

Application Number: F/YR12/0207/F
Minor
Parish/Ward: March/March West
Date Received: 09 March 2012
Expiry Date: 04 May 2012
Applicant: Mr H. Whittome

Proposal: Erection of a 36.4m high (hub height) wind turbine
Location: Land North of Floods Ferry Farm, Floods Ferry Road, March

Site Area/Density: 0.029ha

Reason before Committee: This proposal is before the Planning Committee as the recommendation is contrary to the views of March Town Council and due to Member call in by Councillors French and Owen due to the effects on the amenity of adjoining occupiers, access arrangements and detrimental to the local area.

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY/RECOMMENDATION

The proposed wind turbine has an overall height of 46 metres and is similar in design to a turbine which has been erected at Staffurths Bridge Farm to the north east of the site. In planning policy terms the proposal is considered to accord with national, regional and local planning policy in contributing to the need for renewable energy without adversely affecting biodiversity, noise, access, visual impact, cumulative effect or noise in relation to the site. RSPB have recommended a condition regarding bird monitoring and this has been included as have recommended safeguarding conditions from Environmental Protection regarding noise monitoring. The application is recommended for grant subject to conditions.

2. HISTORY

Of relevance to this proposal is:

2.1	F/YR11/0794/F	Erection of 1 x 36.4 metre high (hub height) wind turbine – Staffurths Bridge Farm	Granted December 2012	19
	F/YR/09/0272/F	Erection of 9 x 67 metre high (hub height) wind turbines and met mast	Refused 04/01/2010	on
	F/YR/09/0392/F	Erection of 3 no wind turbines (max height 100 m to blade tip) Land North Of Burnthouse Farm	Allowed on appeal	
	F/YR09/0562/F	Erection of 5 wind turbines (110m to blade tip) Boardinghouse Farm, Knights End Road, March	Allowed on appeal 06 July 2011	
	F/YR07/0585/SCO	Wind Farm Screening Opinion	Further required	details
	F/YR/06/0594/F	Erection of 2 no wind turbines (max height 100 m to blade tip) Ransonmoor Farm	Granted February 2007	– 23

F/YR/03/0990

Erection of 3 no wind turbines (max height 100 m to blade tip) 2005
Granted – 25 April
Ransonmoor Farm

3. **PLANNING POLICIES**

3.1 **National Planning Policy Framework:**

Paragraph 2: Planning law requires that application for planning permission must be determined in accordance with the development plan.

Paragraph 14: Presumption in favour of sustainable development.

Paragraph 93: Meeting the challenge of climate change, flooding and coastal change.

Paragraph 109: Conserving and enhancing the natural environment.

3.2 **Draft Fenland Core Strategy July 2012:**

CS12: Responding to climate change and managing the risk of flooding in Fenland.

CS14: Delivering and Protecting High Quality Environments across the District.

3.3 **Fenland District Wide Local Plan:**

EMP1: Proposals will normally be favoured for new, or the extension or expansion of existing, firms ... outside DABs the expansion of existing firms will only be permitted where certain criteria are satisfied.

E1: To resist development likely to detract from the Fenland landscape. New development should meet certain criteria.

E8: Proposals for new development should: allow for protection of site features, be of a design compatible with their surroundings, have regard to amenities of adjoining properties and provide adequate access.

E20: To resist any development which by its nature gives rise to unacceptable levels of noise, nuisance and other environmental pollution.

3.4 **East of England Plan:**

SS1: seeks to bring about sustainable development

ENG2: The development of new facilities for renewable power generation should be supported with the aim that by 2010 10% of the region's energy, and by 2020 - 17%, should come from renewable sources (excluding energy from offshore wind)

ENV2: Planning Authorities should protect and enhance the diversity and local distinctiveness of countryside character by developing area-wide strategies and landscape character assessments to ensure development respects/enhances local landscape character.

The ENV3: Ensure that new development minimises damage to biodiversity.

