

PRESS RELEASE 003



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BEGINS:

Heading:

Anti space radar campaign 'demands answers' from MOD on key safety questions after citing DARC public consultation meetings as 'utter shambles'

Body:

Protests were held outside each of the MOD's Public engagements events in Solva and St Davids this Friday and Saturday 13th-14th September.

[PARC Against DARC](#), which launched in May this year to oppose the proposed US military DARC radars at Brawdy, mobilised a large crowd of DARC opponents who maintained a permanent presence at both events. PARC also held its own counter-information event outside each of the buildings themed 'The People's Exhibition,' which was comprised of information boards detailing all of the key arguments the campaign has compiled against the proposed 27 dish radar array which would facilitate the United States' ability to militarily dominate all of space.

Campaigners gave out 'NO RADAR' signs for protesters to wear, with a large number of anti-DARC locals attending the PR meetings inside and asking questions.

London PR firm hosts 'utterly shambolic meeting,' says campaign

A PARC spokesperson told us: 'person after person came out from these so called public engagement meetings telling us that they were an "utter shambles," that they were being told completely different things by different "experts," and that when pushed on any of the serious questions, they were answered with "we can't answer that" or "we don't know yet," over and over again. Others repeated the mantra that DARC was still at the "conception phase," leaving us thinking it was strange they could have so much confidence in a proposal they seemed to know very little about at all!'

Campaigners recounted, 'One local attendee told us that when they'd asked one of the top military officials present if he'd stand next to one of these radars himself, he'd replied, "No, I wouldn't stand next to one of these radars myself; it'd be like putting my head in a microwave."'

'Another official, when quizzed as to why they hadn't re-sent the invitation leaflets sent out to locals which had got wrong the local place names of Newgale, Middle Mill and Penycwm – calling them "Newgate," "Middle Hill" and "Penycwn" – replied, "we could

have done, but there wasn't any point.”

A further attendee told campaigners that when he asked if it was true that the construction phase of DARC would involve 120 LGV and HGV lorries per day driving along the Haverfordwest to St Davids road and up the narrow and angular Newgale hill, the reply he received was, ‘We don't know, but I can tell you it will be less than you think.’

Local resident Jenna asked a question about what the MOD could possibly do about the visual impacts of 27 radars on the landscape that would be unavoidable. Jenna was given ‘answers that ranged from nothing, to maybe something if forced, to a man who confidently said they'd be growing enormous hedges in an area famous for its lack of anything growing beyond 3 ft in the harsh salt wind.’ The campaigners said, ‘Many attendees told us that the officials asked had said the MOD didn't even know where the radars were going!’

Box-ticking PR, not public engagement

PARC Against DARC asked a series of technical questions on safety and other issues and told us that they received ‘no responses of any meaningful value or reassurance,’ adding that ‘the London-based PR company Cascade, who had been responsible for running the event, were clearly out of their depth here in Wales. It became very clear very quickly that they were not adhering to National Principles of Public Engagement in Wales. The event was quite visibly a shambles, and it was very apparent this firm were conducting a PR exercise and not the public engagement they were statutorily obliged to carry out.’

They continued: ‘we asked Cascade representatives what other methods of public engagement they were planning to undertake as part of the consultation process in addition to drop-in meetings like these as well as online consultations, and their reply was that they'd “welcome our feedback on what we'd like to see,” and that they “haven't determined exactly what other engagement they're doing.” This begs two questions: isn't this their job in the first place? And why are they asking us to tell them how to do it?’

‘They didn't even make it clear that only written comments and questions submitted on their feedback forms would be taken into consideration when compiling the results of findings of these events in their report! That's not public engagement, and already it seems likely to us they are not meeting their statutory obligations. We encourage everyone with concerns to write in and fill out these forms online when they go live, which we were told would be September 16.’

Serious unanswered technical safety questions

Campaigners asked the MOD, ‘What would be the peak and average power outputs and frequency of the radiation sidelobes, backlobes and other radiation output besides the main beam of one single DARC transmission radar?’

‘We were told that the MOD could not give out this information merely because it was “operational,” and also that it's even possible this information—without which DARC's residential safety cannot possibly be properly examined by scientists or the public—

will never be released publicly, not even during the planning application phase to Pembrokeshire County Council.'

