

TOWN AND COUNTRY PLANNING ACT 1990, Section 78

PINS Reference: APP/Z2830/A/11/2165035

Spring Farm Ridge Wind Farm, Helmdon, South Northamptonshire

PROOF OF EVIDENCE

OF

ALISON FARMER

BA, MLD, MLI

Landscape and Visual Effects and Cultural Heritage

Summary Proof

On behalf of

Helmdon, Stuchbury and Greatworth
Windfarm Action Group

September 2013

1. My name is Alison Farmer and I am the principal of Alison Farmer Associates. My evidence relates to landscape and visual effects and cultural heritage.

Landscape Effects

2. My assessment and review of evidence relating to landscape sensitivity has led me to conclude that parts of the Undulating Claylands landscape within the vicinity of the development site have a medium-high sensitivity to wind farm development of the scale proposed due to the wealth of features which are highly valued and which make an important contribution to landscape character and sense of place. The landscape valleys have a small to medium scale field pattern, enclosure, tranquillity, undisturbed character and historic features evocative of the medieval period. The valleys are defined by the interfluves which divide them and the skylines form an important part of the setting to historic settlements.
3. The landscape is not, in my view, 'ordinary'. Although continually evolving it has retained a predominately rural, tranquil, settled and small scale character. The turbines would not extend the legacy of human intervention or illustrate continuity but rather would break from the area's historic evolution through the introduction of new elements of a wholly different order.
4. In terms of the extent of characterising influences, I consider that a wind farm landscape will be created in the valley which surrounds the proposed development site. This is due to the nature of the topography in which the wind farm site will sit. The valley landscape and the interfluves collectively form the perceived valley unit. The turbines would occupy this valley unit as dominant elements.
5. In terms of the characterising influences on the wider landscape, I do not believe that 2.5km, or any lesser distance, is the extent of the theoretical possible local landscape with wind farm sub type and that beyond this the turbines would be only apparent and their characterising effects subordinate to the original baseline landscape. Distance cannot be the only factor which affects the extent to which turbines have a characterising effect. Topography, elevation and perceptions must all play a part too. To the north of Sulgrave the turbines would continue to have an influence on landscape character due to the elevation/orientation of the landscape, the scale and prominence of the turbines on the skyline and the rural character of the area. The landscape would

be perceived as less rural, less timeless; perceptions of scale and distance would be altered and the prominence of Sulgrave church as a landmark would be undermined.

6. The landscape does not, in my view, have the capacity to accept the proposed development without adverse effect on character. I consider that the impacts on the historic environment would also be significant because many of the features which contribute to local character are visually subtle and the addition of large scale features would diminish their perceived contribution to local sense of place.

Cultural Heritage Assets

7. In assessing impacts on cultural heritage assets I have considered relevant policy, and published guidance by English Heritage and have reviewed the indirect impacts on designated and undesignated heritage assets.
8. My assessment of the heritage assets within 4km of the proposed development has concluded that for the following assets the effects on their significance would be clearly discernible:
 - Castle Hill Ringwork, Sulgrave;
 - Sulgrave Church;
 - Sulgrave Conservation Area;
 - Helmdon Viaduct;
 - Priory Farm and barn, Helmdon;
 - Stuchbury Earthworks;
 - Greatworth Hall;
 - Church of St Peter, Greatworth;
 - Astwell Castle.
9. In the case of Sulgrave Conservation Area I consider this asset to be of high sensitivity. The proposed development would intrude into its setting and adversely affect its significance as set out in the Conservation Area Appraisal. In relation to Stuchbury Earthworks (currently an undesignated heritage asset), it is my professional opinion, having undertaken a review of the evidence, that the site is demonstrably of equivalent significance to scheduled monuments. The setting of this site contributes greatly to its

significance and would be adversely affected due to the scale and proximity of the proposed development.

10. For Sulgrave Conservation Area and Stuchbury Earthworks the effects on significance would be considerable and would constitute substantial harm.
11. For the other assets noted above the effects would be significant and unacceptable, and collectively should carry great weight. In my view the number of assets significantly affected should be considered as a cumulative impact against the scheme.
12. In terms of degree of fit I do not consider the proposed scheme to relate well to the grain and scale of the surrounding landscape. Nor do I consider that any harm has been minimised, in part because of the number and scale of the turbines proposed for this constrained site.
13. I entirely accept that the planning permission sought in this case is for 25 years and that the scheme is capable of being reversed. However I do not consider it to be “transient” in the ordinary meaning of that word as being brief or momentary, even in the context of the historic environment.

Visual Effects and Amenity

14. In relation to the effects of the development on visual amenity I have focused on the following properties:
 - Stuchbury Hall Farm;
 - Grange Farm;
 - Astral Row/Helmdon Road, Greatworth;
 - Manor Barn, No 66 and Manor Farm, Church Street, Helmdon.
15. The proposed development would, in my view, have a substantial adverse effect on the visual amenity and living conditions of Stuchbury Hall Farm and holding, as a result of the scale and proximity of the turbines, such that they would appear pervasive and dominating. Notable adverse effects on visual amenity and living conditions of Grange Farm, Astral Row and Church Street, Helmdon would also be felt. The development would bring unacceptable harm to the occupiers of these properties also.

16. Finally, in terms of the historic and natural landscape, the enjoyment of the area by people engaged in outdoor recreation would be substantially diminished, especially within the Helmdon Valley where the development is proposed and where people currently walk and ride.