

DARLINGTON BOROUGH COUNCIL

PLANNING APPLICATIONS COMMITTEE

COMMITTEE DATE: 11TH February 2009

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APPLICATION REF. NO:	08/00991/FUL
STATUTORY DECISION DATE:	11/02/09
WARD/PARISH:	Ward - Sadberge and Whessoe Parish - Bishopton
LOCATION:	Gilly Flatt Farm, Little Stainton.
DESCRIPTION:	51 metre high Wind Monitoring Mast
APPLICANT:	Pure Renewable Energies.

APPLICATION AND SITE DESCRIPTION

This application was deferred at the Meeting of 11th February 2009 to enable a site visit to take place. The officer recommendation is repeated below for Members' consideration.

This application relates to the erection of a 51 metre high wind monitoring mast on land midway between Gilly Flatts Farm and East Newbiggin on the eastern border of Darlington Borough. A temporary permission of three years is sought.

The mast will be of a monopole design; there are no associated cabinets proposed in this instance.

It is intended that the mast will collect wind speed data to assist in selecting the design of wind turbines in the event that planning permission is sought in the future for a wind farm in this locality. This would be the subject of a separate planning application.

The application site is in an isolated rural location approximately one kilometre from the nearest classified road. There are no other significant features nearby other than overhead power lines running east to west to the north and south of the site.

The land hereabouts is primarily arable in nature and has a mainly flat or undulating character.

The locality is not designated in the Local Plan as being an Area of High Landscape Value.

PLANNING HISTORY

None relating to this site.

PLANNING POLICY BACKGROUND

Whilst the current proposal does not relate to renewable energy generation directly, it is required to gather data to assess the wind resource of the area and may be seen as a necessary precursor to a wind energy project and as such, in planning policy terms, be treated as if it were a renewable energy development.

Members will be aware of Government document PPS22 – ‘Planning for Renewable Energy’ and its general support for the development of renewable energy projects as a means of reducing carbon emissions.

Following on from that, The North East Regional Spatial Strategy which was published in July 2008 includes advice and guidance on renewable energy development and in relation to onshore wind generated energy identifies the planning application site (as part of the Tees Plain) as being located close to or within an area of “least constraint”.

The Borough of Darlington Local Plan 1997 includes within its Policy E26 support for renewable energy projects provided they do not significantly detrimentally effect landscape character or visual amenity, or other residential amenity.

RESULTS OF CONSULTATION AND PUBLICITY

The application was advertised locally via a site notice and various third party interests notified. At the time of drafting fifteen residents from local villages have made individual comments, and four residents have signed a pre prepared/circulated letter, however most of these comments relate to possible future wind farm applications which are not the subject of this application.

The following issues have been raised which relate to the proposed wind monitoring mast :

- The proposed mast is a precursor to future wind turbine development which taken with other similar proposals nearby will cumulatively form a visual intrusion in the countryside.
- The proposal is contrary to the Local Plan which only supports development that does not harm the landscape, wildlife or amenity.
- Approval of this wind monitoring mast should not result in favourable consideration of any future wind turbine application.
- The mast should be lit for safety reasons.
- No need for another mast as there is another approved recently less than 5km away – the information gathered should be shared and wind speed data already exists for the area.
- Two monitoring masts will cumulatively detrimentally affect the character of the area.
- Any permission should include similar construction period restrictions as for the earlier Moor House monitoring mast.

East and West Newbiggin Parish Meeting – Object for the following reasons :

- Mast is close to residential properties and will form an eyesore in the landscape.
- Wildlife habitats will be disrupted and migratory bird flightpaths will be affected along with bats.
- Mast is too close to the airport.
- Approval of this wind monitoring mast should not result in favourable consideration of any future wind turbine application.
- Potential for increased flooding from surface water runoff from the mast.

Bishopton Parish Council – Object for the following reasons :

- Any approval of this wind monitoring mast should not result in favourable consideration of any future wind turbine application.
- Mast not high enough to measure wind speeds.

Other comments relate to possible future wind farm applications which are not the subject of this application

Great Stainton Parish Council – Object for the following reasons :

- Mast not high enough to measure wind and should be lit to avoid safety issues with the nearby airport.
- Any permission should include similar construction period restrictions as for the earlier Moor House monitoring mast.

Other comments relate to possible future wind farm applications which are not the subject of this application

Sadberge Parish Council – No objection to the proposal itself but any approval of this wind monitoring mast should not result in favourable consideration of any future wind turbine application.

CPRE Durham Branch - Raise concerns that approval of this application would not prejudice consideration of future wind turbine applications.

Environmental Health – No objections.

