

# 'NIMBYism' and Social Acceptance of Energy Infrastructures

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# Social acceptance and energy transitions

- Climate change mitigation: Transition from fossil-fuels to low carbon energy
- But this produces impacts for particular places and communities.
- Impossible to consider successful low carbon transition without public consent.
- Lack of acceptance can lead to opposition, delays and rejection of projects.



# Understanding NIMBYism

- ‘NIMBY refers to the protectionist attitudes of and oppositional tactics adopted by community groups facing an unwelcome development in their neighbourhood’ (Dear, 1992).
- *What are its causes?*
- The conventional view - NIMBYism arises from the characteristics of local objectors: **deficits** in knowledge, rationality and objectivity, legitimacy, public-mindedness (Burningham et al., 2015)
- *But strongly critiqued by social scientists*

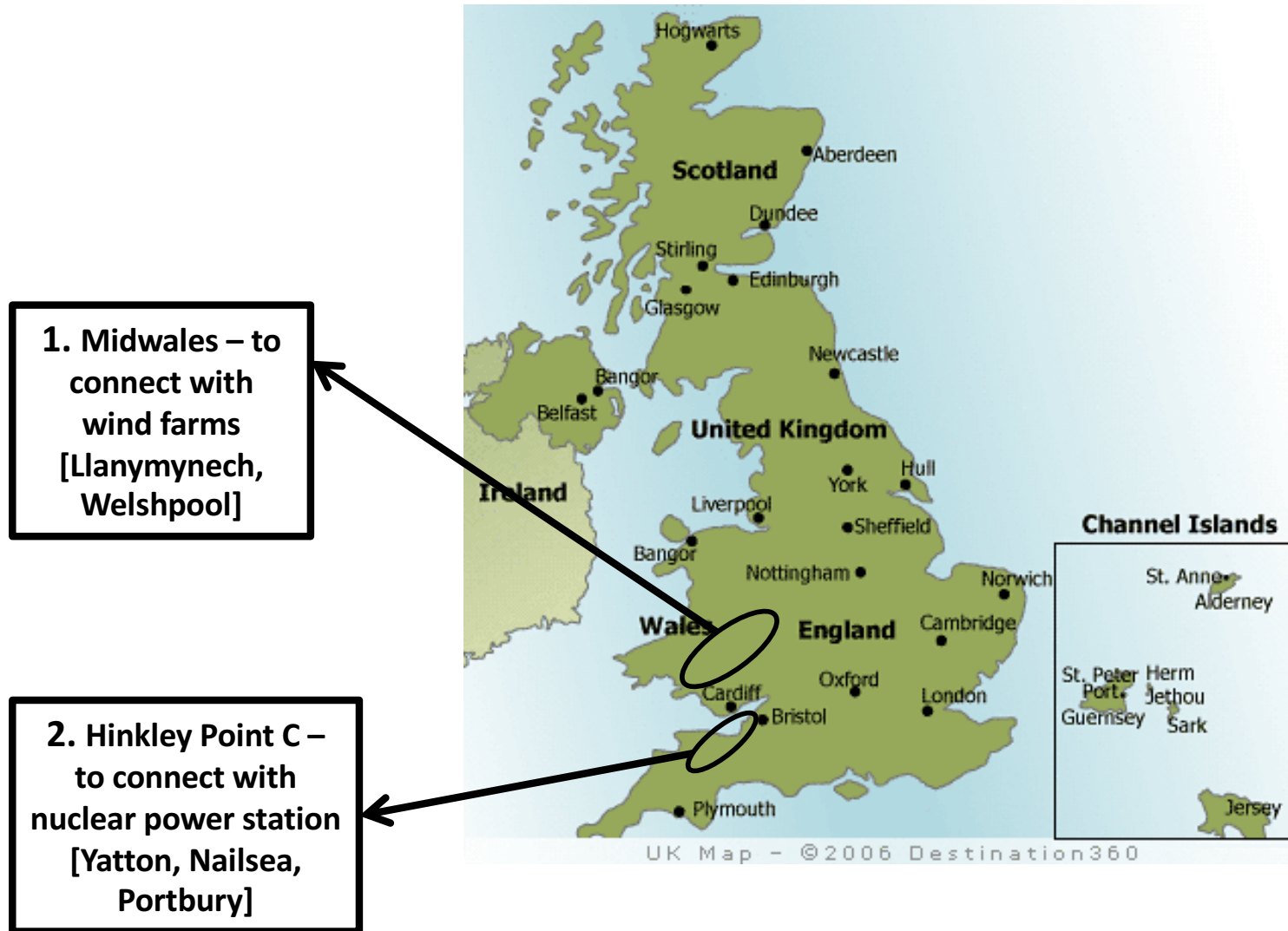
# Emotions, identities and place

- *‘[NIMBYs are] residents who want to **protect their turf...**’* (Dear, 1992, 288).
- **Place** has two aspects (Williams, 2014):
  - symbolic meanings
  - emotional bonds
- Rethinking ‘NIMBYism’ as **place protective action**, undertaken by people with strong, positive bonds with a place, in response to a sense of threat from development proposals seen as ‘out of place’ (Devine-Wright, 2009).

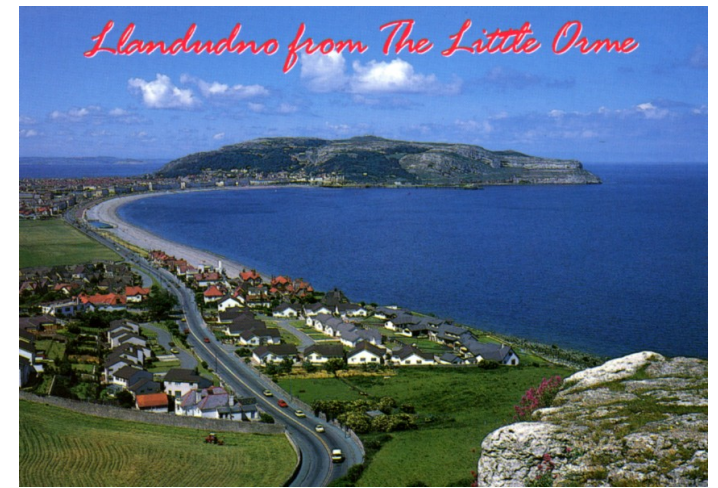
# Two empirical studies from UK

1. The concept of place/technology 'fit'
2. Understanding varieties of place attachment
  - SusGrid research project, funded by Norwegian Research Council, investigating public acceptance of energy infrastructure (high voltage power lines)