Policy ENV4: Ensures that the landscape, historic and wildlife value of farmland is increased whilst responding to issues such as climate change.

4. **CONSULTATIONS**

4.1 ***March Town Council:***

Recommend refusal. Inappropriate site for this development.

4.2 ***Benwick Parish Council***

Agreed to accept the application

- 4.3 ***Doddington Parish Council*** The Council object strongly to any more wind turbines in Doddington and the surrounding area. The erection of turbines causes a great deal of damage to the environment with heavy lorries carrying 1000's of tons of aggregate on our badly maintained roads, so more damage will be done in the name of turbines than they will save during their performance lifetime. The parishioners of Doddington are now completely fed up with what appears to be the continual erection of turbines in and around their village. At this particular time they are only seeing the detrimental effect of the turbines and continued rise in electricity bills to subsidise these.
- 4.4 ***Whittlesey Town Council*** The Town Council advise this is out of our area and have not commented.
- 4.5 ***Local Highway Authority (CCC):*** I have no objections to this proposal from the highway point of view. Whilst there will likely be a modest increase in the number of vehicle trips to the site during the construction phase, the type and size of vehicle to be generated should not cause problems. Articulated vehicles are already generated by the farm use.
- 4.6 ***Natural England*** From the information provided with this application, it does not appear to fall within the scope of the consultations that Natural England would routinely comment on. The lack of comment from Natural England should not be interpreted as a statement that there are no impacts on the natural environment. Other bodies and individuals may be able to make comments that will help the Local Planning Authority (LPA) to fully take account of the environmental value of this site in the decision making process.
- 4.7 ***Middle Level Commissioners*** No pre-application discussion occurred and consent has not currently been sought for these matters. The Board expect the applicant to provide adequate details and test results to prove that the proposed surface water disposal system will work efficiently and that consent is unlikely to be sought for the location of the control cabinet within the Middle Level maintenance access strip.

- 4.8 **March and Whittlesey IDB** The nearest Boards drain is approximately 400 metres north of the site.
- 4.9 **CAA** No adverse comments
- 4.10 **Peterborough Business Airfield** No objections
- 4.11 **Environmental Protection Officer** Recommend as follows:-
- The noise emission (LA90, 10 mins) from the turbine, as measured in free field conditions, at the nearest dwelling shall not exceed the greater of 35 dB(A) or 5 dB(A) above background noise during the daytime (7:00 to 23:00) and 43dB(A) at night-time (23:00 to 7:00).
- At the reasonable request of Fenland District Council the operator of the development shall, at their expense, employ an independent consultant approved by the Council to measure and assess the level of noise emissions from the wind turbine generators, following the procedures described in "The Assessment and Rating of Noise from Wind Farms, ETSU-R-97" published by ETSU for the Department of Trade and Industry.
- 4.12 **Joint Radio Company** This proposal is cleared with respect to radio link infrastructure operated by National Grid Gas Networks.
- 4.13 **Environment Agency** We have no objection to the proposed development but wish to make the following comments:
- We consider that the main source of flood risk at this site is associated with watercourses under the jurisdiction of the March & Whittlesey Internal Drainage Board (IDB). Therefore the IDB / Middle Level Commissioners should be consulted with regard to flood risk and surface water drainage proposals.
- 4.14 **RSPB** The RSPB is supportive of renewable energy projects providing that adverse impacts upon wildlife are avoided by appropriate siting and design. The available evidence suggests that wind farms can pose three main problems for birds: disturbance, habitat loss or damage,

