

HSGWAG/AF/1.5

TOWN AND COUNTRY PLANNING ACT 1990, Section 78

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

Spring Farm Ridge Wind Farm, Helmdon, South Northamptonshire

REBUTTAL PROOF OF EVIDENCE

OF

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Landscape and Visual Effects and Cultural Heritage

On behalf of

Helmdon, Stuchbury and Greatworth
Windfarm Action Group

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Introduction

1. This rebuttal proof of evidence has been prepared in response to the evidence of Mr Andrew Brown and Mr Jeff Stevenson for the Appellant in relation to cultural heritage matters and landscape and visual effects respectively. Paragraph numbers relate to their evidence unless otherwise stated. I have not responded to all matters raised in the Appellant's evidence, only where I consider that it would assist the Inspector, and so where I have not commented it should not be assumed that I agree with the Appellant's witnesses. I have reviewed the evidence from the Appellant and South Northants Council and re-visited my own evidence, but there is nothing which has caused me to change the opinions and conclusions set out in my proof of evidence.
2. The evidence I set out in this rebuttal proof is given in accordance with the guidance of the Landscape Institute. I confirm that the opinions expressed are my true and professional opinions.

Issues Raised in Mr Andrew Brown's Evidence (BEL/ANB/2)

Substantial Harm (para 3.10)

3. Mr Brown explains in para 3.10 that in his view substantial harm equals a major impact in EIA terms. In his evidence he does not set out how he has concluded whether effects on the significance of heritage assets are substantial or not. It is assumed that he has utilised the table set out in the ES (table 8.1) to determine the effects in EIA terms and anything less than a major effect is considered to be less than substantial in NPPF terms. I address this myself in para 64 of my proof of evidence and consider this in more detail below in relation to the ES table 8.1 which combines an understanding of heritage asset sensitivity with magnitude of change to determine the level of significance of effect.
4. In the ES, the importance of the asset appears to have been used to determine sensitivity (para 8.6.1 and table 8.1). This cannot be correct. Sensitivity, and particularly sensitivity in relation to setting impacts, is not solely determined by the importance attributed to an asset. CD 10.1, page 22, states *"All heritage assets are not of equal importance and the contribution made by their setting to their significance also varies. Nor do all settings have the same capacity to accommodate change without*

harm to the significance of the asset. This capacity may vary between designated assets of the same grade or of the same type...it can also depend on the location of the asset...[which]...may increase the sensitivity of the setting (i.e. the capacity of the setting to accommodate change without harm to the heritage asset's significance)". The designation of a heritage asset and therefore its importance reflects the weight to be given to it in policy terms (see my proof para 52).

5. In using the ES table 8.1, Mr Brown's approach is such that it would never be possible for there to be substantial harm to a conservation area or undesignated heritage asset for example, even if the magnitude of change to the significance of the asset is regarded as major adverse. In my view a medium magnitude of change on setting, to an asset/setting which is regarded as having high sensitivity, is likely to result in a moderate/major effect and one which could be regarded as causing substantial harm. Similarly, a high magnitude of change on the setting of an asset which is regarded as having a medium sensitivity, is also likely to result in a moderate/major effect and one which could be regarded as causing substantial harm.
6. When assessing the effects of a development on the setting of heritage assets, one first needs to understand the significance of an asset through consideration of the values attached to it. Understanding enables the assessor to determine the role of the setting in contributing to the significance and therefore the sensitivity of the setting and asset to the proposed development. Mr Brown appears to have utilised the conclusions reached in the ES through the use of the flawed table in 8.1 and then substituted 'not substantial harm' in his evidence on the basis that all impacts determined in the ES were moderate or less. If one accepts that the table in the ES is flawed and/or one accepts that the importance/designation of an asset is not the only aspect which should determine sensitivity and particularly sensitivity of setting, then Mr Brown's conclusions cannot be relied upon.
7. I have reviewed the recent judgement in the Bedford BC v Nuon case, and the consultation draft national planning practice guidance website on conserving and enhancing the historic environment (although as a consultation draft document I only give the latter limited weight). I consider that there is nothing there which is materially different from the approach taken in my proof of evidence and that my conclusions still stand.

