

**THE ISLES WIND FARM PROPOSAL – STAGE TWO CONSULTATION**

**CONSTRUCTION OF WINDFARM COMPRISING OF 24 WIND TURBINES AND  
ASSOCIATED INFRASTRUCTURE ON FARMLAND TO THE EAST OF NEWTON  
AYCLIFFE, COUNTY DURHAM**

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**SUMMARY REPORT**

**Purpose of the Report**

1. To inform Members of the above recently submitted Stage Two Consultation Document within Durham County Council's area of jurisdiction and to invite comments thereon bearing in mind similar proposals that have been approved by Durham County Council at Stillington (Lambs Hill), approved by this Council at Moor House and currently being considered by this Council at Newbiggin.

**Summary**

2. Members are being invited to comment on the proposal referred to above – known as “The Isles Wind Farm” which lies just over one kilometre north of Darlington's northern boundary.
  3. Normally when considering wind farm proposals there are numerous issues to address such as noise, shadow flicker or effects on aircraft radar, however in this instance, at this stage, as a neighbouring Authority we are only considering policy issues and any visual impact implications there may be on our Borough as a result of the proposals.
  4. As the proposed development will generate more than 50 MW of electricity, it will be necessary for the planning application, when submitted, to be considered by the Planning Inspectorate as set out in the 2008 Planning Act. If the Inspectorate is content with the proposed development then it will recommend to the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change who will make the final decision.
  5. The planning Act requires formal consultation before an application for a DCO [Development Consent Order] is submitted. Nearby or adjacent Local Authorities are considered to be relevant consultees so we are now being asked for our views as part of the second stage consultation. Last year our views were sought on a number of potential wind turbine layouts and Members resolved to express concern that the proposals were contrary to the conclusions of the Arup report relating to wind farm impacts on the landscape, and that there were no visualisations provided which gave an indication of the visual impact of the proposal from within Darlington Borough.
  6. It is not anticipated that an application for a DCO will be submitted before summer 2013.
  7. In the context of the above the document prepared by Arup on behalf of the North East Assembly relating to wind farm impacts on the landscape is relevant. In addition there are considered to be visual impacts on a number of villages and individual residences within Darlington Borough and these are highlighted in the Main Report below.
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8. In May 2009 a planning application was submitted for 10 wind turbines on part of the above site, known as The A1 Wind Farm. This application has been withdrawn and replaced by the current Isles proposal.

### **Recommendations**

9. It is recommended that Members note the content of this report and if necessary comment on the proposals as they affect the Borough of Darlington.

**Richard Alty  
Director of Place**

### **Background Papers**

No background papers were used in the preparation of this report.

Adrian Hobbs : Extension 2083

## MAIN REPORT

### Information and Analysis

10. The original proposal submitted for consultation last year was for the construction of a windfarm comprising of between 25 and 45 wind turbines and associated infrastructure on farmland to the east of Newton Aycliffe, County Durham. The site area was some 11.8 square kilometres and the turbine height was to be between 100m and 126m.
11. No specific details were submitted at that time; however the applicants submitted three sets of visualisations of the visual impact of the three different options of either 45 turbines, 30 turbines or 29 turbines. These scenarios would have given an installed capacity of between 50 – 115 MW; enough to supply electricity for between approximately 23,000 and 53,000 homes.
12. As a result of the Stage 1 Consultation feedback, the applicants have made a number of changes to the overall proposals, the main one of which has been to reduce the number of turbines to 24 in two distinct clusters. In addition, this time around, visualisations have been provided from the outskirts of Great Stainton, about 2.3 kilometres from the nearest turbine. All twenty four turbines will be visible, but only their upper sections.
13. The Regional Spatial Strategy for the North East (RSS) remains a relevant regional policy document and sets out the broad development strategy for the region for the period 2004 to 2021. The renewable energy provision target for 2011 for County Durham is likely to be exceeded in the near future, and this current application if approved will add to that excess provision. However it is accepted that the targets can be exceeded and the additional capacity contributes towards the 2020 target of 20% of energy being provided by renewable resources.
14. In August 2008 Arup completed a study – resourced in part by Darlington Borough Council – to assess the potential of the East Durham Limestone and Tees Plain wind resource areas to accommodate further wind turbine development.
15. This study concerned itself only with the visual impacts of wind turbines on the landscape, taking into account existing planning policy in the region in relation to wind turbine development, the character of the various landscapes in the study area and the cumulative effects of a variety of wind turbine development scenarios.
16. The study area was divided into a number of landscape zones in order that their landscape sensitivity could be assessed in terms of what – if any – further wind turbine development could be accommodated without unacceptable visual harm being caused to the environment. Zones 14 and 19 are within County Durham, parts of which include The Isles Wind Farm proposal.
17. Whereas some zones – particularly on the East Coast – were considered to be at capacity in terms of further wind turbine development, others, including those specifically referred to above, were considered to have limited suitability for wind turbines. In both zones 14 and 19 the landscape was assigned a medium to medium – high landscape sensitivity capable of accommodating no more than 4 turbines each. The Isles planning application would be for up to 24 wind turbines – obviously well in excess of the above figures.

