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TOWN AND COUNTRY PLANNING ACT 1990

APPEAL BY BROADVIEW ENERGY DEVELOPMENTS LTD AGAINST THE REFUSAL TO GRANT PLANNING PERMISSION FOR THE CONSTRUCTION, OPERATION AND DECOMMISSIONING OF A WIND FARM COMPRISING 5 WIND TURBINE GENERATORS AND ASSOCIATED INFRASTRUCTURE ON LAND AT SPRING FARM RIDGE, NORTH OF WELSH LANE BETWEEN GREATWORTH AND HELMDON

PROOF OF EVIDENCE - SUMMARY

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ON BEHALF OF BROADVIEW ENERGY DEVELOPMENTS LTD

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

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SUMMARY PROOF OF EVIDENCE

1. Introduction

- 1.1. My name is Jeffrey Stevenson and my qualifications and experience are set out in my main proof of evidence and appendices.
- 1.2. In essence, I do not consider that the objections raised are such that the proposed development should be rejected on landscape and visual grounds.
- 1.3. For those adversely disposed to the proposed wind farm, the scheme will be regarded as altering the attributes of a part of the landscape through the addition of elements which some regard as unwelcome industrial intrusions which, in another context, were referred to as 'monstrous metallic megafauna'. As such, they will consider there to be a significant adverse effect upon landscape character and local amenity with local landscape value and quality being unacceptably compromised.
- 1.4. In both my consideration of the proposed development in individual and cumulative terms and in setting out my evidence, I have approached the matter dispassionately and as objectively as possible i.e. applying professionally informed subjectivity alongside those matters which can be addressed objectively.

Local Landscape Character

- 1.5. Landscape character will be subject to significant effects in the local context but the landscape is not rare or unique in terms of landscape type. Furthermore, the area over which a significant character effect would be felt is limited and relatively small in extent when considered at the District/County scale. The site does not fall within any part of the landscape covered by designation at any level. In my main proof of evidence, I draw attention to words expressed in the Current Landscape Character Assessment for Northamptonshire with respect to the Undulating Claylands and consider that, at the Northamptonshire scale, this landscape type is of moderate scenic quality and generally unremarkable.
- 1.6. At the District scale, by and large the same comment applies. I acknowledge that there are pockets where there is a greater degree of intimacy and attractiveness but, notwithstanding, it remains pleasant rather than beautiful – an attribute which does not render a potential wind farm development location unacceptable. I also demonstrate why, other than in the highly local context, this is not considered to be a special landscape.
- 1.7. I accept that there is a degree of logic in that if landscape character is to be protected and enhanced, then that which changes it does not 'protect' it and therefore must be contrary to the intention. This is usually interpreted as 'change = adverse' and, strictly speaking, regarded as 'harmful'. However, I consider that if harm is deemed then it is not unacceptable harm. The wind farm would be located in a medium-large scale, open, partly exposed

landscape (less exposed and more intimate lower down and more exposed at the upper levels). For the most part, the wind farm would be seen in this context under a large, sometimes over-arching sky without significantly or unacceptably affecting the tranquillity of the landscape. Some might argue that the wind farm would industrialise the landscape but I do not consider that the term is usefully applied to this proposal and I explain why in my main proof of evidence.

1.8. Furthermore, as guided by Mr Bell, I am aware of the National Planning Policy Framework (Core Doc 2.1) and that there is a presumption in favour of sustainable development bearing in mind the core principles set out in paragraph 17 of the Framework. I am also aware that the NPPF indicates at paragraphs 6 & 7 that the purpose of planning is to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development which is founded on three roles one of which is 'environmental': *'contributing to protecting and enhancing our natural, built and historic environment; and, as part of this, helping to improve biodiversity, use natural resources prudently, minimise waste and pollution, and mitigate and adapt to climate change including moving to a low carbon economy.'* In effect, the deployment of wind turbines as a means of tackling climate change is a vehicle for moving towards a more sustainable society.