HS2 (paras 6.06 and 6.12)

8. Mr Brown has made reference to the proposals for HS2 to the south of the wind farm site in his assessment of impacts on heritage assets apparently to support a point that HS2 would effectively form part of the baseline circumstances in which the impacts of the wind farm proposal should be assessed. Whilst I agree that it is important to be mindful of the HS2 development, and to consider it as part of a cautious approach in assessing the 'in combination' impacts with the wind farm development (as I have in conducting my own assessment), I do not believe that the proposals for HS2 are sufficiently firmed-up or certain for them to be considered as part of the baseline conditions or even assessment. This is in accordance with the Guidance on Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (CD 8.15, para 7.13 and 7.14). Even if I am wrong in this, the nature of the HS2 proposals to the south of the wind farm development would be substantially in cutting and tunnel (as noted by Mr Brown paras 6.06 and 6.12) and in CD 14.1. In addition it is likely that Phase 1 of HS2 would not start operating until 2026, and although construction would start prior to this, it is unlikely that HS2 would overlap entirely with the 25 year lifespan of the wind farm.

Assessment of Effects on Heritage Assets Generally

9. Mr Brown in his evidence sets out his views on the effects on a number of heritage assets. He does not discuss all heritage assets listed in the ES (page 151) as experiencing significant effects. No changes to the conclusions reached in the ES were made in the FEI. It is therefore not clear if Mr Brown continues to hold the view that there are significant effects on listed buildings at Helmdon, Sulgrave Bowl Barrow and Marston Hill Farmhouse.
10. Mr Brown in his assessment of effects on heritage assets has taken into account a number of factors which, whilst relevant, do not in my view demonstrate limited effects on cultural heritage assets, as he appears to imply. These are set out below:
11. **Visual Dominance (paras 6.07, 6.13, 6.24, 6.29).** It is not the case that wind turbines need to be visually dominant in views for there to be an adverse effect. Turbines which are prominent are known to give rise to characterising effects. Such characterising effects can alter the setting of a heritage asset and may therefore have an adverse effect on the significance of the asset. The vertical height of the turbines is significantly larger than most heritage assets and their landscape context and their resulting visual dominance is particularly important in relatively close proximity impacts on setting and significance.

12. **Scale of the proposed development is relatively limited (consisting of five turbines) (paras 6.07, 6.13, 6.23, 6.29, 6.57 and 6.61).** Whilst it is true that in this instance there are five turbines, as opposed to say ten or more, the number of turbines is not the only consideration of scale - angle and orientation of views can also effect the extent or scale of development in views.
13. **Turbines would not surround the heritage asset (paras 6.07, 6.13, 6.29, 6.57 and 6.61).** Whilst this may be factually correct it is wrong to conclude that as a result the effects of the proposed development on the significance of a heritage asset is limited or minimal. A development does not need to surround a heritage asset for there to be substantial harm. The situation in each case needs more sophisticated consideration than that.
14. **Agricultural land surrounding a heritage asset would remain unaltered (paras 6.08, 6.19, 6.24, 6.30, 6.45, 6.58 and 6.61).** Just because there is no physical alteration in terms of land use as a result of a proposed development does not mean that the impacts are limited. The perceived difference in landscape setting and the effects that this has on appreciation of significance are also relevant. The effects of a proposed wind farm development on the rural setting of a heritage asset may affect historic function and key views as well as tranquillity, ruralness, scale, and distance for example, each of which may be important to the significance of the asset. It is wrong therefore to assume that the continuation of rural land use means there is no or limited adverse effect.
15. **No confusion between the heritage asset and the turbines (para 6.24, 6.29, and 6.35).** Confusion between a heritage asset and turbines is not the test as to whether the proposed development effects the significance of a heritage asset. This does not explain fully how the development may affect the values associated with an asset and its appreciation. The approach adopted by Mr Brown would imply that impacts only arise where a proposed development is similar in character to that of the heritage asset. This cannot be the case. Alterations and extensions to listed buildings for example may be similar to or contrasting in character but in both cases the 'degree of fit' in terms of location, character/materials and form/scale are the determining factors when assessing impacts on the significance of the heritage asset. In other words it is how the old and the new read together not the propensity for visual confusion. It would never be the

case that a wind turbine could be confused for a heritage asset, or vice versa, and yet the planning practice guidance for renewables states “depending on their scale, design and prominence a wind turbine within the setting of a heritage asset may cause substantial harm to the significance of the asset” (CD 2.5, para 34).