18. The Arup study is not a formally adopted public document and may have reduced weight in planning policy terms, it nevertheless is a sound technical document and Members may wish to consider referring to this document in formulating a response to the current consultation.
19. The proposed development will be seen from a wide variety of viewpoints and the applicants have submitted photo montages of potential views of the proposed turbines, including on this occasion from the South, that is from the direction of the Borough of Darlington boundary.
20. Members are invited to comment on the submitted montage which show a “before” and “after” visualisation of the potential visual impact of the wind turbines when viewed from Great Stainton,
21. Apart from the Isles proposal, residents from in and around Great Stainton will be likely to be affected by the visual impact of two other wind farms recently granted planning permission at Lambs Hill (Stillington, Co Durham) and Moor House to the south. This cumulative effect will be likely to result in residents and others in Great Stainton feeling as if they are living in a “windfarm landscape” with turbine developments being seen in relatively close proximity in three directions.
22. Turbine delivery and heavy goods vehicle routes to the site have been indicated on plans included in the consultation. There are three routes proposed due to the scale of the proposal; the western and northern routes lie well beyond Darlington Borough boundary and will not have any impact on our settlements and road network. The southern route however is intended to run north off the A66 at Great Burden onto Bishopton Lane/Elstob Lane, through Great Stainton and entering the site north of Elstob.
23. The consultation report suggests that there will be about 7 abnormal loads required for each turbine (to transport the large turbine sections to the site). The report also indicates that the southern route will be used to deliver abnormal loads for 13 turbines (those to the east of the east Coast Main Line Railway). Simple maths suggests therefore that there will be over 90 abnormal loads delivered to the site along Bishopton Lane/Elstob Lane.
24. In addition, construction traffic is expected to use this route for the 13 turbines. The consultation document suggests a maximum daily HGV movement of 94 vehicles when concrete is being delivered (which will be for 24 individual days). This number would reduce when concrete delivery is complete.
25. The above number of abnormal load and HGV movements is considered to be significant and apart from the impact on living conditions of the residents of Great Stainton and others living along the route, the restricted width of the proposed route for much of its length will be likely to result in severe disruption to non turbine traffic using the lane. Our Highways Engineer will be able to advise further in this regard at the Meeting.
26. Other issues that may affect residents such as noise, shadow flicker and effects on airport or Ministry of Defence radar will eventually be addressed by the Planning Inspectorate when the application is submitted. However, at this stage Darlington Borough Council, as a consultee, is able to raise issues it considers important in relation to impacts upon its residents and landscape character, in the context of existing regional and local planning policies.

## **Recommendation**

27. It is recommended that the applicants are again reminded that the proposal conflicts with the recommendations of the Arup Wind Farm and Landscape Capacity Study in respect of the scale of the proposed development, in particular the number of wind turbines proposed.
28. Residents and others in and around Great Stainton are likely to suffer visual intrusion into the landscape from the proposed development. In addition, two other wind farms recently granted planning permission at Lambs Hill (Stillington, Co Durham) and Moor House to the south will be likely to cause a cumulative impact that will be likely to result in residents and others in Great Stainton feeling as if they are living in a “windfarm landscape” with turbine developments being seen in relatively close proximity in three directions.
29. The proposed southern route to the site is considered to be unsuitable in terms of road width and layout to accommodate the predicted amount of abnormal load and construction traffic needed to construct the southern part of the proposed wind farm development. There is likely to be an unacceptable impact on residents of Great Stainton and others living along the route and it will be likely to result in severe disruption to non turbine traffic using the lane.