Durham Tees Airport – No objections to the proposal but will object to any subsequent wind turbine application on grounds of Air Traffic Operational safety.

Seven Parishes Action Group (SPAG) – Object to the proposed mast for the following reasons :

- It is a precursor to a wind farm planning application
- It will only be half the height of any proposed wind turbines and therefore not able to measure wind accurately.

- Any approval of this application should be subject to the same period of construction conditions as the Moor House proposal.

Other comments submitted by SPAG relate to wind turbine development which as stated above is not the subject of this planning application.

PLANNING ISSUES

The main planning issue associated with this proposal is the visual impact it will have on any local residents, members of the public using local rights of way and the local countryside in general.

Impact on local residents – There are two residential properties within approximately half a kilometre of the site. One of the properties is occupied by the applicants whilst the other property is located to the south east beyond a line of electricity pylons. Because of the separation distance between the proposal and these properties and the nature of the existing landscape and man made features in the locality it is considered that there are no material visual impacts in planning terms to occupiers of these properties.

Impact on users of rights of way – The nearest classified road is within approximately half a kilometre of the application site, and there is a public footpath running through East Newbiggin to the south East of the application site. Users of both these will inevitably experience some limited visual intrusion into their enjoyment of the countryside by the presence of the proposed mast, however this needs to be balanced with the separation distance, the slender design of the mast together with its temporary nature as it would not be a permanent feature in the countryside. Due to its design, it would not be visually intrusive from distant views and would only become dominant from relatively close to the structure, however there are no public rights of way close by to facilitate this.

Other Issues – A comment has been made suggesting the mast should be lit to reduce safety issues relating to the nearby Airport, however Durham Tees Airport have written to Officers confirming no objections to the proposal and making no request for such lighting.

Also a request has been made that the construction and decommissioning period for this mast if approved should be restricted to between 1st October and 1st March in the interests of wildlife, as was the recent Moor House mast application. Whilst this condition has not been included in the current recommendation, Members may wish to consider it, but having regard to the reasonableness of such an imposition bearing in mind the dates proposed.

Regarding the potential for flooding as a result of the development, the site lies within “Flood Zone 1” in the Environment Agency’s database and as such, for this particular development they do not consider they need to be consulted as there is no risk of additional flooding problems as a result of the development.

Regarding the issue of using the mast that was recently approved at Moor Farm rather than erecting a further mast, the applicants confirm that the masts are site specific and need to be at the site of any future wind turbine development in order that precise locations of the turbines can be determined for their maximum efficiency.

The above, taken together with the wider environmental effects of renewable energy projects which this proposal is intended to facilitate need to be taken into account as a material planning consideration and in this instance, on balance, it is considered that a temporary planning permission as applied for would be appropriate.

Concerns have been expressed by most objectors about the amount of wind turbines proposals being suggested for the application site and its environs and how they will have a detrimental effect on the landscape, wildlife and amenity in general. These issues however do not relate to the current planning application before Members, which is for a single wind monitoring mast.

It is important for Members to recognise that granting planning permission in this case would not set a precedent that would make the granting of permission for a wind farm in the future more likely. Such a proposal would need to be considered on its own merits.

SECTION 17 OF THE CRIME AND DISORDER ACT 1998

The contents of this report have been considered in the context of the requirements placed on the Council by Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, namely the duty on the Council to exercise its functions with due regard to the likely effect of the exercise of those functions on, and the need to do all that it reasonably can to prevent crime and disorder in its area. It is not considered that the contents of this report have any such effect.

CONCLUSION

The application relates to the erection of a 51 metre high wind monitoring mast for a temporary period of three years. Its location is necessarily in an open countryside location as its function is to measure wind speeds in the locality to inform decision making in relation to a possible future planning application for wind turbines.

The mast will be of a slender design and due to its temporary nature it would not be a permanent feature in the countryside.

It would only be a prominent feature when viewed from relatively close by however there are no public rights of way nearby to facilitate such views. The visual impact from more distant views is somewhat diluted by the presence of electricity pylons near to the application site.

The above, taken together with the wider environmental effects of renewable energy projects which this proposal is intended to facilitate need to be taken into account as a material planning consideration and in this instance, on balance, it is considered that a temporary planning permission as applied for would be appropriate.

RECOMMENDATION

That Planning Permission be granted with the following conditions :

1. A4 – Time limit
2. B5 – Accordance with plan
3. C1 – Limited period of 3 years

SUGGESTED SUMMARY OF REASONS FOR GRANTING PLANNING PERMISSION

The decision to grant planning permission has been taken having regard to the policies and proposals in the Borough of Darlington Local Plan set out above, and to all relevant material considerations.

INFORMATIVES

None