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Desecration of Bronte country: The bleak beauty of the moors inspired Wuthering Heights. But if a faceless Saudi company has its way, these hills will be scarred by 65 wind turbines 100ft taller than the Blackpool Tower

By [ROBERT HARDMAN FOR THE DAILY MAIL](#)

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Not so much a walk as a pilgrimage. That is certainly how many of those who slog up this section of the Pennine Way regard the trek from Stanbury up and over Wadsworth Moor in West Yorkshire.

For this is the path to Top Withens, the magnificently bleak — and now ruined — farmhouse which was the inspiration for one of the greatest classic novels in English literature.

Emily Bronte gave it the name 'Wuthering Heights', home of the heroine Cathy Earnshaw. Though the author would superimpose a grander fictional mansion on this spot, the setting has not changed since the book appeared in 1847.

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It is the last remnant of a dwelling before you really are out on the 'wily, windy moors' — as **Kate Bush** described the scene in her brilliant 1978 debut single of the same name, one which introduced Wuthering Heights to an entirely new, late 20th century audience.

It is a delightful — though some might say 'spooky' or even 'Gothic' — coincidence that both Bronte and Bush were born on the very same day exactly 140 years apart. To this day, fans of both still flock up here on July 30 by way of homage. But will they in years to come?

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Lydia Macpherson (pictured) on the footpath close to her home in Haworth, West Yorkshire, that leads to the Bronte sisters' former home Top Withens farmhouse

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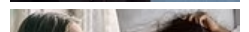
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Such passions go some way to explain the sense of utter incredulity following the submission of a new proposal to build England's largest onshore wind farm. The scheme, which would see a row of turbines in question, at up to 650ft high, would not only be more than the Blackpool Tower but, on a clear day, you would be able to see the Blackpool Tower. Put another way, each of these will be ten times

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If the scheme is approved, much of the North of England — from Prescot to Harrogate — will be able to see the monster, new-generation turbines earmarked for these hills. Protest groups are quick to point out that the turbines in question, at up to 650ft high, would not only be more than the Blackpool Tower but, on a clear day, you would be able to see the Blackpool Tower. Put another way, each of these will be ten times

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The Blackpool Tower stands at sea level and the Angel is on a modest hillock at 300 feet. Whereas the base of the Calderdale Wind Farm will be starting at 1,000 feet above sea level and rising to 1,500. It means that the tips of some blades will have an altitude of more than 2,000 feet. To put this into context for southerners, that is twice the height of the Shard — which is visible for 40 miles around — then multiply that by 65.

For many living in and around towns and villages like Haworth, home to the Brontes, or Hebden Bridge, location for the hit drama Happy Valley, the wind farm threatens a gross intrusion into daily life. It doesn't help that the whole thing is being proposed by a faceless Saudi company which does not divulge so much as a telephone number and directs callers to an email address in Madrid.



Top Withens on the moors above Haworth which was the inspiration for one of the greatest classic novels in English literature

Even the greenest of eco-warriors will grudgingly concede that this scheme is unlikely to win hearts and minds to the wind energy cause. I've known oil spills with better PR.

The proposal is so big that it is being fought across constituency and council boundaries, though it is Labour-run, Halifax-based Calderdale Council that will process the formal application.

At present, the plans are at the 'scoping report' stage, with years to go before the first — if any — turbines see the light of day. Although the initial reports have only surfaced in recent weeks, two well-organised action groups are already up and running on either side of the moors.

'It's not about the environment. It's all about money,' says Lydia Macpherson, a poet who lives in the nearest home to Top Withens — it is another 40-minute walk up the hill to the ruins. She feels passionately about this landscape since several generations of her family were tenant farmers battling against the elements at Top Withens, all through the Bronte period. 'Emily Bronte lived at the pars parsonage knew everyone in those days,' says Lydia.

Her family left at some point around 1900 in pursuit of a marginally more comfortable life down the valley.

On a perishing afternoon we meet in her kitchen with a small posse of all invested in what is now known as 'Bronte country' for different reasons.