and collision. The proposed development site lies around 6km from the Nene Washes Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), Special Protection Area (SPA) and Ramsar site and within c.13km of the Ouse Washes SSSI, SPA and Ramsar site at the closest point. The RSPB therefore considers that it is necessary for applications in potentially sensitive areas to be supported by empirical evidence, to ensure potential impacts. We strongly recommend that the Council considers requesting further information from the Applicant to provide reasonable evidence that the siting of a turbine of this scale at this location will present no - or a minimal - collision risk to sensitive species. We consider that this further information should take the form of a collision risk assessment conducted by an independent and suitably qualified professional based on one winter of targeted ornithological surveys, following available guidance. With respect to the Flood's Ferry turbine, as our concerns are the same as for the Staffurth's Bridge turbine, we would suggest that a condition to ensure post construction ornithological monitoring following the guidance approved by Natural England and the RSPB2 is attached as a condition to any permission granted. Given the relatively close proximity of the Staffurth's Bridge turbine the monitoring could be straightforwardly managed to cover both turbines. In addition to recommendations concerning monitoring we also suggest that a condition is attached to any permission granted to ensure the requirements of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) are adhered to with respect to prevention of disturbance to or loss of breeding birds, their active nests and dependent young during construction. The proposal to undertake monitoring to the required standard to produce reliable results (*for both this and the Staffurths Bridge site*) is very much welcome and the RSPB would be happy to provide further advice.

4.15 **Chatteris Airfield**

No objection to this application, which is outside the Safeguarding Zone.

- 4.16 **NERL Safeguarding Office** No safeguarding objection.
- 4.17 **Anglian Water** No objection to this proposal from a groundwater perspective.
- 4.18 **Local residents/interested parties** 11 Letters of support have been received from individuals in properties closest to the turbine location – renewal energy is an important resource now and in the future – this is a suitable site.
1 Letter was received – our peaceful rural existence and view is being spoiled – structures mar our landscape and affect our property values – solar panels could be used instead.
- 4.19 **MOD (Defence Infrastructure Organisation) Safeguarding Officer** Initial objection but following negotiation the MOD has recently ceased safeguarding the Primary Surveillance Radar at RAF Cottesmore from wind farm development proposals and have removed their objection to this proposal.

5. SITE DESCRIPTION

- 5.1 The site is situated on agricultural land adjacent to a 'dry ditch' field boundary. The nearest residential properties are situated at a distance of approximately 250m to the south west of the proposed turbine (Fenside and Fieldside Farm Cottages) and at a distance of 250m to the south west of the proposed turbine (Floods Ferry Farm). Floods Ferry Farm is bounded to the south and east by the River Nene. There are no other scattered residential properties to the south and east of the River Nene in the vicinity of Knights End Road. The locality is open and flat in character and consists of agricultural fields and drainage ditches. Five existing turbines and associated infrastructure already exist on the Ransonmoor Wind Farm site to the east and a further 3 have been granted planning permission at land north of Burnthouse Farm to the west – all of which are 100m high to top blade tip. A recent approved turbine of a similar design to the proposal has been erected at Staffurths Bridge Farm to the north east of the proposed turbine.

6. PLANNING ASSESSMENT

6.1 **Nature of Application**

The application seeks full planning permission for the erection of a 3 bladed wind turbine assembly with an overall height of 46 metres to the top blade tip on a site area of 0.029ha (swept area). The turbine will be used to generate electricity to reduce the farms reliance on fossil fuels, energy bills and carbon emission. The colour of the 50 kW "Endurance" turbine is white on a solid tubular tower, which matches other larger turbines in the area at Ransonmoor Wind Farm. However, this turbine is just under half the height of the existing turbines and has a less imposing scale in the landscape.

Access will be via the existing farm access roadway, which serves Floods Ferry Farm via the junction of the Floods Ferry Access Road with Knights End Road. Access to the turbine site from the farm roadway will be across a field on a temporary road made from aluminium trackway panels and will be laid during the construction period to allow access for construction traffic.

A full Environmental Impact Assessment was not required for this application but the following key issues have been considered;

- Site history
- Principle and policy implications
- Visual Impact
- Landscape Impact/Cumulative Visual Impact
- Biodiversity
- Design
- Access.

Site History

As noted above Planning Permission has been previously granted and implemented for the erection of 5 wind turbines at Ransonmoor Farm 2km to the east and a further 3 have been granted planning permission at land north of Burnthouse Farm to the west of the application site and at a similar distance. A turbine of similar design to the proposal has been erected at Staffurths Bridge Farm to the north east of the proposed turbine.

