

**Application Number: F/YR13/0734/F
Minor
Parish/Ward: Elm
Date Received: 30th September 2013
Expiry Date: 25th November 2013
Applicant: Urban Wind Limited
Agent: Ms A Ellis AE Associates**

Proposal: Erection of 2 x 22.6 metre high (hub height) wind turbines with associated works.

Location: Newsham Farm, March Road, Rings End.

Site Area: 0.134 hectares

Reason before Committee: This proposal is before the Planning Committee as it is in the wider interest.

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY/RECOMMENDATION

This is a full application for 2 proposed wind turbines at land at Newsham Farm, March Road, Rings End. The proposed wind turbines have a hub height of 22.6 metres with the blades taking them to an overall height of approximately 35 metres. The site is in a prominent location. The proposal has been considered against national and local planning policy and the key considerations in this instance are:

- Relevant Policy
- Design and Access
- Visual Impact

The key issues have been taken into consideration and the need to balance the need for renewable energy against the impact on the area and in this instance the proposal is contrary to Policy given the dominant visual impact of the proposal on the surrounding landscape, and is therefore recommended for refusal.

2. HISTORY

The following applications are relevant:

- | | | | |
|-----|------------------|--|---|
| 2.1 | F/YR13/0362/SCOP | Screening Opinion: Erection of 3 x 23 metre high (hub height) wind turbines. | Further details/EIA not required – 10 th September 2013. |
|-----|------------------|--|---|

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.

Paragraph 98: Need for renewable energy and acceptable impacts.

3.2 Fenland Local Plan Core Strategy: Submission Version – September 2013:

CS14: Responding to climate change and managing the risk of flooding in Fenland.

CS16: 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.

E3: To retain existing trees and hedgerows. To impose, where appropriate, conditions on planning applications requiring landscaping and tree planting schemes. To request the submission of a landscaping scheme with planning applications on visually important sites.

4. CONSULTATIONS

- | | | |
|-----|-------------------------------|--|
| 4.1 | Parish Council: | Support. |
| 4.2 | Environment Agency | No objections but provide advisory comments relating to flood risk and resilience, pollution prevention and biodiversity. |
| 4.3 | Natural England | The application site is located within approximately 800m of the Nene Washes Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), Special Area of Conservation (SAC), Special Protection Area (SPA) and Ramsar Site. Whilst the scale and location of the proposal suggest that an adverse effect on these features is unlikely, the applicant will need to confirm this through a detailed assessment. |
| 4.4 | CCC Archaeology | No response received at the time of writing this report. |
| 4.5 | RSPB | No response received at the time of writing this report. |
| 4.6 | NATS/NERL Safeguarding | No safeguarding objection to the proposal. |

- 4.7 **CCC Highways** The means of access from the A141 is a public bridleway to a point approximately 220m north of the proposed turbines. The application lacks supporting information regarding the traffic and transport implications of the development through the construction phase. Also AutoTrack data for the manoeuvring of the largest vehicles entering and leaving the A141 junction. A condition survey will be required for the route from the A141 in order to be able to assess any damage that occurs.
- 4.8 **FDC Environmental Protection** No response received at the time of writing this report.
- 4.9 **Environment Agency** No response received at the time of writing this report.
- 4.10 **MOD** Object to the proposal. The turbines will be 38.4km from, detectable by and will cause unacceptable interference with the radar at RAF Wittering.
- 4.11 **Cambs Police Architectural Liaison** The only risk prevalent to the development is the risk of cabling. It is therefore advised that the cables are buried to a substantial depth of 1.8m below ground level.
- 4.12 **Local residents/interested parties** 1 letter of objection received concerning (in summary):
- The turbines will be in close proximity to their home.
 - Highway safety issues due to drivers being distracted by the turbines.

5. **SITE DESCRIPTION**

- 5.1 The site is located within an area of agricultural land at Newsham Farm on a site known as Hobbs Bank. The site lies to the North of Twenty Foot Road, to the East of March Road (A141) and South of Rings End. The site is relatively flat and open and adjoining sites consist predominantly of agricultural land with some farm premises and some sporadic dwellings present. In addition the existing Coldham and Stags Holt Wind Farms sit approximately 5.5km to the east of the proposed turbines at their nearest point.

6. **PLANNING ASSESSMENT**

6.1 Nature of Application

The application seeks full planning permission for the erection of 2 x 3-bladed wind turbines with hub heights of 22.6 metres and an overall height of approximately 35 metres to blade tips. The turbines consist of a tower, nacelle and 3 blades.

The following key issues have been considered;

- Relevant Policy
- Design and Access
- Visual Impact

Relevant Policy

The proposal has been considered in line with National Guidance, in the form of the new National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), Planning Practice Guidance for Renewable and Low Carbon Energy (PPG) July 2012 – Paragraphs 29-45 and Development Plan Policy in the form of the Fenland District-Wide Local Plan, 1993, and the emerging Fenland Local Plan Core Strategy – September 2013; these are listed in the relevant section of this report.