Effects on Greatworth Church (paras 6.17-6.19)

16. In para 6.16 Mr Brown notes the relationship between and the significance of the church and the headstones in the graveyard. He also notes in para 6.17 that the graveyard is an important part of the setting of the church and that it abuts agricultural land. The church, headstones and Conservation Area have overlapping settings in this instance. However, Mr Brown concludes that the adjacent agricultural land makes little contribution to the significance of the church because of mature trees which restrict views and appreciation of the open countryside. Whilst this may be true to a degree, it is not the appreciation of the open countryside which is important in this case but rather the role of the rural countryside adjacent to the churchyard which contributes to the perceived tranquillity in the churchyard as a quiet place for moments of reflection. In addition guidance on assessing impacts on heritage assets cautions the over-reliance on vegetation to screen views on the basis that it could be removed during the duration of the development (EH The Setting of Heritage Assets, page 22).
17. The tranquillity experienced in the graveyard contributes to the historic significance of the church and headstones and to their appreciation as set out in my proof of evidence (para 122). Mr Brown acknowledges that the turbines would be '*clearly seen in the western end of the graveyard*' but it is notable that in his assessment of effects (para 6.19) he does not mention tranquillity despite the conclusions reached by Inspector Fieldhouse at the last inquiry in relation to the churchyard (CD6.16 para 47).

Effects on Sulgrave Conservation Area (paras 6.26-6.31)

18. Mr Brown considers Sulgrave to be typical of small agricultural settlements within this part of the country. Whilst this may be true at a very general level, Sulgrave is not typical in terms of the collection of heritage assets it contains which contribute to the unique character and appearance of the village and which form a highly significant group. Mr Brown considers the Conservation Area to be of moderate sensitivity; I disagree and consider it to be of high sensitivity for the reasons set out in para 4 above and para 80 in my proof of evidence.

19. As noted in my proof of evidence, the prominent presence of the turbines on the skyline within the Sulgrave valley, which forms the setting to the village, would alter perceptions of tranquillity, ruralness, scale and distance. These effects would diminish the appreciation of the historic significance of the Conservation Area and the heritage assets it contains.

Effects on Stuchbury Earthworks (paras 6.55-58)

20. Mr Brown considers that the earthworks are of regional interest. I have set out in my proof of evidence that there is a very strong possibility the site is of national importance and likely to be scheduled. English Heritage have confirmed that they still intend to assess the site for scheduling and that this is now due to take place in November 2013. Nevertheless, even if the site is of regional importance, this importance should not be confused with the sensitivity of the site to the proposed development and therefore the likely effects of the proposed development on the significance of the asset, which I consider to be very great.
21. Mr Brown in para 6.56 states that the nature of the earthworks at Stuchbury have little visible presence and therefore the contribution of setting to significance is very limited. However EH guidance on the assessment of impacts on the setting of heritage assets states that often where heritage assets are more subtle in character the role setting plays in their significance can be all the more important (CD 10.1, page 8). I consider the setting of the Stuchbury Earthworks to play a significant role in contributing to the significance of the asset and its appreciation as set out in my proof of evidence (paras 104 and 113).
22. In para 6.57 Mr Brown states that the turbines would all be located to the south; this is the primary direction of views from the earthworks due to their location on south-facing slopes. Given the landform, the views out from the earthworks are primarily directed towards the site of the turbines. This is therefore an important consideration. Similarly, in para 6.58 Mr Brown concludes that the agricultural land around the earthworks will remain unaltered (albeit with the addition of five large new elements). Whilst the land may be little altered physically, the evidence of Mr Stevenson concludes that the landscape will become a 'wind farm landscape' and therefore can hardly be considered as unaltered. Mr Brown does not consider the effect of the five new elements on the perceived landscape character and the extent to which this affects significance and appreciation of the asset.