1.9. Deploying such development brings a tension in other directions since landscape character and visual amenity will be affected and a proportion of society will inevitably regard this as eroding the sustainability of their way of life – essentially through the effect of change with respect to visual amenity and, frequently, private visual amenity. The tension between the two is ultimately a matter for the 'planning balance' and Mr Bell. Further guidance is provided in NPPF paragraph 109: *'The planning system should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by: protecting and enhancing valued landscapes....'*

1.10. As previously indicated, concerning the desire to protect and enhance 'valued landscapes', paras 113 – 115 set out what helps us to secure a clear understanding of what is meant and how levels of protection should be commensurate with the hierarchy of designation. It is reasonable to conclude that the Spring Farm Ridge environment, however highly valued informally in the vicinity, would not fit within the NPPF classification of a highly valued landscape.

Is there anything over and above what might 'normally' be expected with wind farm development in the countryside which could serve as a 'show stopper'?

1.11. I have asked myself the above question. I have paid attention to recreational amenity enjoyed within the contemporary landscape. I am aware that the Council and others have expressed concerns with regard to cultural heritage matters – the remit of Andrew Brown.

1.12. I have walked parts of a number of the public rights of way in the area – not just those on site. I agree that there will be significant visual effects arising and that some walkers will pass within what I have termed the wind farm

landscape where the turbines will be dominant. I also agree that some may find the experience disturbing over those sections of the public rights of way where they would be in close proximity to the turbines whilst others will find the experience exhilarating.

- 1.13. What I do not believe is that the effect with respect to local recreational amenity between Greatworth, Sulgrave and Helmdon should be determinative in landscape and amenity terms.
- 1.14. It must be appreciated however that, notwithstanding landscape and visual effects may be deemed significant and even harmful, it is accepted that they do not have to be rendered harmless to be acceptable – a position endorsed by Natural England.
- 1.15. When and where seen, I consider that the proposed Spring Farm Ridge Wind Farm would be read as consistent with the spirit of an open, wind-swept, reasonably exposed, medium-large scale (and reasonably ‘sheltered’ where the landscape is smaller scale and of lesser ‘sensitivity’, reasonably simple, farmed landscape under what appears to be, in many places, a large sky.
- 1.16. This landscape possesses the principal contemporary landscape attributes which lend it the ability to be more accommodating than less accommodating to wind farm development without unacceptable large-scale change to character at both the District and broader scale. The turbines would appear as a controlled, reasonably balanced, stable grouping which would be congruent with the landscape and not unacceptable in terms of proximity to residential properties.
- 1.17. The spacing between the turbines would be such as to give rise to a reasonably rhythmic and coherent pattern rather than a disjointed, fragmented pattern on the one hand or an overly constrained clashing image on the other. Although theoretically dominant when close by (up to c800m) and prominent farther afield up to c2 km+ or thereabouts, they would not look out of place.
- 1.18. Locally significant effects (defined as the general limit where the wind farm would give rise to a localised landscape sub-type) would theoretically occur within the range of up to c1.5 km – 2.5 km from the turbines.
- 1.19. Although strongly influenced by it, the wider local landscape would not be transformed by the Spring Farm Ridge Wind Farm. Its broader underlying baseline character would not be compromised. As such, it is considered that the landscape at the broader scale is sufficiently robust to be able to accommodate the proposed scheme without unacceptable adverse effect.
- 1.20. With the Spring Farm Ridge proposal, there would be a partial, localised change in the composition of the landscape and, with it, a modification (in some cases a substantial modification) in some of the views obtained from roads, tracks, public rights of way and a number of residential

properties when viewing in the direction of the wind farm. Whilst a section of the public would consider this adverse, I believe that the change would not be incompatible with the contemporary context and not unacceptably harmful in amenity terms.

