

September 2013

Town and Country Planning Act 1990, Section 78

Town and Country Planning (Inquiry Procedure) (England) Rules 2000

Proposed Wind Farm at Spring Farm Ridge, land to the north of Welsh Lane between Greatworth and Helmdon, Northamptonshire

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

LPA Ref: S/2010/1437/MAF

Appeal by Broadview Energy Developments Limited against refusal of planning application by South Northamptonshire District Council ("the Council") for the installation of five wind turbines, plus associated infrastructure at Spring Farm Ridge, land to the north of Welsh Lane between Greatworth and Helmdon.

Proof of Evidence in respect of landscape and visual effects

Appendix 2.2: Summary Proof of Evidence

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On behalf of

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1. SUMMARY PROOF OF EVIDENCE

Introduction

- 1.1. My evidence considers the landscape and visual effects arising from the proposed wind turbine development at Spring Farm Ridge.
- 1.2. I recognise that all commercial wind turbine schemes will have effects on the landscape character and visual amenity in the immediate vicinity of the development site due to the size and scale of structures introduced. However, my evidence focusses on showing how the landscape of this rural part of South Northamptonshire, notably the tranquil valley at Stuchbury, and the way that it is experienced, means that it does not have the capacity to accommodate change of the scale proposed. This is an area with a subtle rural character - great care needs to be given to large scale infrastructure to ensure that it is located appropriately within such a landscape. The need to be sensitive to site and local landscape context is emphasised throughout recent government guidance.
- 1.3. In my evidence I show how the area around Spring Farm Ridge and the Helmdon valley is a cherished and sensitive, tranquil rural landscape in the context of South Northamptonshire. It is highly valued locally and provides an important local amenity and is not appropriate for the location of the proposed development. While being in favour of renewable energy, I believe that this is an example of the wrong development in the wrong location.

Landscape

- 1.4. There will be significant adverse effects on landscape character relating to the particular sensitivities of this part of rural South Northamptonshire. I conclude that the landscape does not have capacity to accept such a change without a fundamentally adverse (harmful) effect on character. I do not agree with the conclusion of the LVIA (*para. 7.1.6*) that the "*proposal will relate well to local landscape character and respect the scale and composition of the landscape*". Five structures of 125m height, with moving blades are not simply additive; they remove an understanding and experience of the sense of place. They

do not relate to the grain and scale of this modestly scaled valley landscape for the following reasons:

- It is part of an enclosed, intimate valley unit with undulating valley sides – it is not a large scale or vast landscape;
- The turbines are located on the upper slopes and crest of a minor valley such that they will appear out of scale and overbearing in this subtle valley landscape - it is not an exposed open plateau as suggested by the LVIA. The interfluves form a very narrow ridge between valleys and as such are a prominent skyline over the local area;
- This is an intricate, complex landscape, with hedgerows crossing the undulating valley site enclosing medium sized irregular fields. The minor water course, areas of pasture, sunken lane and medieval earthworks adjacent to the site all add to the interest and complexity of this landscape. It is by no means a regular, simple or linear landscape.
- The landscape has a very strong time depth and resonant historic character – the strong historic and cultural associations are visible in the form of earthworks representing a deserted medieval village on the valley side and a chain of fishponds on the valley floor. These are linked by a distinctive sunken lane descending from Stuchbury. The whole of this local landscape is highly evocative of the medieval;
- The area retains a rural, tranquil quality, with a strong historic resonance. It is largely undisturbed by visual or audible intrusions, with an absence of modern development. The scheme would introduce large scale built vertical moving structures into this subtle quiet, peaceful and locally valued landscape.

1.5. The valley crests and slopes and floor together combine to make up one landscape unit. Any change in one area will affect the other. The fact that the majority of turbines are located on the upper valley sides only serves further to exaggerate their effect on the valley landscape. They will be experienced across the local area and form the skyline backdrop to the small villages. The particular nature of the local topography comprising a series of narrow elevated ridges and small valleys means that the turbines will frequently come in and out of view when travelling through this area and will be a dominant presence

for parts of the landscape between 3 – 4km radius, particularly to the north of the site towards Sulgave and within the Helmdon valley.

Visual Amenity

- 1.6. The LVIA clearly indicates the high visual sensitivity of the site and the main receptors. The development will have a significant adverse effect on visual amenity for a large number of residential receptors, with a notable harmful impact on the residents of Stuchbury Hall Farm, who will have direct views to the turbines on the opposite valley side. It was also have a harmful effect on the outlook of residents from properties at Grange Farm, who will view the turbines along the valley 'end on', with overlapping blades. The turbines would be a constant and pervasive presence, with the result that both these properties would become unpleasant and less attractive places to live. The development would also be clearly be seen, and have a significant adverse impact, from parts of the intact historic Northamptonshire villages of Sulgrave, Helmdon and Greatworth. The turbines will be prominent on an undeveloped rural skyline which forms a backdrop and setting to these settlements.
- 1.7. There is a well-used network of rights of way which crosses the site and links to the surrounding villages. Horse riders and walkers are acknowledged as receptors of the highest sensitivity –for whom appreciation of the landscape context is a key part of their recreational experience. The turbines will be in very close proximity to the rights of way. In my opinion, the development is harmful and will destroy the experience and appreciation of this tranquil rural landscape for users of the rights of way within, across and along the Helmdon Valley.
- 1.5. I do not agree with the LVIA conclusion (*para. 7.1.6*) that significant landscape and visual effects will be localised as a result of local topography and the level of tree cover and the scale of the proposed development. The local topography forming a north facing valley side serves to exaggerate the scale of the development, and the turbines rise above the tree cover forming prominent vertical elements in undisturbed rural views from a large number of residential properties, historic villages, and rights of way.

CONCLUSIONS

1.8. My evidence concludes that the introduction of five wind turbines of 125m height at Spring Farm Ridge, does not take account of the local pattern, scale and grain of the landscape and will have:

- significant adverse impacts on the landscape character and quality of this rural part of South Northamptonshire;
- significant adverse impacts on visual amenity, notably residential amenity and the recreational amenity of the many users of the local rights of way network.

Kate Ahern, September 2013