no doubt with a view to Atlantic Array. There will be a good deal of civil engineering to do out in the channel since the towers will be in an average of 150 feet of water, clearly jobs for specialists. Thanet cost nearly £800m so think over £4bn for this one. Even a small amount of that would be a shot in the arm for Wales.

But the power is expected to make landfall at Alverdiscott, Devon because the South Wales transmission system is currently unable to take the load. Welsh ports will have their work cut out to get any trade. Devon is already lobbying hard, we seem to have missed a trick.

Long term jobs for Wales?

Mostly not. Thanet created just 21 permanent jobs, so think in terms of 100 here. The big work is in construction—estimated at 2,000—not the running of the array. If Devon wins the competition for the home port →

→ then there will be no obvious Welsh connection and few jobs. The real money will be with Danish engineers Vestas, the largest turbine manufacturers in the world. In second and third place are Sinovel (China) and General Electric (USA). Why is the Welsh Government so quiet on this issue? We should be out pitching for business as Devon is. This is not a time for yet more 'Initiatives', it's a time to glad hand the men with the money and promise them whatever they want.

Call the Coastguard

The construction of 250 towers in 150 feet of water in the middle of the Bristol Channel may be expected to create a few dicey moments. It would be reassuring to know that the Coastguards were at hand, in Mumbles not miles away in Pembroke. Happily councillors and AMs are supporting the campaign to keep the Mumbles centre, as are communities in Devon who benefit equally. Any sailor will tell you that fancy navigation toys save work but, when things get rough, knowing the waters counts for everything.

Swansea City centre

At the Gower Show I asked West Gower county councillor Richard Lewis about plans to revitalise the city centre. Council leader Chris Hol-

ley has, I think shrewdly, asked him to work with the city centre businesses to make things better in the retail centre (relations between traders and the council were becoming strained). The first step is to cut parking charges and get more shoppers into Swansea. This is a sound plan and a strategy being used by many other cities. From 1 August four hours' parking at the High Street car park cost just £1, down from £4.

The retailers have been active on their own behalf through the Swansea Business Improvement District (BID) founded in 2006. Funded by a 1% levy on rates they have reduced violent crime and disorder by 68%, won a national city centre cleansing award



Better days? Swansea City centre in the 1970s

and much more. BID are the experts in Swansea city retailing. If the Council (who are not experts in making profit) can be induced to listen to them, we may all benefit.

Adam Psmith

Notes:

- * *Does RWE-npower ring a bell? They sponsor Ospreys Rugby.*
- * *Atlantic Array: a map and current papers are available on the website at www.gowermagazine.com/econ.htm*
- * *Stop Press 22 Aug—Economy of Wales: Figures published by the British Retail Consortium reveal footfall in Welsh towns and cities dropped by 9.2% between April and July. The UK average footfall was down 1%*