

THE CLERK'S COLUMN

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BULLINGTON'S CROSS

For most of us, Bullington Cross signifies little more than a junction, with an invisible roundabout, which you negotiate on your way to somewhere else. But recently it's been at the eye of quite a storm of protest. There's plenty of heat being generated - though as yet no electricity - about the proposal to install a small forest of wind-turbines there. This has certainly worried the executives of the Hampshire Energy Group enough for them to send, for the attention of the Parish Council, a 34-page document called *Common Concerns about Wind Power*, full of re-assuring science, compiled in the optimistic hope that communities can be persuaded to accept, or even welcome, the installation of a wind farm nearby. Note the use of the cosy word *farm*, with its connotations of contented cows, portly pigs, leaping lambs and waving corn - a far cry from serried ranks of whirling blades set on towers three times as high as Nelson's column.

There's no way they can suggest that a wind farm lends enchantment to the view, but they take pains to show their greenness and care for nature. So they stack up the statistics; they clobber anything that creates CO₂; they assure us that any flicker-effect will be at frequencies well below the threshold that can cause photo-epileptic seizures; they promise that turbines can't produce enough infrasound (noise below the frequency range of the human ear) to do any damage. There's a whole chapter entitled *Bat and Bird Mortality in relation to Wind Turbines*, notable for a marked reluctance to use Anglo-Saxon words. It appears that *their contemporary design and their placement across areas used by ecologically sensitive raptor populations have all conspired to cause an elevated rate of avian mortality...* Actually, it claims that only 0.01% of bird deaths associated with the human population are caused by turbines; most are caused by windows, power lines or cats.

As for bats, I suppose some people find them lovable, but certainly for such small creatures they seem to involve a huge amount of ecological concern. Nobody knows why large numbers of bats, with their amazing sonic radar, fail to avoid fatal collisions with turbine blades; a recent scientific review produced 11 different answers (or as *Common Concerns...* puts it: *hypotheses as to what might be contributing to these fatalities*). The least unlikely of these suggested that above certain altitudes, bats switch off their radar.

BE AWARE OF BATS

The current obsession with bats is believed to derive from a bored Brussels bureaucrat who hadn't thought up a regulation for a week or two. My guess, having just been entertained by the antics of some bats dancing around the thatched eaves of Little Ann, is that he got the idea while gazing languidly out of the window of his air-conditioned office one twilit evening, wishing he was somewhere else, and noticed the bats fluttering about the steeples of Brussels. So now anyone applying for planning permission is liable to be asked to prove that no bat will be inconvenienced by anything built more than a few feet above ground level. A specialised branch of the new profession of ecological consultant, the bat conservation expert, has already dozens of practitioners; their advice to architects and reports on habitats add considerable weight to the planning applications seen by the Parish Council.

I bet none of the architects in France, Spain or Italy, let alone Bulgaria, take any notice, but the law-abiding Brits ensure that they introduce laws which frighten the daylight out of anyone who ignores the anathemas of the EU. UK law now states that you may be committing a criminal offence if you:

- Deliberately injure or kill a bat;
- Intentionally or recklessly disturb a bat in its roost, or a group of bats;
- Damage or destroy the breeding or resting place of a bat;
- Intentionally or recklessly obstruct access to a bat's roost;
- Possess a bat (alive or dead) or any part of a bat.

So be sure you haven't got a bit of bat in the back of a drawer somewhere. And remember that you need to get planning permission if you want to put even a mini-turbine on the roof to charge your mobile phone. It's good to think in this friendly village that your neighbours' interest will be considered. But don't forget the non-human neighbours. *Adrian Stokes, Clerk*