Principle and Policy Implications

The proposal has been considered in line with the Development Plan Policies and National Guidance, in the form of the new National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), the Fenland District-Wide Local Plan, 1993, the East of England Plan and also the new Draft Core Strategy.

The Government has set a target of generating 20% of the UK's electricity by 2020 and also aims for the UK to be on a path to cut its carbon dioxide emissions by 60% by 2050, as well as maintaining reliable and competitive energy supplies. The development of renewable energy is considered to form a key part of meeting this target, which has led to the view that renewable energy schemes should be supported where they do not result in other adverse impact upon the area that outweigh the renewable energy benefits. This application is for the erection of a wind turbine and associated infrastructure. Wind turbines are a sustainable and efficient source of renewable energy and, therefore, comply, in principle, with the provisions of the NPPF and emerging Core Strategy.

In addition to the policy framework highlighted under Section 3 above, due regard must also be given to the Fenland Wind Turbine Development Policy Guidance June 2009. This document provides local guidance in relation to wind turbine development. It is recognised that there is a need to ensure that future development is in balance with the local landscape and the population that lives within it. As a result the Wind Turbine Development Policy Guidance (WTDPG) was produced by landscape consultants for FDC in April 2008. The WTDPG has been adopted as supplementary planning guidance by the Council. The WTDPG sets down a number of landscape character types and then sets out criteria for evaluating the sensitivity of each type.

Section 6 sets out the criteria for assessing planning applications based on:

- *Landscape character*
- *Landscape capacity*
- *Visual impacts*
- *Cumulative landscape impacts*
- *Cumulative visual impacts*
- *Biodiversity considerations*
- *Heritage considerations*
- *Recreation and transport routes*
- *Mitigation*

Only where wind turbine development is considered appropriate in the light of the above criteria, guidance is then given in terms of how the form and siting of turbine(s) should relate to the characteristics of the landscape type in which it is to be situated. Under the above guidance the proposed site is situated within the following designations:

- 1 *“The Fens” landscape character area which has a medium - high landscape capacity for groups of 17+,*
- 2 *A high landscape capacity for single turbines*
- 3 *A high landscape capacity for small turbine groups (2-5),*
- 4 *A high landscape capacity for small/medium turbine groups (6-10),*
- 5 *A medium-high landscape capacity for medium turbine groups (12-16),*
- 6 *A medium-high landscape capacity for large turbine groups (17+),*
- 7 *Within the 5km conspicuous zones for existing turbines,*
- 8 *Within the 2km ‘prominent’ zone for proposed turbines.*

In terms of landscape capacity within the Drained Fenland character type the WTDPG advises that the “cumulative impact of wind turbine development needs to be carefully considered”.

In terms of visual impact the WTDPG advises that:

- *Proposals within 400m of a settlement are highly unlikely to be considered acceptable in visual amenity terms.*
- *There should be no shadow flicker for any residential properties or on A or B roads.*
- *Proposals within 2km of a settlement should be carefully considered as turbines are likely to be highly prominent features*
- *Turbines should be set back a minimum distance of 200m from public footpaths (The Companion Guide to PPS22 considers this to be a desirable, though non-statutory distance, in relation to bridleways). The WTDPG advises that for National Trails this should be 3 times the distance of the overall height of the turbine.*
- *Residential properties and users of recreational routes/facilities are likely to be considered more sensitive as receptors.*

In terms of cumulative landscape impact the WTDPG advises that that there is a danger that excessive development of wind turbines in any landscape would at some point result in such material change as to unbalance and overpower the existing key characteristics of the landscape. To prevent this it advises that within the Drained Fenland character type not more than 25% of the area should be within 2km of a turbine development (prominent zone) and not more

than 75% within 5km (conspicuous zone).