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, there is a current adopted SPG which is The Fenland Wind Turbine Development Policy Guidance June 2009 (WTDPG). This document is due to be replaced in the near future by a new SPD and also its main focus relates to the larger turbines (i.e. those of an overall height of 100m plus). As such, this report will focus on the provisions of the Local Plan, Core Strategy, NPPF and Planning Practice Guidance rather than the WTDPG.

Design and Access

The proposed turbines are to consist of a tower, nacelle and three blades. The hub height is 22.6m and the blades will take the overall height to approximately 35m. The turbine is to be light grey in colour with a matt finish. Access to the site will be via the existing Newsham Farm access, situated off the A141 (March Road). To access the turbines, an additional length of access within the site will need to be constructed. The turbines will sit to the South of the existing Newsham Farm buildings. The first turbine is sited approximately 120 metres from the existing buildings, with the second turbine being a further 120m south.

Visual Impact

The site is not located within any national or locally designated landscape areas. The turbine is to be situated within an existing area of arable land at a distance of approximately 105m from the road. By the very nature of the development it will be visible within the landscape, which is flat and relatively open in nature. The Coldham and Stags Holt Wind Farms sit to the East of the proposal at a distance of approximately 5.5km at its closest point to the nearest turbine. Due to the location of the turbines in a prominent position a key consideration in this instance is the visual impact on the surrounding area. The site and its surroundings are relatively flat, open and exposed. In the distance the Coldham/Stags Holt turbines are visible. Although in comparison to other

wind turbines these are considered to be small-scale, they are still of an overall height of approximately 35 metres and as such will be very dominant in an otherwise open landscape. In addition, the proximity of the turbines to the A141 is a concern. They will be a visually dominant and potentially distracting feature within the landscape at a distance of only just over 100 metres from the main highway. Furthermore, when viewed from the junction with the A605, with the backdrop of the existing larger wind farms it is considered that there is potential for a visual disharmony, with the proposed turbines being at the forefront and rotating faster than the background turbines of Coldham and Stags Holt. The need for renewable energy has been taken into consideration however, given the above points, in this instance it is not considered to be sufficient to outweigh the adverse visual impacts on the surrounding area.

In addition to the visual impacts noted above, there has been an objection from the MOD. They object as the turbines in this location, at approximately 38.4km from their ATC radar at RAF Wittering, and as such would cause unacceptable interference to this radar. They have the potential to create 'false' aircraft returns, as well as the desensitisation of the radar which in turn could result in aircraft not being detected by the radar and therefore not present to air traffic controllers. As such, as well as the location of the turbines having an adverse visual effect, the MOD also consider that the location of the turbines will have a wider safety impact.

Given the above issues the application is considered to be unacceptable in this location and as such is recommended for refusal. Other issues relating to highway and biodiversity have been highlighted as in need of further information, however given the 'in-principle' objection further clarification regarding these have not been sought.

7. CONCLUSION

- 7.1 Although the proposal is considered to accord with national regional and local planning policy in contributing to the need for renewable energy this has to be balanced with the impacts that the development would have on the local character of the surrounding area. In this instance, it is considered that the proposal, by virtue of its proximity to the A141 and the dominant visual impact on the surrounding, open landscape, would outweigh the renewable benefits of the scheme. As such, the proposal is considered to be unacceptable in this instance. The proposal is therefore recommended for refusal.

8 RECOMMENDATION

Refuse:

- 1. The proposed turbines, by virtue of their proximity to the adjacent public highway and their visual prominence within the landscape, would result in a visually dominant and incongruous feature within the landscape. The development would be out of character with the surrounding area to such an extent as to outweigh any renewable benefits that would result from the scheme. The proposal is therefore contrary to the provisions of Policies E1 and E8 of the Fenland District Wide Local Plan, 1993 and Policies CS14 and CS16 of the Fenland Local Plan Core Strategy – Submission Version September 2013 and Paragraph 98 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).**

- 2. The proposal fails to demonstrate that there will be no adverse impacts on the highway safety or the biodiversity of the site and surrounding area. As such it is contrary to the provisions of Policies E1 and E8 of the Fenland District Wide Local Plan, 1993 and Policies CS14 and CS16 of the Fenland Local Plan Core Strategy – Submission Version September 2013.**

- 3. The proposal would have an adverse effect on the MOD ATC radar based at RAF Wittering by virtue of the height and location of the turbines. This would result in Air Traffic Control safety and as such is contrary to the provisions of Policy CS14 of the Fenland Local Plan Core Strategy – Submission Version September 2013.**