  - Studies presented here involve UK data collection at local case study levels, using qualitative methods (focus groups, interviews)

# UK case study areas



# Lack of 'fit'?



- Objections to wind energy often based upon dualist claims:
- *'Two million people ... visit this town every year ... they come from largely industrial towns to get away from industrial landscapes, and in this case, to see a beautiful, open, natural seascape'* (quote from resident, Devine-Wright & Howes, 2010)
- *"The wind-farming industry's mechanization of great tracts of open countryside is a profound tragedy ... This is a sudden encroachment of the machine-world on the natural world"* (Robinson, 2006).



# Residents speaking in focus groups

- *‘Extremely tall kind of like towers which **bear no resemblance** to the countryside they’re passing through and are **imposed on the landscape** rather than growing out of it ...’ [Llanymynech].*
- *‘I mean people come here to get away from city life, town life and whatever. If there’s like, **stuff like pylons**, what they see around where they live, well they’re not really going to come here, they come here **they come to get away from that you know**, [to come to the] countryside and fresh air’ [Shrewsbury].*



# Negative emotions - energy projects

- M[oderator]: *So what were your first reactions then when you first found out about it?*
- P5: ***Disgust.***
- P1: *Absolute **horror** – horror...* [Llanymynech1, 31:65-68 ]
- P5: ***Evil*** [Llanymynech1, 31:162 ]
- P1: *and you see South Wales Docks and you think ‘Oh my God that’s **horrible**’, go over the other side, look from South Wales back to Bristol and you think ‘**Yuck**, that’s even worse’* [Nailsea2, 30:63]
- P1: ***It looks revolting it does look horrendous*** [Portbury, 34:48 ]

