

Greatworth Parish Council

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**PROPOSED WINDFARM AT SPRING FARM RIDGE,
HELMDON/GREATWORTH, NORTHAMPTONSHIRE (SOUTH NORTHANTS
COUNCIL PLANNING APPLICATION S/2010/1437/MAF)
PUBLIC INQUIRY INTO APPEAL AGAINST REFUSAL OF PLANNING
PERMISSION
APP/Z2830/A/11/2165035
STATEMENT BY NICHOLAS PEART CHAIR, GREATWORTH PARISH
COUNCIL**

Greatworth Parish Council appears before the inquiry to represent the views of the local community. We remain continually frustrated by the way that the applicant has conducted this application – from the poor environmental impact study to photomontages that lacked clarity. The applicant has continually attempted to ignore the views of the local community; the attention of the inquiry is drawn to the fact that even though all five proposed turbines fall within the Parish of Greatworth – Broadview have failed to directly address the community, only holding open meetings in other villages further away from the proposed site.

The localism agenda championed by the coalition government is designed to specifically allow local communities to have a say – and more importantly be heard – on issues that affect them. Broadview have not addressed the people of Greatworth and they have not addressed the local issues of heritage, environment and local public rights of way. For all of these reasons the inquiry should uphold the decision of the South Northants District Council and reject the appeal.

This appeal is now being heard on the grounds of the impact on the heritage assets of the area, the visual impact on the environment and the impact on the rights of way.

In considering these points we consider it imperative that the viability of the Spring Farm Ridge as a suitable location is taken into account. Without truly establishing a value the proposed development delivers it is impossible to balance the losses to the local community. The applicant continually refers to balancing the needs of the nation against the local costs, yet has not defined in any of their documentation the value the development will bring beyond “contributing to the renewable energy targets”.

While the government has signed up to targets to drive the delivery of energy from green renewable sources, and has issued Renewable Energy Certificates to encourage investment –these certificates are not tied to viability or in fact the actual ability to generate significant quantities of electricity.

In the present economic environment the country can not afford to waste valuable investment capital on schemes that are at best marginal. This is before the local cost is assessed against the proposed development.

We believe that this point alone should be enough for the inquiry to support the original decision by South Northants District Council to reject the application.

In addressing the main points for discussion at this inquiry, your attention is drawn to our original letter to South Northants District Council. In addressing the issues that are before this inquiry we would like to add -

Heritage Assets

Firstly, we support the evidence you will hear from both Helmdon and Sulgrave Parish Councils on the impact the proposed development will have on their heritage assets.

The proposed development will be visible from almost every point in Greatworth including the established conservation area to the eastern and southerly aspects.

With the Eastern side of the village directly facing the turbine sites. View 11 of the supplied photographic montages clearly shows the turbines dominating the horizon of the views from the Cemetery at St. Peters Church in Greatworth. This quiet and secluded spot offers an idyllic resting place and a valued location where members of the community share the best and worst of times, and affording them a quiet place for moments of reflection.

If this inquiry decides to overturn the decision of South Northants District Council the value of this spot will be lost forever and the impact on the village will be immeasurable.

Impact on the Environment

We would like to draw your attention to Views 9 and 10 of the photomontages supplied. These views represent how the proposed development will be visible from Helmdon Road, Greatworth. The turbines at 410 m high would dominate the horizon, sitting atop of a slight hill, totally out of scale to the environment around them.

This fact is highlighted by the row of telegraph poles that can be seen running across the image. These telegraph poles when viewed in real life often appear large and out of place in a rural setting. As you can see from this image the telegraph poles are almost insignificant in terms of size and appearance when compared to the turbines with the effect being that you almost do not even see

the poles themselves. Just imagine the effect the large 410m turbines will have on Greatworth should they be allowed to be built.

We know that the inquiry will visit the site and we ask you to remember this image when picturing the turbines and compare the physical presence of the telegraph poles with the size and scale of the proposed 410m turbines.

We are equally frustrated that in applying for retrospective planning permission for a commercial use on part of the windfarm site, the landowner is at pains to point out that the proposal will be "...a sustainable way to protect the character of the South Northamptonshire countryside.." and will ensure that the "character and beauty of the countryside remains intact". He stresses that there will be "...no significant visual impact proposed by the scheme". Yet within weeks of making this application he is party to a further planning application on his land for five 125 metre high wind turbines. Using an argument of scale to support one application and ignoring in another is hypocrisy beyond belief.

As a Parish Council we remain increasingly concerned about the wider impact on the environment of the turbines. We are dismayed at the quality of the initial environmental impact study conducted by Broadview. We understand that as a result of the further environmental studies the applicant has decided to progress this appeal on new positions for the turbines to accommodate an endangered species of bats. We have two issues with the new proposed sites, firstly we are not convinced that they really moved them far enough away from the flight path of the bats and secondly the new locations significantly impact the use of public rights of way.

Impact on Public Rights of Way

The planning application for the wind turbines at Spring Farm Ridge showed little regard for the use of the public rights of way that stretch across the site.

This has been further compounded by the new locations for the turbines that are now before this inquiry. Turbines that were already too close to both footpaths and bridleways are now closer and therefore do not allow for their continued safe public use.

The bridleways across the site are amongst the few in the area that allow for horses to be exercised safely off a main road and above walking pace. The British Horse Society has a published safe distance for acceptable use and we urge the inquiry to look at this measure and apply it to this development.

Walkers on a regular, and adhoc basis use the footpaths in the area. Additionally South Northants District Council champions "Health Walks" on the 1st and 3rd Tuesday of the month that regularly cross the site. The enjoyment of these footpaths would be reduced if the decision to reject the planning application is overturned.

The Roads around our village and specifically the B4525 are also public rights of way. Sadly in the last few months we have had a death on the road close to the site which has reminded us all of the dangers of this stretch of road. We remain concerned about the section of road from the Culworth crossroads to the turning for Greatworth approaching the site from the west.

In the autumn and the spring, when the sun is low in the sky. We are concerned that as the road sweeps through bends towards the site the two nearest turbines will provide an unacceptable distraction to drivers. Locally we are all aware of the number of “near misses” that happen every year on this stretch of road simply from speeding cars not noticing other vehicles slowing down to turn into Greatworth. We fear this will be made worse by the distraction of the turbines.

The risk that one of these near misses should turn into an actual statistic is further evidence that the inquiry should reject the appeal and uphold the decision of the local communities elected representatives.

Conclusion

As a parish we have continued to assess the proposed development on the grounds of fact and have restricted our formal correspondence with South Northants District Council to issues that affect the whole community. We uphold the decision of South Northants District Council to reject the planning application and we urge the inquiry to reach the same conclusion.

The proposed windfarm at Spring Farm will not generate enough electricity compared to other areas of the country to significantly contribute to the UK's renewable energy targets; it will not benefit the nation; it will not benefit the local community; it will not benefit the environment.

The proposed windfarm will only benefit the landowners and Broadview.

By any measure, as there are no real benefits and there are significant impacts on the local environment, heritage sites and public rights of way – we call for the inquiry to reject this appeal.