- 1.21. Concerning the Spring Farm Ridge scheme, no especially valued element, pattern or combination of patterns within the contemporary landscape would be unacceptably and irrevocably/ indefinitely harmed.
- 1.22. I have given careful consideration to the potential effect of the proposal with respect to recreational amenity and the enjoyment of views in the local and wider landscape. I have come to the conclusion that, whether passing through the local and/or wider environment or enjoying local facilities, the visual effects of the wind farm would not unacceptably compromise the experience and enjoyment of the landscape and the recreation it provides and this applies also to the experiences to be gained at Sulgrave Manor.
- 1.23. I have given considerable thought to residents who enjoy their homes and gardens and who leave their property to go about their daily business. In so doing, they pass through a range of landscape contexts, whether by car, bus, cycle or when using local rights of way. Adopting the adverse stance, I cannot come to the conclusion that the proposal should not be part of that broader experience of the environment that residents and visitors, who may pass through the area, would encounter.
- 1.24. So far as I have been able, I have considered a broad range of residential locations (the properties comprising both the house and the associated external amenity space). But I cannot come to the conclusion that from any of them - including the closest to the proposed turbines - that such visual and landscape harm, if that is what is deemed to arise, would prove unacceptable in terms of living conditions whether in respect of the enjoyment of residential amenity and/or local recreational amenity (the latter being enjoyed by both residents and visitors – see above) as a result of the deployment of the turbines.
- 1.25. The proposal would result in an alteration to the environment whose attributes could quickly be substantially recovered through rapid decommissioning and site restoration. Judgements concerning significant effects should be tempered in that light. Whilst influential for their lifetime or for any period that they may be in operation, visual and landscape effects arising from the proposed wind farms, whether regarded as adverse or positive, can be reversed. The landscape would not be destroyed or be subject to significant effects of indefinite duration.
- 1.26. Natural England do not object to this proposal on landscape and/or visual amenity grounds.
- 1.27. Change in views obtainable is not determinative. Change in landscape character is not determinative. Harm to visual amenity is not determinative. Harm to landscape character is not determinative.

Significant does not equate to adverse. Adverse does not equate to unacceptable. Even significantly adverse (when considered solely within the visual and landscape 'silo') may not be so when considered in the round and when placed in the broader planning balance.

- 1.28. I believe that the proposed wind farm, if consented and constructed, will be welcomed and perceived positively by a substantial proportion of those who encounter it. However, I recognise that a section of the public will perceive harm, a high proportion of whom is likely to live locally and who will experience the wind farm on a daily basis and who will consider their private residential amenity to be impaired rendering their properties less pleasant places in which to live.
- 1.29. However, I do not believe that such local landscape character change as would occur would be unacceptably harmful to the broader perception of character bearing in mind the localised nature of the significant change and the scope to assimilate wind energy development deriving from the scale of the landscape; its open, wind-swept, relatively exposed atmosphere; and the skies under which it would sit and bearing in mind the other attributes which I have addressed in Table 3.1 of my main proof of evidence.
- 1.30. There is no question whether highly localised significant effects would arise but, with respect to perceptions of landscape character and visual amenity at the local level, I do not consider such effects to be unacceptable and therefore determinative.

Inspector Fieldhouse's Decision

- 1.31. I recognise that this Inquiry is the result of a High Court Challenge which has to do with determining the appeal in accordance with the Development Plan unless material conditions indicate otherwise. I cannot helpfully comment on emissions benefits or the planning balance. However I can state plainly that, in her decision, I consider Inspector Fieldhouse to have identified and considered in detail all relevant landscape and visual amenity matters – from landscape character and recreational amenity at the broad scale down to the field by field level; and from the residential amenity perspective visiting and giving detailed consideration to all those properties to which she was invited as well as appraising others in close proximity which were drawn to her attention. It was clear that she had visited ES viewpoints unaccompanied as well as accompanied as well as objector viewpoints. I do not believe that anything of landscape or visual amenity relevance to her decision was missed.

Conclusion

- 1.32. I therefore return to my conclusion which is I believe, that in landscape and visual terms, planning permission can be safely granted for the Spring Farm Ridge proposal.