# Distinctiveness of 'our landscape'

- P5 - *Montgomeryshire is a very rural county (...), very beautiful landscapes rolling valleys and hills um very green*
- P6 - *I think it's like **the greenest county in Wales** (...) the rolling hills and I've had the experience of living in other areas (...) where are hills and mountains but they are not - you know **none of those counties are as green and as rolling as this county** [Welshpool]*
- P5 – *(...) it's just pretty flat open countryside*
- P6 - *Precisely yes which is fine isn't it*
- P5 - *less um... **obtrusive in that sort of landscape than they potentially would in our landscape** [Welshpool]*

## But also 'industrial' countryside

- *'Yeah, yeah, I mean some people have this **romanticised version of the countryside which doesn't have the industry** in it does it? ...but even so there's still quite a lot of industry going on because life has changed ... they've got the industrialisation, they've got the lights and the tractors and so they can keep working... so you know, **this new power line, it's not going to change anything**, it's not going to affect the outlying area **because there's already industry there**' [Nailsea].*

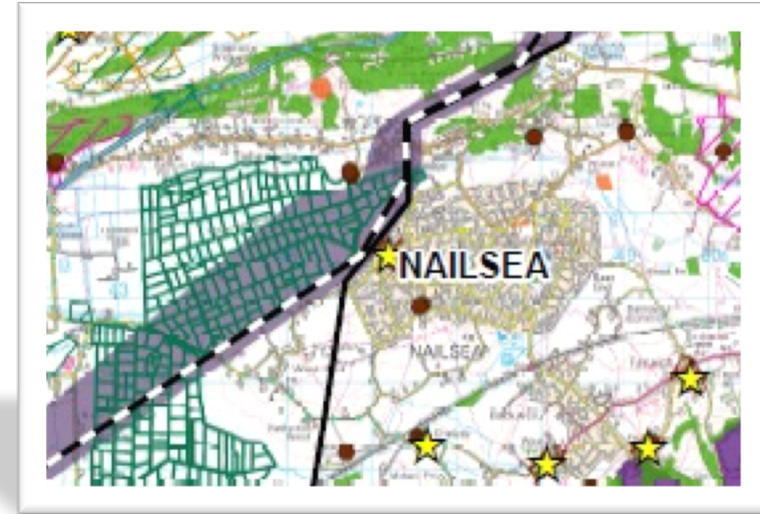
# Summary

- Landscape meanings strategically employed by local residents to present their local place in a way that maximises contrast with energy proposals.
- Supports previous wind energy studies that have highlighted how **nature/industry** and **rural/urban** dualisms presented as incompatible or bad 'fit'.
- People distinguish 'our' countryside from elsewhere to support their objections to the energy project.
- Countryside not always seen as 'pristine' and natural – sometimes already industrialised (agriculture)

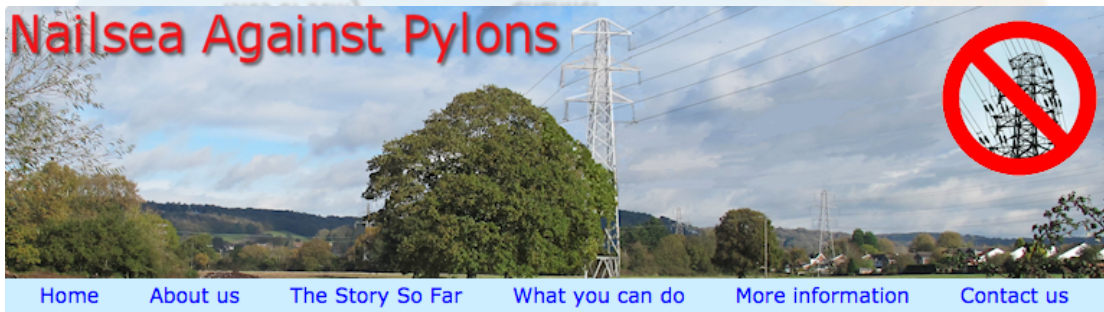
# Types of place attachment bonds (Lewicka, 2011)

