

Air Quality and Biomass

Bishop's Castle Biomass Power Limited (BCBP) made a planning application to build and operate a biomass power plant in Bishop's Castle in Shropshire. BCBP appealed to the Secretary of State following a non determination by the local planning authority. The application was vigorously opposed by a local campaign group who objected to the scheme on a number of grounds. Air quality impacts were a major topic at the public inquiry which was held over eight days in March and April 2009. Steve Fraser of The Airshed acted as expert witness at the inquiry on behalf of BCBP.

The Planning Inspector largely disregarded the expert evidence provided by Enviros representing the local opposition group. Enviros had claimed that Airshed model results were unreliable over a wide range of parameters.

The Planning Inspector found that the air quality impact assessment and dispersion modelling was reasonably robust, that the assessment had considered a wide range of model sensitivities and that these would not significantly affect the conclusions in any event.

The Inspector concluded that "...having regard to pollutant concentrations and flow rate, efflux velocity and temperature, meteorological conditions, surface roughness and terrain. Predicted levels were compared to Air Quality Objectives and environmental quality standards. There is limited meteorological data available for the site, and so data from elsewhere was used. The appellant acknowledges that this is potentially a weakness in the assessment. Nevertheless, sensitivity analysis was undertaken, and reference to Numerical Weather Prediction (NWP) meteorological data for Bishop's Castle indicates that the data relied upon is likely to be pessimistic. I find that the model is, given that there are limitations and uncertainties inherent in any dispersion model, reasonably robust. Other minor errors or corrections were acknowledged at the Inquiry, but I do not consider that these, either individually or cumulatively, have a significant effect on the overall validity of the model.....The sensitivity analysis indicates that no air quality problems of any real significance would arise. The model might not be perfect, but I do not consider it to be invalidated by any of the criticisms to its application in this case."

The new combined heat and power plant will be fuelled by locally sourced wood chips and wood-energy crops and designed to generate 2.5 megawatts of electricity. Wood pellets will also be produced using heat from the plant to provide low carbon fuel for domestic and business premises.

The Planning Inspector's Appeal Decision can be accessed via the government planning portal – www.planningportal.gov.uk and searching the case number 2086011.

