



Tyndall°Centre
for Climate Change Research



Winkleigh Parish Opinion on The Proposed WINBEG Biomass Gasifier

Postal Questionnaire Survey Results

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Executive Summary

This report describes the results of a postal opinion survey conducted in the Parish of Winkleigh, North Devon, by The University of Manchester section of the Tyndall Centre for Climate Change Research. The subject of the survey is the proposal by Peninsula Power Ltd, a small North Devon company specialising in renewable power projects, to construct a 23 megawatt biomass gasifier on a disused RAF airfield on the outskirts of the village. The gasifier project is phase 1 of *WINBEG*, the proposed Winkleigh Biomass Generator.

The opinion survey is funded under the Biomass and Bioenergy consortium of the EPSRC SuperGen research programme. One of the purposes of SuperGen is to inform national bioenergy policy, particularly social obstacles to bioenergy. 1200 questionnaires were distributed to 600 households in Winkleigh Parish between 10th June 2004 and 14th June 2004, allowing for up to two questionnaire returns per household. 573 completed questionnaires were returned. The survey report is available on the internet at: <http://www.supergen-bioenergy.net/?sid=252&pgid=284> The main findings are as follows:

- In general, WINBEG is highly unpopular with the large majority of Winkleigh parishioners. While the questionnaire survey does over-represent the views of people aged 55-64, the unusually high return rate (48%) and hence the relatively large percentage of total Parish inhabitants questioned (38%) mean that the results are likely to accurately reflect local adult opinion.
- There is a very high level of local awareness of the WINBEG development proposal, informed more by the local newsletter (from which 83% have learned about WINBEG) and by campaign material (70%) than by the developer's publicity flyer (54%).
- Nevertheless, fewer than half of the respondents think that they have good or very good knowledge of the development proposal, suggesting scope for further information, explanation and discussion.
- Any such efforts will need to take account of the lack of trust in the developer's information to date. More than three quarters of people doubt the accuracy of the developer's publicity flyer (dated November 2003). 84% also doubt the independence of the forthcoming Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA): only 5% expect it to be relatively independent.
- A very large majority think that the WINBEG development proposal is an important issue (88%).

- A very large majority feel negatively about WINBEG (88%), with only about 6% feeling positively. Most people think WINBEG will be bad for the local area (80%), though nearly 14% expressed approval of the ideas behind WINBEG – but not of WINBEG itself.
- All but one of the concerns either raised by active objectors to WINBEG prior to the survey, or selected from those identified for attention in the EIA scoping document for WINBEG, are shared by more than half of respondents. Concerns shared by more than three quarters are: haulage lorry traffic congestion (93%), haulage lorry air pollution (86%), the credibility of the developer (85%), air pollution from WINBEG (85%), the visual appearance of WINBEG (84%), odour from WINBEG (82%), the wastes that may be used as a fuel for WINBEG (82%) and the technological reliability of WINBEG (79%).
- Most people declined to rank their top five concerns. The key exception was haulage lorry traffic congestion, which was ranked in the top five concerns by more than two thirds of people. In addition, air pollution from WINBEG was ranked as a top five concern by nearly half of the sample. For those respondents that did rank their concerns, the top three *first ranked* concerns are haulage lorry traffic congestion (19%), air pollution from WINBEG (16%) and the credibility of the developer (14%).
- People were relatively reluctant to admit any potential benefits of WINBEG: more than 75% of respondents identified no potential benefits. Some 23% confirmed WINBEG's direct employment potential and 18% its indirect employment potential, with the former receiving the largest proportion of highest rank by respondents.
- Although people were much more averse to WINBEG as currently conceived than to onshore wind or small bioenergy plant as alternatives, most were still negative about those alternatives. Over 92% were negative about WINBEG as currently conceived, 61% were negative about 50 large wind turbines sited in Torridge District, and 55% were negative about 100 small bioenergy plant sited in Torridge District. Only 18% were positive about onshore wind or small bioenergy plant for Torridge. The most favoured alternative was 15 offshore turbines, about which nearly half (48%) of respondents were positive. The greater objection to renewable alternatives suggested for Torridge, compared to those suggested for offshore, suggests that proximity per se is a key issue for people. Nevertheless, some eight times more people were in favour of wind turbines or small bioenergy plant in Torridge than were in favour of

WINBEG as currently conceived, despite the proximity that these alternatives would entail. Nearly a quarter of people were positive about re-locating WINBEG to an unspecified industrial area of Devon.

- When asked to rate the level of communication in relation to WINBEG that may have taken place by SWRDA, Devonshire County Council, Torridge District Council and Winkleigh Parish Council, a very much higher percentage of people rated communication by the relevant authorities (Devon CC, Torridge DC and SWRDA) negatively than positively. There was little difference between the ratings of these bodies. They were given a positive rating by 5% or fewer people, and a negative rating by 75% or more. This suggests a high degree of dissatisfaction with the communication roles of these bodies in relation to WINBEG. In comparison, communication by Winkleigh Parish Council was rated positively by 44.4% of people.
- Comments made by people on the questionnaire, in the space provided, largely confirm the validity of the questionnaire design. That is, the comments largely relate to issues that the questionnaire addresses. The most frequent comment repeated the concern that the development project is likely to fail if it goes ahead, be it financially or technically. Of those themes in the comments that are not evident elsewhere in the questionnaire returns, the most frequent were that WINBEG is 'too large', and that the scheme will result in a major detriment to the local environment.
- The report concludes that supporters of WINBEG will face very considerable obstacles in any efforts to convince the local population to accept WINBEG. Local people see little or nothing for the community to gain from WINBEG, and much to lose. Of the community's many concerns, the impact of haulage trucks, the credibility of the developer and the proposed technology, the emissions to air from WINBEG and the use of domestic and industrial wastes as fuel are those that are most widely shared. While the EIA should help to clarify whether or not some of the perceived threats are plausible realities, very convincing evidence to that effect would be required to bring about a sea change in the local public's currently very negative perceptions.