TYPE OF RELATION WITH PLACE	DESCRIPTION
Traditional Attachment	Taken-for-granted bond with a place associated with previous generations of your family
Active Attachment	A self-conscious bond + an interest in the goings-on of the place + active involvement in community activities
Place Relativity	Ambivalent attitude towards the place
Place Alienation	A dislike of the place where you live
Placelessness	Indifference to where you live

# Case study: Nailsea, SW England



- Nailsea town surrounded by countryside, 18,000 residents
- Already smaller power line in the local area.
- Local protest group.
- In-depth interviews (n=25) with cross-section of residents
- Narrative analysis of current and past place attachments



# Findings – past place attachments

- Five life-place trajectories identified:
  - Life-long residence
  - Childhood home, move away then return
  - Move into the place as adult from similar (semi-rural) places
  - Move into the place as adult from different places (e.g. larger towns, cities)
  - High residential mobility
- Settlement identities (Feldman, 1996)



# Patterns of residence history and response

Life-place trajectory	Relations to Nailsea & surrounding landscape	Stance towards power line proposal
<p>1. Life-long residence in Nailsea (strong autobiographical insideness)</p> <p>2. Grew up in Nailsea, moved away briefly, then returned to 'home' place</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>Traditional attachment</b></li> <li>- Accustomed to existing electricity infrastructure (132kV)</li> <li>- Powerlines represented as 'familiar'</li> </ul>	Acceptance
<p>3. Moved to Nailsea as adults from similar (semi-rural) types of place</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Active bonds to prior residence places + value proximity to nature</li> <li>• Actively sought to move to Nailsea</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>Active Attachment</b></li> <li>- Powerline seen to 'industrialise' the surrounding landscape, which is seen as 'natural' and 'scenic'</li> </ul>	Opposition

# Patterns of residence history and response

Life-place trajectory	Relations to Nailsea and surrounding landscape	Stance towards power line proposal
<p>4. Moved to Nailsea as adults from different types of place (i.e. large towns and cities)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Experienced discontinuity in settlement type moving to Nailsea</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Place Relative/Place Alienated</b></li> <li>Representations of landscape or power line less important</li> </ul>	<p>Opposition:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Procedural Injustice</li> <li>Distributive Injustice</li> </ul>
<p>5. Moved to Nailsea as adults</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Very high residential mobility</li> <li>Indifference to residence places across life course</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Placelessness</b></li> <li>Representations of landscape or power line less important</li> </ul>	

# Invisible infrastructure?

- For **traditionally attached residents**, the existing power line is such a normal feature of the locality as to be relatively invisible and taken for granted, hence acceptance.
- For **actively attached residents**, existing power line also relatively invisible, and therefore fear spoiling of the place by 'industrial' character of the new power line, hence objections.
- Contrasting findings indicate why '**strong place attachment**' not sufficient to understand community responses.

# Summary

- Findings link residential biographies, place attachments and responses to energy infrastructure proposals.
- Those who viewed the infrastructure as ‘industrialising’ the landscape had moved to Nailsea as adults from similar places and were ‘actively attached’ to the place.
- Those who had grown up in the place were already familiar with local power lines and accepting of the new power line proposals.
- Objections also prevalent amongst non-attached residents, but based on procedural & distributional justice concerns.

# How to engage the public?

- Avoid ‘NIMBY’ assumptions about objectors.
- Consider ways to make energy projects ‘fit’ or enhance existing places or landscapes.
- Don’t underestimate ‘non-rational’ factors, including emotional place bonds.
- There is no “one-size-fits-all” solution: every technology, every community is different.
- To benefit communities, consider ownership (full or part) of energy projects not just asking companies to provide funds.

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# Publications

- Batel, S. and Devine-Wright, P. (2015). The role of (de-)essentialisation within siting conflicts: An interdisciplinary approach. *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, 44, 149-159.
- Bailey, E., Devine-Wright, P. and Batel, S. (in press) Investigating varieties of people-place relations across the life course: the relation between 'life-place trajectories' and responses to a power line proposal. *Journal of Environmental Psychology*.