Effects on Helmdon Viaduct (paras 6.59-61)

23. Mr Brown considers that it is the disused railway lines which primarily contribute to the significance of this heritage asset. I disagree, as set out in my proof (paras 96 and 97), where I indicate how the landscape setting of the asset also contributes to the asset's significance and how this is likely to be altered by the proposed development. Again, the evidence of Mr Stevenson concludes that the landscape will become a 'wind farm landscape' and therefore can hardly be considered as unaltered.
24. It is my understanding that access to the Viaduct is likely to improve in future. The viaduct and surrounding land has recently been purchased by the Tims family at Stuchbury Hall Farm. It is their intention to include this newly acquired land within higher level stewardship and to improve public access.

Issues Raised in Mr Jeffrey Stevenson's Evidence (BEL/JS/2)**Meaning of valued landscape (paras 3.2-34, 4.47 and 9.7)**

25. Mr Stevenson makes reference in para 3.2 to 'valued landscapes' in the NPPF (para 109) and implies that this term does not apply to the Spring Farm Ridge area because the landscape is only valued by the local community. I disagree. Whilst I accept that the landscape affected by the Spring Farm Ridge wind farm proposal is not an internationally, nationally or locally designated landscape, I consider that it nonetheless is of significant value, particularly for its cultural heritage and rural tranquillity. It may be an undesignated landscape but it contains features which are recognised as having national value and which significantly contribute to local distinctiveness. In my view it is appropriate for the term 'valued landscape' in the NPPF paragraph 109 to be applied to the landscape at Spring Farm Ridge.
26. The map referred to by Mr Stevenson in his paragraph 3.4 does not in my view indicate that the proposed site is completely unconstrained. Firstly the map in CD 4.9 does not show all national and local designations, for example listed buildings are not mapped. Secondly, as I set out in my evidence, the scheduling of monuments is discretionary and therefore there may be archaeological sites of equivalent importance which are not designated and would therefore not appear on the map. It is a simplistic approach to conclude that the Spring Farm Ridge site is unconstrained based simply on the contents of the map, or to conclude, as Mr Stevenson does in his para 4.47, that the area is not special in landscape terms.

27. In landscape and visual impact assessment the value of the landscape is relevant to assessing the effects of development because it forms part of the assessment of landscape sensitivity (as noted in Mr Stevenson's evidence table 4.2) as well as determining the weight to be given in policy terms. A landscape which is undesignated may still be particularly sensitive to a proposed development.

Effects of HS2 (paras 3.16, 4.5 and 4.67)

28. Mr Stevenson notes the plans for HS2 to the south of the Spring Farm Ridge wind farm proposal in a number of places in his proof. I do not agree that there is a sense of 'developed countryside' in the vicinity of the proposed wind farm nor do I consider that HS2, if it goes ahead, is likely to result in a reinforcement of developed countryside not least because of the mitigation (cutting and tunnel) which is proposed (CD 14.1, drawing number C222-ATK-CV-DPL-020-000012). HS2 is unlikely to have any significant landscape effect on the Helmdon Valley in which the proposed wind farm would sit. As stated in para 8 above, I do not consider HS2 to be sufficiently advanced to form part of the baseline assessment for the Spring Farm Ridge proposal.

Extent of Influence of wind farm on landscape character (paras 4.15, 4.27, 4.43 and 4.46)

29. Mr Stevenson describes the extent of characterising influence in para 4.28. I do not consider this description to be right as it appears not to take into account the variation in topography which, as I have explained in my proof of evidence, influences effects. For example, it is unclear why Mr Stevenson considers the characterising effects to extend towards Sulgrave but not to extend to the north of the village. Arguably the characterising effects of the turbines are in fact more evident to the north of the village than they are to the south. Similarly, in views to the east, HSGWAG photomontages SV5 and SV6 illustrate the characterising effects of the proposed development on the south side of Helmdon. It is unclear why Mr Stevenson considers the characterising effects of the proposed development to be limited to the west of Helmdon village. Further, Mr Stevenson in para 4.43 confirms that there would be moderate/major level of effect (significant in character terms) up to around 2.5km from the turbines. This does not correlate with his assessment of characterising effects described in his para 4.28.