- Proposals for new wind turbine development, detached from existing turbines sites by more than 500m but within 4km of existing turbine developments are unlikely to be acceptable in visual terms. In some circumstances a distance greater than 500m is required.*
- Proposals for new development within 10km of existing turbine developments need to be carefully considered.*
- Settlements of more than 10 dwellings should not have wind turbines in more than 90° of their field of view from public or residential viewpoints within or around the settlements from a distance of 10km from the settlement.*
- No more than 25% of the length of A and B roads and railways should be within 2km of wind turbines (prominent zone) and no more than 75% of its length being within 5km of turbines (conspicuous zone)*
- Turbines within 4km of each other are likely to demonstrate a significant cumulative impact from a number of locations and are less likely to be considered acceptable in visual/landscape terms, unless they form a relatively modest extension to an existing turbine development.*

Visual Impact

As noted above the proposed turbine is less than half the size of the existing and proposed turbines at Ransonmoor and Burnthouse Farms. The nearest residential properties are situated at a distance of approximately 250m to the south west of the proposed turbine and at a distance of 250m to the south west of the proposed turbine (Floods Ferry Farm). There are no other scattered residential properties to the south and east of the River Nene in the vicinity of Knights End Road. Most of the occupants within the immediate vicinity of the turbine have supported the proposal. The turbine would be visible in the immediate locality, but is less dominant in that setting than the larger turbines at Ransonmoor and Burnthouse Farms. Taking into account the impact of the turbine in both short and long distance views, it is considered to be acceptable.

Landscape Impact/Cumulative Visual Impact

The site is not located within any national or locally designated landscape areas. However, it is important to consider the impact of the turbine on the overall appearance of the Fenland landscape in terms of cumulative visual impact and the proximity of existing and proposed turbines at Ransonmoor and Burnthouse Farms. In this case the proposed turbine is approximately 2 km from one existing turbine at Staffurths Bridge Farm and one approved turbine at Greenvale. As all 3 turbines are of a smaller scale than the larger wind farms - and will be viewed in perspective at a distance - it is considered on balance that in this case adverse cumulative visual impact will not occur.

Biodiversity

Natural England advise that Nene Washes Special Protection Area (SPA) is located approximately 3.5 km north of the proposed turbine, but note that no consideration has been given to potential impacts on the bird interest features which are known to occur within the wider area. However, Natural England accepts that the proposed development is unlikely to have a significant effect on the bird interest features for which the SPA is classified given that the current proposal is only for a single midi-turbine, and that low levels of bird flight activity were recorded during the Floods Ferry surveys.

RSPB state that, on its own, this medium-scale turbine is unlikely to have a significant impact on species associated with the Nene Washes Special Protection Area (SPA) and Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). However, they do not consider that sufficient information has been provided to safely conclude that the turbine will not contribute to cumulative collision risk to species (migratory swans) that are designated features of this site and that also utilise arable land and other habitats within the Fens. It would be appropriate in these circumstances to attach a condition (linked with the Staffurths Bridge site) to ensure post construction monitoring surveys of the operational turbine are conducted (following the available guidance) in order to confirm whether there will be no/minimal contribution to cumulative collision risk.

Design

Shadow flicker created by the turning of the turbine blades at certain times of day should also be considered. In terms of this proposal the impact is considered to be minimal as the nearest property is over 200m from the turbine. Noise impact from the turbine has been assessed and a basic noise condition has been suggested by Environmental Protection as a safeguard in the event of any justified complaint being received.

Access

Access into the site will be via the existing farm track at Floods Ferry Farm via its junction with Knights End Road. The Highway Authority has no objections and the access is acceptable for construction and ongoing maintenance traffic.

7. CONCLUSION

- 7.1 In planning policy terms the proposal is considered to accord with national, regional and local planning policy in contributing to the need for renewable energy without adversely affecting biodiversity, noise, access, visual impact, cumulative effect or noise in relation to the site. The proposed turbine is located in an area where it will generally be viewed from a distant perspective. Its scale will not dominate or have an adverse impact in its landscape setting. However, informatives in relation to flood risk, drainage and bird monitoring should accompany any planning consent.

