

Letter from Horatio Clare, Writer, Journalist and Broadcaster – 4 February 2024
To: Richard Seaman, Chief Planning Officer, Calderdale Council Planning Services
Town Hall, Crossley Street, Halifax HX1 1UJ

Ref: 23/06010/EIA Calderdale Wind Farm, Walshaw Moor Estate

Dear Mr Seaman,

My apologies for bothering you. I am a writer, journalist and broadcaster living in Hebden Bridge. I know – one of the incomers. But although we arrived from Italy 11 years ago, for family reasons, and although my son was born there, since he was less than a year old this has been his home. He grew up on Crimsworth Terrace, Midgehole. His blessed childhood belongs to these woods and these becks and these moors; to the birds, the animals, the skylines and the weather of this extraordinary place.

You will have guessed I am writing to register my opposition to the proposed Calderdale Wind Farm on the Walshaw Moor Estate. I am entirely in favour of wind energy, and entirely against generating it there. That particular fragment of the Pennines, that fraction of Britain, is unique. I am sure you have visited. I am a nature and travel writer. I have written about a lot of extraordinary places around the world. The awful truth is, there aren't very many of them left in Britain. But this is one.

Curlews, plover, lapwings, wheatears, chats, oystercatcher, hares, swallows, swifts, martins, short eared owls – and in a profusion you never see any more, in numbers you only find in books and pictures from the 1970s. A little bit of miraculous old Britain is still there. It really is a miracle, really. I am writing you to ask you to preserve it.

I talked about it with my son. He really gets the turbine argument – ‘The thing is, Dad, he said, I'd really quite like a planet?’ And I said, ‘Yes, of course – but there are many places where we can generate wind energy. There are just so few places left like this.’

Once we start destroying Sites of Special Scientific Interest, once we erase the few jewels we have left – the earth is abused and we are terribly diminished, in every deep way. I desperately want him and friends and all their children to hear curlews in summer, and to know what lapwings look like, and see oyster catchers, like bright little guardsmen, miles from the coast on our miraculous high moor. I hope our children will go out into the world and want to come back here, to show their friends and the wide planet these miraculous things, to show and share what we have here across their worlds. I think we must look after the riches of this place for them.

I think it is not just that birds and wild animals give depth and meaning to our moments, our walks, our days, our lives. I think it is also that without them, without other species, humans are left alone on a bare planet, lonesome rulers of a rock stripped for power and for money. And that isolation, that destruction, seems to make it all pointless. I think we lose peace, and meaning, and ease, and joy, and connection, and proportion when we lose nature – or, worse, when we destroy it.

The planning application, the map of the turbines and their size, is terrifying. You cannot look at it and believe there will be anything left of the moor, the birds, the animals.

There is so much high ground around; I have walked much of it – it is a terrible irony that this should be the proposed site, because I can honestly say, hand on heart, I don't believe there is a site of upland biodiversity to match it for fifty miles in any direction.

For all I know, you could travel a hundred miles or more and not find the like of it. Although wind energy is exactly the right thing to do, this is exactly the wrong place.

Thank you for troubling with this. It cannot be an easy decision, but if you go for a walk across the ground in late April or early May, I guarantee you will know what to do. It's a piece of wild heaven, so rich and giving and full of life. Our role, surely, is to protect it.

And here is the formal bit. Thank you for wading through it:

I wish to make it known at this stage that I have strong objections to this development on environmental and cultural grounds, and in the name of future generations. Please keep this letter on file in relation to any future planning applications on the Walshaw Moor Estate and keep me informed of any further developments regarding this project.

My objections to the proposed Calderdale Wind Farm include the following:

- - Walshaw Moor is a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), a Special Area of Conservation (SAC) and a Special Protection Area (SPA). A wind farm on this site will cause irrevocable ecological damage to sensitive moorland habitats and wildlife, particularly ground-nesting birds.
- - Damaging the blanket peat bogs on Walshaw Moor will significantly increase carbon emissions, exacerbating climate change. I agree with the RSPB that 'a wind farm on Walshaw Moor is highly inappropriate, given the sensitivity of this location, with important peatland habitat, significant wildlife interest and protected wildlife sites.'
- - An intrusive industrial development of the scale proposed by Calderdale Wind Farm Ltd, consisting of 65 turbines up to 200 metres in height covering 9 square miles, is completely inappropriate for this location, especially given its proximity to the National Trust estate of Hardcastle Crag and Crimsworth Dean, both of which would be directly affected. Visually the turbines would completely dominate the landscape, not only on Walshaw Moor but throughout the surrounding area, intruding on significant views throughout Calderdale.
- - The landscape of the Upper Calder Valley is some of the most spectacular in the UK comparable with the National Parks. A valued local amenity, it acts as a magnet for walkers and cyclists. Many footpaths and bridleways would be affected by this wind farm, either directly or indirectly, including the Pennine Way through Walshaw Dean, and the extensive network of footpaths in and around Hardcastle Crag and Crimsworth Dean. This highly insensitive development will ruin some of the most outstanding countryside in Yorkshire and damage our natural heritage and cultural heritage – the landscape that inspired the Brontes and Ted Hughes.

Yours sincerely,

Horatio Clare
Hebden Bridge