Historic landscape (paras 4.61-4.68 and 4.73)

30. Mr Stevenson in para 4.64 notes that the HLCA describes the historic character area in which the proposed development would sit as having been significantly modified in the

19th century and he concludes that the area is not an ancient landscape. He goes on in para 4.66 to state that there are no relic landscapes which would be significantly affected by the proposed development and refers to Mr Brown's evidence about Stuchbury Earthworks. However, the HLCA describes the fieldscapes in this character area (page 38) as including enclosed fields which remain untouched by 19th century agricultural activity and may be of some antiquity. On page 40 it describes the Stuchbury Open Field remains with the DMV (deserted medieval village) as a 'relic landscape'.

31. In para 4.67 Mr Stevenson draws attention to other changes which he considers are likely to alter the historic pattern of the area. However, as noted above, HS2 is likely to be in a cutting/tunnel to the south of the Spring Farm Ridge site and would not in any event impact on the historic patterns found within the Helmdon valley where the turbines would be located. HS2 would not in my view increase perceptions of developed countryside in this location.
32. I disagree with the conclusions reached in para 4.68 in relation to the Helmdon Valley and Stuchbury Earthworks for the reasons set out in my proof of evidence.
33. I note in paragraph 4.73 that it is acknowledged that the 5m wide tracks associated with the wind farm development would be retained, after decommissioning.

Conclusions on landscape effects (paras 9.4, 9.16, 9.17 and 9.34)

34. It is not clear how Mr Stevenson reaches his conclusions on landscape effects. For example he states in para 9.4 that the wind farm would not significantly affect the tranquillity of the landscape and yet there appears to be no assessment of the tranquillity of the area (see table 4.2 page 19).
35. In para 9.16 it is concluded that the wind farm proposal would be consistent with the spirit of an open, wind-swept, reasonably exposed, medium-large scale, reasonably simple farmed landscape. I do not agree that this description of landscape applies to the landscape significantly affected by the wind farm proposal. The segregation of the landscape into interfluves and valleys does not reflect the perception of the landscape in the real world, where the two are read together and comprise a single valley unit. The description provided in para 9.16 only really applies to longer distance views from elevated ridges where the more intermediate intervening valley landscapes are not

perceived in the same way and where views are much broader and a large sky is more apparent.

36. The turbines would not in my opinion appear as a controlled, reasonably balanced, stable grouping when seen from the east (HSGWAG Photomontages SV5 and SV6). I do not believe that the receiving landscape possesses the principal contemporary landscape attributes which lend it the ability to be more accommodating rather than less accommodating as confirmed by the detailed sensitivity assessment carried out by LUC and as found in my own assessment of the area.
37. Mr Stevenson accepts that there are characterising effects and adverse harm on landscape character up to 2.5km from the proposed development but concludes in para 9.34 that the change would not be unacceptably harmful because it is localised and the landscape is valued only locally. This cannot be right. Localised impacts can still be regarded as unacceptable depending on the nature of the impacts, which in this case include significant effects on character, visual and residential amenity, and the historic environment.

Use of public rights of way and effects on use (paras 6.9-6.11 and 6.15)

38. It is my understanding that the majority of people who use the public rights of way which cross the appeal site are undertaking short, local, recreational, circular walks. This is confirmed by Mr Stevenson in his paragraphs 6.9-6.11. It is precisely because these routes are used in this way that the proposed development will have such a profound effect on people's enjoyment of them. Had these routes been used primarily as part of longer distance routes, or for functional reasons to get from A to B, then the effects on use could perhaps be less significant.

Tranquillity (paras 8.7 and 8.8)

39. Mr Stevenson's description of tranquillity in the vicinity of the site and the influence of the Tanks-a-Lot activity does not accord with my own experience of the area from my site visits or indeed information provided to me by those who live and walk in the area. Having reviewed the Officer's report to committee relating to the retrospective planning application for Tanks-a-Lot, it appears that no concern had been raised in the past regarding noise from activity on the site save for shooting, which was restricted by condition. Noise from Tanks-a-Lot activity, when it does occur, is therefore not a new noise and is intermittent.

40. Mr Stevenson's assessment of tranquillity, as I have noted above, is limited. Research into what contributes to and detracts from tranquillity has become more widely understood over recent years. Tranquillity is known to be enhanced by the presence of open spaces, dark star-strewn skies and natural features such as woodland, presence of water, wildlife and natural sounds such as birdsong. Factors known to undermine tranquillity are overt signs of large scale development (including movement), noise and light pollution, inappropriate recreational activity and large numbers of people.