8. RECOMMENDATION

Grant Planning Permission subject to the following planning conditions.

- 1 **The development permitted shall be begun before the expiration of 3 years from the date of this permission.**

Reason - To ensure compliance with Section 51 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004.

- 2 **The permission hereby granted shall expire not later than 25 years from the date when electricity is first exported from the wind turbine to the electricity distribution grid ("First Export Date"). Written notification of the First Export Date shall be given to the Local Planning Authority no later than 14 days after the event.**

Reason - In the interests of the appearance of the locality.

- 3 Not later than 12 months before the end of this permission, a decommissioning and site restoration scheme shall be submitted for the written approval of the local planning authority. The scheme shall make provision for the removal of the wind turbine and associated ancillary equipment to a depth of at least 0.2 metres below ground. The scheme shall include the management and timing of any works, a traffic management plan to address likely traffic issues during the decommissioning period, an environmental management plan to include details of measures to be taken during the decommissioning period to protect wildlife and habitats and a programme of implementation. The approved scheme shall be fully implemented within 12 months of the expiry of this permission.

Reason - In the interests of the appearance of the locality.

- 4 If the wind turbine fails to produce electricity for supply to the grid for a continuous period of 12 months then, unless otherwise agreed in writing by the Local Planning Authority, the wind turbine and its associated ancillary equipment shall be removed from the site within a period of 3 months from the end of the 12 month period. The land shall be reinstated in accordance with a scheme (including management and timing of the works and a traffic management plan) submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority.

Reason -In the interests of the appearance of the locality.

- 5 Construction work and material deliveries shall only take place between the hours of 07:00 – 18:00 on Monday to Friday inclusive, 08:00 – 13:00 hours on Saturdays with no such construction work on a Sunday or Public Holiday. Outside these hours, works at the site shall be limited to emergency works and dust suppression, unless otherwise approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The Local Planning Authority shall be informed in writing of emergency works within three working days of the occurrence.

Reason - In the interests of residential and recreational amenity.

- 6 The overall height of the wind turbines shall not exceed 46 metres to the tip of the blades when the turbine is in a vertical position as measured from natural ground conditions immediately adjacent to the turbine base.

Reason - To safeguard the visual amenities of the area.

- 7 The noise emission (LA90, 10 mins) from the turbine, as measured in free field conditions, at the nearest dwelling shall not exceed the greater of 35 dB(A) or 5 dB(A) above background noise during the daytime (7:00 to 23:00) and 43dB(A) at night-time (23:00 to 7:00).

Reason - In the interests of residential amenity.

- 8 **At the reasonable request of Fenland District Council the operator of the development shall, at their expense, employ an independent consultant approved by the Council to measure and assess the level of noise emissions from the wind turbine generators, following the procedures described in “The Assessment and Rating of Noise from Wind Farms, ETSU-R-97” published by ETSU for the Department of Trade and Industry.**

