

# Mega Poultry Farms: A blot on the landscape or the future of farming?

In Herefordshire, Shropshire and Powys there has been a huge increase in the numbers of Intensive Poultry Units (IPUs) for broiler birds or egg-layers during the last few years.

An intensive poultry unit is defined as a warehouse housing over 40,000 birds and while Herefordshire tops the league, our county of Shropshire is now not far behind.

There is growing concern that they are doing long-term damage to both the human and the natural environment. Organisations such as Compassion in World Farming have been campaigning against them on animal welfare grounds whereas CPRE and our neighbours in Wales (CPRW) focus on their environmental impacts, including the landscape.

The Environment Agency (EA) issues permits to allow applicants to operate a specific number of units provided certain conditions are met, but it is Shropshire Council who decides to allow or refuse any specific application and who must assess whether or not the effects of the installation, once oper-

ating, will have deleterious effects on the landscape, the biodiversity, air and water quality, road use, and local residents' quality of life.

Any application for IPUs where the sheds will house more than 85,000 broilers or 60,000 egg-layers requires an Environmental Impact Assessment to be submitted, carried out by professionally qualified individuals. This is because developments of that size are classed as 'Schedule One' under the Town and Country Planning Regulations 2011, alongside large chemical installations, nuclear fuel processing plants and crude oil refineries, thereby indicating how potentially damaging they are considered to be to the environment.

## Noise & odour

Associated noise and odour can be extremely damaging to local residents. Noise levels can in principle be measured with calibrated instruments, but are a controversial issue; people living down quiet country lanes do not normally have HGVs rumbling past during the night, disrupting their sleep, or continuous noise from high speed roof fans which have to be open in hot weather to cool the birds.

There are no calibrated instruments currently available to measure odour and so assessments are based entirely on theoretical models and not supported by authenticated empirical data; the thresholds set as acceptable in the models used have little validity in the experiences of many people living near to a mega poultry unit.

Chicken manure has a high ammonia concentration which can itself be harmful, capable of destroying foliage and having serious implications for people with respiratory problems. So there should be assessments of ammonia, especially since it is an element that can be objectively measured. Manure is produced in large quantities; DEFRA advises that 1,000 broiler birds produce 1.5 tonnes of ex-

### According to the Compassion in World Farming UK factory farming map, Shropshire has:

- ◇ **the second highest number of indoor reared meat/table chickens (13.3+ million birds) in the UK. Herefordshire has 16.7 million and has the highest concentration.**
- ◇ **second highest number of indoor-reared egg hens (1.3+ million birds)**
- ◇ **tenth highest number of indoor-reared dairy cows (2,000+)**
- ◇ **23,000+ indoor-reared pigs**

Source: <https://www.ciwf.org.uk/factory-farm-map/> (July 2017)

creta per month. What happens to the manure, where it will be stored and how and when it will be transported all need to be documented. Poor manure management can result in pollutants leaching into local watercourses and contaminating rivers.

Most applications include proposals for mitigating the undesirable effects of the proposed development, by means of the design and layout of the buildings, the technology employed and usually by some sort of 'landscaping'. They use trees, hedges, and bunds, or embankment. None of these are permanent; trees can die or be removed at any time. Most native trees are deciduous so provide less screening in winter and can be vulnerable to ammonia and heavy levels of dust.

The problem for many of us is that we often disagree with the judgements and decisions made by Shropshire Council in allowing applications. We may question the weight given to the assessments made by applicants, and question the thresholds of emissions that are deemed to be acceptable; we query the acceptability of impacts on people and much

## Some Shropshire examples

In April 2017, Shropshire Council granted planning permission for a poultry unit housing up to 100,000 birds in the Clun Valley. One protester remarked that "one came up against Officers and Councillors who held fast to a regressed and philistine view of the countryside as a site of intensive agriculture at any price."

Recently a controversial IPU at Tasley on the outskirts of Bridgnorth, which will house up to 210,000 birds has also been approved by Shropshire Council, in spite of over 230 objections referring to odour, toxicity, noise, pollution, traffic and water contamination,



Poultry farms in the Shropshire landscape: In this instance, some care has been taken to reduce landscape impact. It is sited behind the Nesscliffe bypass, shielded from it by an embankment and hedge. On the three other sides, it is surrounded by a high bank which has been planted with numerous saplings. The roof is green, the walls dark. (Photo © Selby & David Martin)

-loved local landscapes, and suggest the development be sited elsewhere.

There is also a body of opinion that considers IPUs and the industrialisation of farming producing cheap meat are simply unethical and should be stopped. That view has gained support from recent exposures in the press of unsafe processing practices. It will probably, however, need a marked change of public attitude or the advent of a widespread infection, such as we saw with BSE, to make 'industrial' chicken meat unpopular.

The economic argument propounded by applicants for broiler units that they are of economic benefit to the county's population has never been objectively tested or proven. The processing plants employ a fair number of people but with increasing mechanisation, the labour force is unlikely to expand markedly. Individual farms even with four or more units rarely add more than one or two jobs in the long-term. Business rates are not applicable to these large industrial type barns, nor do the owners have to pay road taxes on their vehicles which are heavy users of local roads. Unlike other types of development no tariffs (e.g. 106 money or CIL) are charged to off-set the effects of the development. So where are the cost/benefit analyses to support the claim that these intensive poultry farms are of benefit to us all?

With huge uncertainties around the future of farming and Brexit some farmers, particularly those working marginal land in the hills, are already looking into diversifying their farm businesses into other forms of livestock rearing, and these include intensive pig and poultry enterprises.

CPRE will continue to campaign against industrial scale poultry units that harm the landscape and the environment and which negatively affect the quality of life of local residents.

**Do you live near a mega poultry unit? What is life like? Or have you managed to object successfully to a local poultry unit application? Do get in touch and let us know on [admin@cpreshropshire.org.uk](mailto:admin@cpreshropshire.org.uk)**

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