

'Mad' Swansea scheme heading for the rocks

SUNDAY TELEGRAPH: 17.1.2016 CHRISTOPHER BOOKER REVIEW.

The publication last week of a trenchant High Court ruling against Cornwall Council has given a further twist to the murky story of what I described last year as "the most insane 'green' project" the Government had ever given its backing to.

When I wrote more than once about the project to build a vast "tidal" power station on Swansea Bay, it seemed to have everything going for it. It had the personal backing of David Cameron, it was highlighted in the Tories' election manifesto, and after the election it was hurriedly given planning permission by Amber Rudd, so that work could start as soon as last autumn.

But as I pointed out, the amount of power that the £1 billion scheme could generate was not only laughably small - the developers also insisted that it could only work if they were given a subsidy so

exorbitant that it would be the most expensive electricity in the world.

Then, as months went by, it seemed that various snags arose. The Planning Inspectorate asked a stack of further questions on the scheme's environmental impact. There was still haggling over the subsidy the developers were demanding. There was talk of a delay until 2017 - and in the autumn they were laying off a good part of their workforce.

But another battle was raging over the developers' plans to create a huge "super-quarry" on the Lizard Peninsula in Cornwall, from which they hoped to ship 1.5 million tons a year of the stone needed to build the six-mile long breakwater round Swansea Bay.

A case brought on behalf of local protesters argued that the planning permission rushed through Cornwall Council last April had broken the law by failing to include an environmental

assessment of the potential damage the quarry would do to a whole range of natural sites officially designated for special protection.

Although just before Christmas Mr Justice Dove in the High Court ruled that the permission had been given illegally, it is only now his judgment has been published we can see just how damning it was to the council's conduct in every way. It also emerges that the planning officer responsible had been involved in two earlier decisions where Cornwall approved applications for two highly controversial wind farms.

Last week, even Mr Cameron admitted to MPs that he had now changed his view of the Swansea scheme, because of the cost of its electricity. But we are entitled to wonder just what it says about his judgment that he could ever have fallen for such a ludicrous project in the first place.