

Argyll & The Isles



News and Views from around the Diocese

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Bishop's Letter

Global warming and climate change.

I have been involved in conversations recently with those who have an interest and indeed expertise in the ecology of these coastal regions. The overall impression I get is that we in this Diocese are singularly well-placed to observe what is happening to our climate and the coastlands, as well as to the sea itself. In some ways, we are perhaps better placed than those who are in cities. Certainly pollution is strikingly obvious in cities, but the subtlety of weather, wild life changes and the changes to the commerce and economy put us, I believe, in a position of responsibility not only with regard to how we behave personally, but in how we influence decisions with regard to energy and the environment.

Plans for the building of an enormous wind farm on Lewis have now moved a stage further to being implemented. This, of course, is part of the response to the need to find sustainable sources of energy. However, is the decision really the best one?

Rob Scott, a member of St Peter's, Stornoway, teaches physics on Lewis and with his wife Janis, has a deep and abiding knowledge and love of the island, its natural habitat and its people. In talking to Rob, I have learnt about the tensions between creating sustainable energy systems, economics and the environmental impact from our growing appetite for energy. Lewis councillors have recently voted by a majority in favour of a proposed huge wind farm on moorland in north Lewis, this despite strong opposition from the electorate. The development would not be economically viable without the effective subsidy provided by a distorted market and much of the argument in favour has been about money. Linked to this was the desire to create jobs and reverse a perceived population decline. Some of the argument, though, was related to global warming. A Lewis Councillor has suggested that the farm should be approved

because of its contribution to mitigation of global warming which would leave us with no moorland and no birds. Dubious moral arguments such as this have been a constant undercurrent, possibly being used in some cases to justify ignoring the views of the electorate. Some councillors however have recognized local feeling and did vote against the development.

The proposed wind farm although huge in geographical extent and cost represents only a small energy output in national terms which becomes insignificant globally. Considering also the free market in fossil fuels and the spectacular growth in the energy-hungry economies of China and India, it becomes clear that the Lewis wind farm will make no contribution to saving the wild and special places. It will, however, do one thing certainly, and that is destroy the essential nature of the Lewis moorland.

We must cherish and protect the wild and unspoilt places. It would be so dispiriting to lose the moorland which gives the people of Lewis a constant reminder of what there is to love in the natural world. In the effort to counter global warming, losing it could be counter productive.

To stop on the road from Stornoway to Barvas on the West Coast of Lewis, it is almost frightening to imagine the transformation that will take place when the Wind Farm's towers are in place. I try to do this every time I make that journey, if for no other reason than it may not be long before even that strange, forbidding but beautiful slope of the moorland that seems to ignore our abuses, becomes tamed and wrapped in metal and tarmac. I have heard the Lewis Wind Farm project being described to being, in effect, 'offshore'. I am reminded of the weatherman on television, who one evening described the weather in the UK being fine and settled, except for the Outer Hebrides – '*nowhere land*'. Mmmm....!

Christianity, in many ways, had its foundation place in a '*nowhere land*'. That same tradition also holds that there is no way to love humanity or creation without cost. The cost is not the rape of an island, but the painful cost of a massive reduction in energy use.

Someone once described Christian spirituality as being simply – awareness. Perhaps we all, in this Diocese, can practice awareness of energy consumption.

+Martin
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