Lydia's partner, poet and retired Winchester schoolmaster Nick Mack Hughes and Sylvia Plath were both inspired by the majesty of the moors.

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wind and water,' he explains.

Others here include Chris Hill, a professor of shoe design whose past pupils include Jimmy Choo. They are all appalled not just by the thought of 65 turbines clunking above the skyline but also the impact down below. All point out that the wind farm would involve digging roads, foundations and cable trenches for many miles through the peat.

Briggs says: 'This is what is called blanket bog — full of sphagnum moss which is like a sponge. It's our rainforest.' Once you break the seal by digging it up, he argues, that water drains away and the stored carbon is released into the atmosphere.



If the scheme is approved, much of the North of England — from Preston and Manchester to Harrogate — will be able to see the monster, new-generation turbines earmarked for these hills

Lydia is involved in a charity protecting endangered curlews and even has a curlew-handled walking stick. 'They're like salmon. They nest in the same spot, generation after generation. If you disturb that, they never come back.'

Indeed, one of the most vocal opponents of the plans has been the RSPB, along with the Bronte Society, which warns of 'a significant and detrimental impact'.

The standard response to those protesting against any local development like this is to cry 'Nimby!'

Yet the problem with wind turbines — especially the new breed of mega-machines — is that it goes well beyond 'not in my back yard'. Just one of these structures can intrude on tens of thousands of back yards.

My initial thoughts on reading about this latest saga was almost wistful. Back in the early Noughties, in those carefree days before Brexit, Cov saturation social media, we were always hearing about wind farm bat

I recall going all over the country, from the Home Counties to the Borders, chronicling toxic quarrels between residents and landowners, whose feuds and ostracism was outweighed by the weight of the wonga from the energy industry in turn, enjoyed whopping government subsidies.

All that changed in 2015 when the Cameron government slapped the brakes on onshore wind schemes — so the industry shifted its operations out



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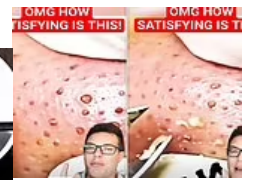
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for Wadsworth and Widdop Moors in West Yorkshire, a swathe of rugged peaty emptiness between Haworth to the north, Hebden Bridge to the south and the border with Lancashire to the west.

Just like the technology, however, the arguments have moved on. Polls show that many, if not most, people now accept the need for more wind turbines. Yet, the public are more savvy, too. They don't mind projects which will genuinely benefit the community and the planet. But they won't stand for get-rich-quick schemes dressed up as 'greenwash' and paid for by the taxpayer.

They are also well aware that developers will kick off with a horribly scary proposal in the hope they can then push through the watered-down scheme they were secretly planning all along.

That is certainly how many view the Calderdale Wind Farm, not least the residents of Oxenhope. If the wind farm does get approved, then industrial quantities of machinery and material will pass through this village en route to the moors.

I drop in on this week's meeting of the village council. The wind farm is very much on the agenda, although chairman Ken Eastwood explains that the village council cannot take a formal position until the plans have been submitted.

In any case, Oxenhope is not part of Calderdale (it comes under Bradford Council) so the best they can do is to ask to be consulted.

However, there is still a proper, informed discussion about the plans. One village councillor, Nick Pearce, has been for a fact-finding meeting with the scheme's agents and says many key questions remain unanswered. Another councillor, Neal Cameron, has been through the balance sheet of carbon emissions. He says that even if the wind farm hits its targets, it will still leave the environment worse off.

That, he says, is because of all the emissions expended on manufacturing dozens of steel skyscrapers, building 15 miles of road across peatland to transport the hardware over the hills and installing cranes and car parks for all the kit.

However, the really serious damage comes from breaking the membrane of this huge peat bog. Crack it open and that would release thousands of tons of CO2 into the atmosphere. We need only look at the excavations for a similar wind farm in the Shetlands to see the impact this sort of building work has on a fragile ecosystem.