The campaigners said, 'Given that there are now nearly 4,000 studies demonstrating health impacts associated with the high levels of radiofrequency radiation DARC produces, we repeat our calls for answers to these serious safety questions, and we haven't had a single one. It's a matter of deep concern for the public, and the onus is on them to address these questions they seem clearly uncomfortable about.'

New pylons for DARC's energy supply?

PARC enquired about the electricity supply for DARC, with the question, 'considering the MOD told the National Parks in 2023 that DARC would mean the Barracks may require additional power in the form of either an underground or overground supply, and that an underground supply would likely be inefficient and expensive for the project's stated timeline, how many pylons will be erected, and where will they be located?'

The response received from the MOD's 'planning expert' was that 'ultimately they would be dependent on electricity being provided by the statutory providers, the National Grid, and this was not a question they were able to answer. So again we ask the MOD: will there be new pylons erected for DARC and where will they be located?'

Similarly, when asked if the high security perimeter fence would be illuminated at night with bright lights which could have a devastating impact on the manx shearwater birds, people were simply being told, over and over again, 'We don't know yet.'

New pylons for DARC's energy supply?

Amidst widespread local speculation that the new proposed Newgale bypass which is currently being put in front of Pembrokeshire County Council's planning department for scrutiny was actually being rushed through planning stages because it is an essential piece of infrastructure that DARC would require, PARC also asked if the 120 lorries per day referenced in the MOD's scoping report would be able to get to the site without the new road in place. 'We were told that they "would be able to complete DARC's construction phase using the existing road infrastructure."'

'At PARC we share the community's doubts that this is realistically possible, and we affirm that the MOD should be fulfilling the legal requirement to submit the new road planning application as part of DARC's wider planning application due to the quite possible reality that DARC can only go ahead itself if the new road is in place. However, if it really were possible for DARC's construction phase to be completed using the existing road networks, then imagine for one minute being one of the thousands of local residents and tourists who use the road and getting repeatedly stuck behind the 12 huge lorries per hour which would be driving up and down the tiny and very angular Newgale hill. It would be absolute mayhem!'

Elusive and evasive MOD unwilling or unable to answer questions

'We asked several other key and extremely important questions, as did so many who attended the events. We couldn't find anyone who had come out satisfied with the

answers they'd received. Many people came out baffled, feeling the consultation was rushed, poorly-informed and confusing. They told us they'd heard contradiction after contradiction, felt that MOD spokespeople came across as evasive and defensive, and some even felt they had been lied to.'

"Many of us would have expected this, of course—but as a government ministry that is meant to be an exemplar of best practice in public engagement and consultation, we can and ought to expect far, far better."

'If the MOD were really serious about engaging with the local population on DARC as it is obligated to do rather than engaging in a series of box-ticking exercises, perhaps it would have been best off starting by sacking its London PR firm, Cascade which has no connection to Pembrokeshire, and replacing it with a dedicated public engagement organisation from within Wales. Preferably one which knows how, and is committed to, finding out and prioritising what the public really feels and wants in this area.'

Avalanche of opposition

'The temperature of opposition you could see in the room, however, suggests that these problems are going to do very little indeed to dissuade what seems like extraordinarily intense opposition from the local public. This was particularly true in St Davids, with hardly a single person we could see seeming to be there with a kind word to say for the DARC proposal.'

'We had every confidence that the people of Dewisland would see straight through this one-sided, see-through and frankly contemptuous attempt to steamroll us as a community, and by turning out in such unprecedented numbers, and in effect making the whole day our own, with research and challenges put together by people who actually care about the future and fate of this area, that's exactly what we did. We are extremely proud to be part of a community who cares so vocally about our landscape, our environment, our economy and its future.'

'We believe that these PR stunts completely failed in their public engagement obligations and we demand serious answers to all of the serious questions we have raised.'

ENDS.

Further statement by PARC following MOD's removal of its own consultation feedback form following a large volume of complaints from local residents, issued 22/09/24

'The MOD's handling of this engagement process has just gone from bad to worse. First they got the names of our towns wrong, then they put on a consultation it's fair to say was widely described as a shambles. But now, when we as residents get together to send the feedback they wanted from us as a community, they take their own form off the internet altogether. Anyone would think they're looking pretty afraid of what people around here have to say about the proposal!

‘This is another gross failing in terms of their public engagement obligations under National Principles of Public Engagement in Wales. We’re sure the idea of running a public engagement process is that you want people to engage with it, so it’s strange to us that the MOD seems to be doing as much as it can to make sure as few people say anything about DARC in the area as possible!’