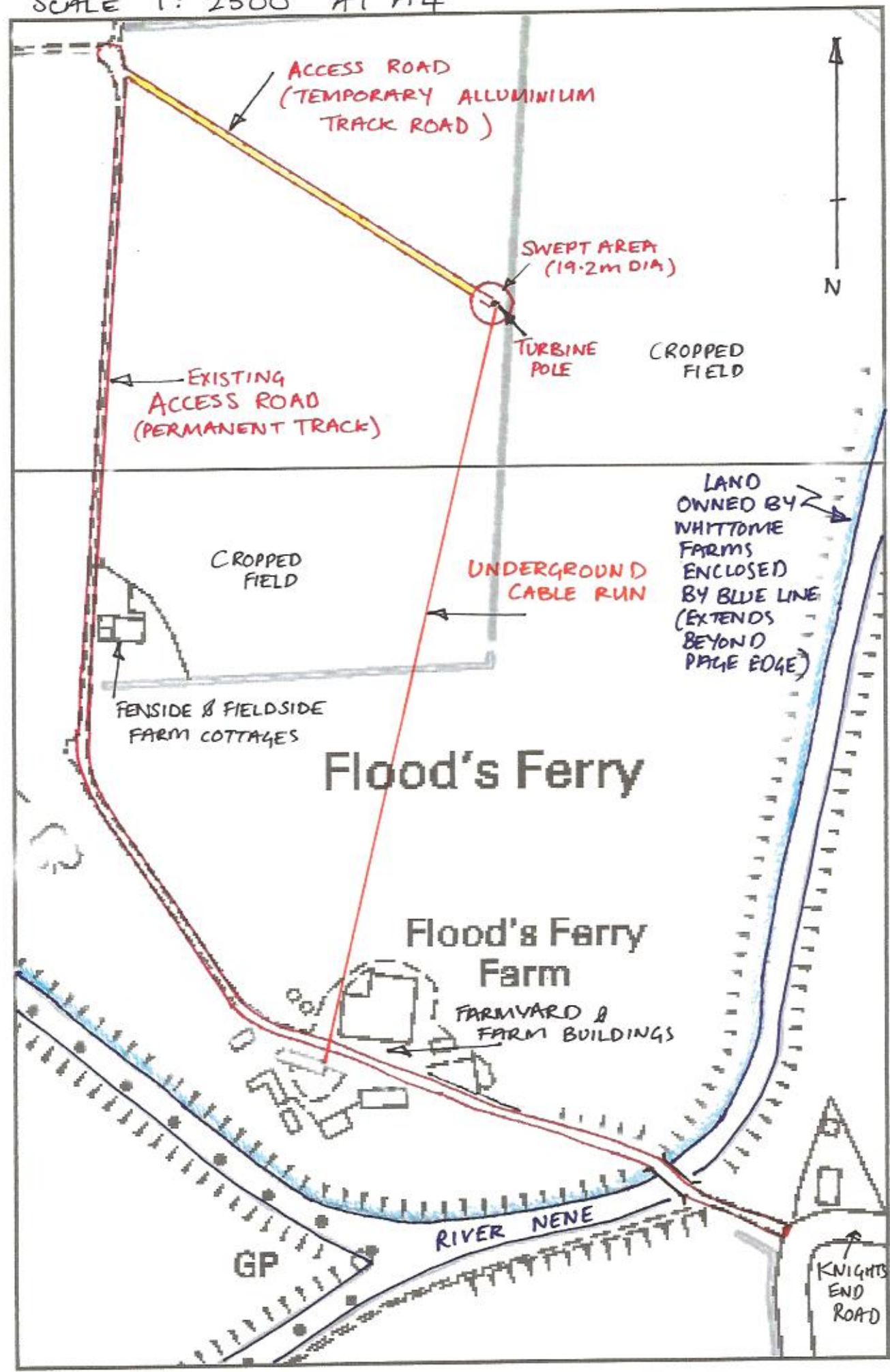
Reason - In the interests of residential amenity.

- 9 **Details of a plan to conduct a post construction ornithological monitoring survey of the proposed turbine at Floods Ferry Farm (to include the recently approved operational turbine at Staffurths Bridge Farm) shall be submitted for approval to the Planning Authority prior to commencement of work on site and thereafter implemented in order to confirm whether or not there will be no/minimal contribution to cumulative ornithological collision risk. The surveys shall be conducted by a suitably qualified and independent professional and follow available guidance on the monitoring of the interaction of birds with operational wind turbines as provided in the Natural England Technical Information Note ‘TIN069’ Assessing the effects of onshore wind farms on birds - specifically, pages 11-14 and Appendix 2.**

Reason - In the interests of ensuring that adverse impacts upon wildlife are avoided and as agreed with the applicant.