The Calderdale land is currently preserved as a loss-making grouse moor by the present owner, Lancashire businessman Richard Bannister.

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'Wuthering Heights' TV - 2009 - Tom Hardy as Heathcliff and Charlotte Riley as Cathy

A distant cousin of the record-breaking athlete, Sir Roger Bannister of four-minute-mile fame, he is best-known for owning the Boundary Outlet chain of fashion outlets. Until recently, Bannister had been a passionate defender of grouse shooting as a sustainable form of moorland conservation.

In recent years, though he has come under increasing opposition both from animal rights groups and those who claim that the controlled burning of heathland to stimulate fresh growth and food for the grouse — is environmentally

Quite why Bannister now wants to sell is unclear. He has been contacted by a Saudi-owned entity, dale Windfarm Ltd which will acquire the land subject to planning permission for a certain number of wind turbines.

Tory MP for Calder Valley, Craig Whittaker tells me he will retain an option to buy the land now. He acknowledges the depth of feeling but adds: 'On paper, it could be beneficial, with £75 million for the community,' he says. 'We also have energy security and the need to get prices down.'

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Calderdale Council has already demanded environmental reports which will take two years to produce prior to any formal application. It could take at least another two years to process the plans and, even without appeals, another two years to install the first blade. In other words, it could be 2030 before anything happens.

On the other side of the moor, minds are made up outside the Pack Horse Inn above Heptonstall. Steve Oldroyd, 45, founder of the Calderdale Wind Farm Action Group is here with fellow activists who show me where the pylons will go up. One will be just yards from the road, along with the three-acre industrial plant to house battery storage facilities.

'This is one of the biggest carbon sinks in Europe. How can you cover it in roads and turbines?' asks Oldroyd, who runs a courier business when not walking on the moors.

'It's one huge carbon sponge. How on earth is it progress to squeeze it dry?' asks retired paramedic Sue Wilde. 'I don't mind if anyone wants to call me a Nimby,' says retired engineer, Mark Bottomley. 'I just want to ensure my grandchildren can enjoy this landscape and the solace it brings.'

These residents know the developers are over-reaching at this stage, that these plans will inevitably be scaled back. But Oldroyd takes me up to nearby (and much smaller) Ovenden Wind Farm to stand next to a turbine half the size of those envisaged for Bronte country. Quite apart from the footprint of the pylon and the whooshing, each one has a car park the size of a garage forecourt.

Two days after emailing the mysterious Saudi entity in Madrid, I receive a statement via an agent in Manchester. 'Calderdale Wind Farm stands as an exciting opportunity, to deliver large scale, renewable onshore wind energy,' it says. 'During a cost-of-living crisis and the pressing climate emergency, the UK needs to explore avenues that promote home-grown, carbon-free renewable electricity generation.'

'We recognise there is a range of views about the merits of our proposal, and we look forward to continuing to work with the local community over the coming months to help shape the final design of the project.'

The proposals also include the planting of 300,000 trees plus 'flood reduction along the Calder Valley' and 'increased biodiversity across the moor'.

Back in Haworth, I do find some people who are happy with the plan. 'It's a great idea. Get on with it,' says John Dockray, walking his dog, George.

But most, it must be said, are strongly opposed. 'I can't see why you'd do that,' says ardent Bronte fan, Amy Gentry, from Bury. 'Absolutely opposed,' says hospital worker Graham Todd, who is Haworth born and bred. 'Where the Brontes walked, we don't want sullied. That's final.'

Maybe it is time for Kate Bush to rework her great 1978 hit.

Altogether now: 'I'm coming home to Shuddering, Shuddering Heights...'

Kate Bush

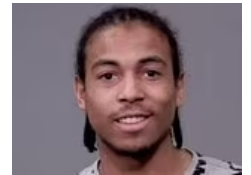
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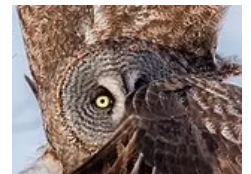
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