

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 matters

Appendix 2.3: Relevant Experience

Prepared by

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On behalf of

South Northamptonshire District Council

1. THE WITNESS - RELEVANT EXPERIENCE

Introduction

- 1.1. My name is Kate Ahern. I am a Principal of Land Use Consultants (LUC) based in LUC's London office. LUC is a multi-disciplinary Environmental Consultancy embracing the core disciplines of Landscape Architecture, Urban Design, Planning, Ecology, Landscape Planning and Management. LUC has offices in London, Glasgow, Bristol and Edinburgh. The company is a 'Registered Assessor' with the Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment (IEMA). There are currently 37 practices worldwide with Registered Assessor status.
- 1.2. I joined LUC in January 1988, became Associate in 1995 and a Principal of the practice in 2001.
- 1.3. My professional qualifications are BSc (Hons) Geography, MSc Landscape, Ecology, Design and Management. I am a Member of the Landscape Institute (Management) (MLI).
- 1.4. My experience in Landscape Planning covers a wide range of projects. I have worked on projects at a range of scales and complexities, for both public and private sectors.

Landscape Character and Sensitivity

- 1.5. I have recently co-authored the revision of the national **Guidance on Landscape Character Assessment** on behalf of Natural England, Scottish Natural Heritage and the Countryside Council for Wales. This included a new Topic Paper on **Understanding Landscape Sensitivity**. The new guidance was developed through wide consultation and discussion with agencies, organisations and individuals with an interest in landscape character. The revised guidance will be issued by Natural England.
- 1.6. I have extensive practical experience in producing landscape character assessments across all types of landscape and scales including protected landscapes, national and regional character assessment, county and district studies and site based schemes. My experience spans rural landscapes, townscapes and seascapes. I have prepared a large number of landscape sensitivity studies for diverse types of change including residential development, transport infrastructure, renewable energy schemes including tidal stream, solar array and

wind turbine scheme. I prepared one of the first studies looking at landscape sensitivity to wind turbine development for King's Lynn Borough and Breckland District Councils in 2003. This won a Landscape Institute Award, 2004, in the Strategic Planning category. My recent study of the sensitivity of the coastal landscapes of Wales to tidal stream energy won the 2011 strategic planning award. The focus of all of this work has been on using an understanding of landscape character to help guide and manage change, and support the development of renewable energy technologies in appropriate locations.

Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment Experience

- 1.7. My experience of characterisation has been applied in a wide range of LVIA. I have particular expertise in reviewing LVIA for wind farms on behalf of local authorities and statutory agencies and have undertaken numerous assessments for North Cornwall District Council, South Northamptonshire, East Northamptonshire and Natural England. I have also been involved in the preparation of LVIA for a wide range of schemes including transport infrastructure and institutional developments. I have recently prepared baseline landscape sensitivity work in relation to the proposed High Speed 2 Rail link for four local authorities. I am currently working with the National Trust and HS2 to seek appropriate design and mitigation along the route in relation to highly valued landscapes. I have prepared a number of proofs of evidence. I recently acted as landscape expert witness for the Catshead Wood/Barnwell Manor Wind Turbine Appeal (App/G2815/A/11/2156757).
- 1.8. This year I was appointed by Natural England to provide all their advice on the landscape/seascape and visual impact off offshore developments. I am currently reviewing the ES and contributing to consultation with developers (formal and informal) the written representations and hearings in relation to Atlantic Array (Bristol Channel), Navitus and Rampion wind farms (English Channel). For the last two years I have acted as a special advisor to the National Trust, working with HS2 to assess the impact of HS2 on the landscape and setting of key National Trust properties and devise realistic mitigation measures.
- 1.9. I have been leader of the Landscape Planning Business Unit at LUC. This unit undertakes a wide body of work in relation to wind turbines. This includes strategic advice to national agencies, for example contribution to Natural England's Guidance 'Making Space for

Renewable Energy', and advice to other statutory agencies, including Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) and Countryside Council for Wales (CCW), preparation of wind farm LVIA on behalf of developers, preparation of wind turbine landscape sensitivity studies and review of LVIA on behalf of government agencies, local authorities and local groups. LUC provide an independent, objective service to our clients. In my role as Business Unit lead I sought to provide calibration of our work across the range of wind farm projects. This is done through informal and formal briefings, project workshops and lunch time professional development sessions. It also involves an understanding of previous wind farm appeals. However, I recognise that every site needs to be considered on its own merits and its local context.

Other relevant experience

- 1.10. Also of relevance is my work for Natural England preparing and delivering training to the regional staff on the techniques and application of Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment and Landscape Character Assessment.
- 1.11. I am not anti-wind turbines. I am concerned about getting the right renewable energy developments in the right locations and ensuring that the drive for renewables conserves and enhances our cherished landscapes. From my home on the North Kent coast I look across to a number of wind turbine schemes (Kentish Flats, Gunfleet Sands, London Array and Thanet Offshore) which range from 6km to 35km from the coast. I have a small personal project to calibrate the visibility of these schemes at different distances over times of the year and day and according to different weather and light conditions. This keeps 'my eye in' in terms of understanding the real impacts of turbines on visual amenity.