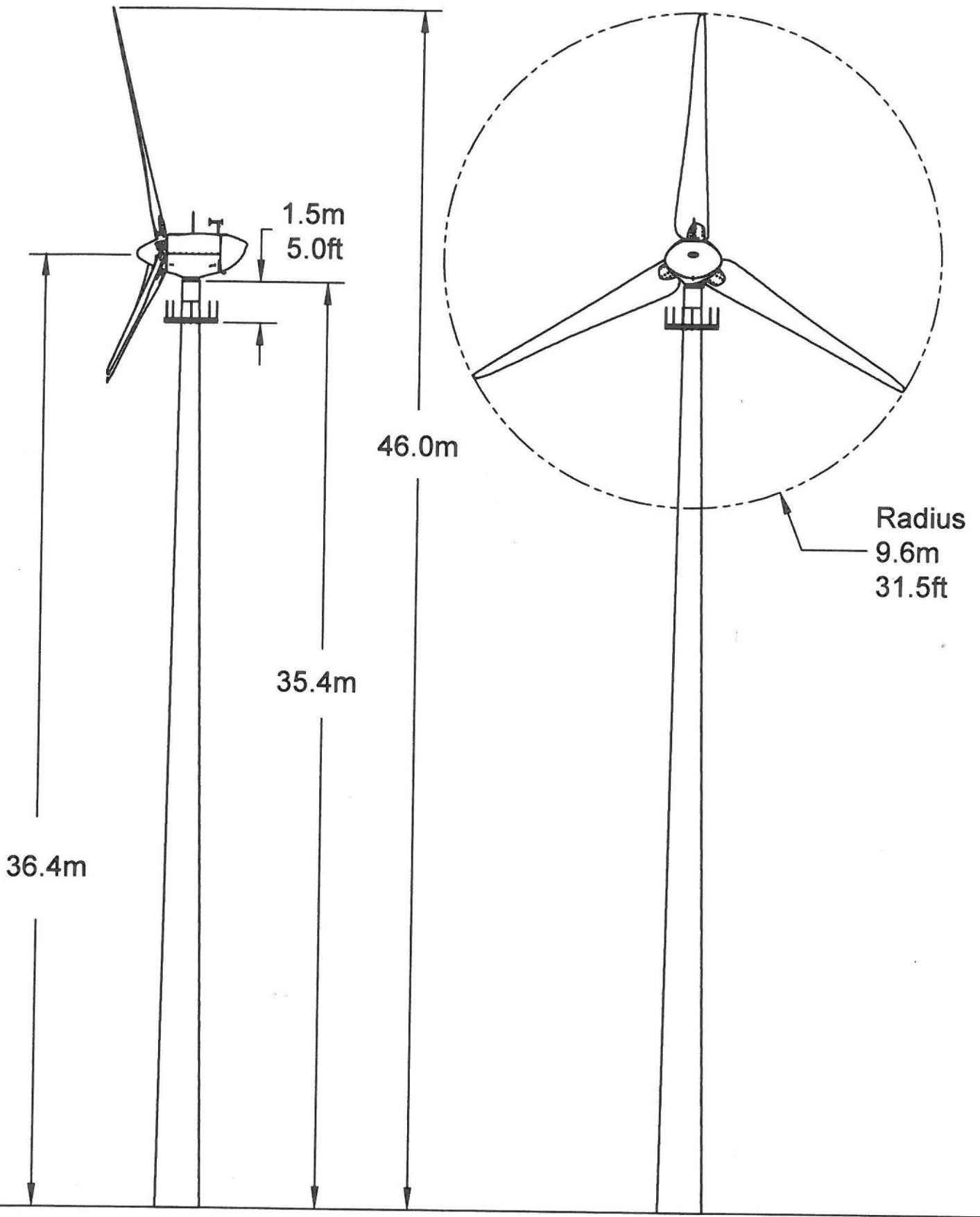
APPENDIX A : LOCATION MAP(2)(FLOODS FERRY ENDURANCE TURBINE

SCALE 1: 2500 AT A4



SCALE 1: 2500

Appendix D - Endurance E-3120 36m Scaled Elevation Drawing



Scale 1:200 at A4 (1:50 at A2)

