
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**

SUMMARY REPORT

Purpose of the Report

1. To inform Members of the above recently submitted planning application 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), and approved by this Council at Moor House.
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 specific issues relative to Darlington such as any visual impact implications there may be on Darlington Borough as a result of the proposals.
4. As the revised proposed development will generate less than 50 MW of electricity, it will be determined by Durham County Council.
5. The Planning Act requires formal consultation before a planning application can be determined. Nearby or adjacent Local Authorities are considered to be relevant consultees so the Council is now being asked for its views as part of the consultation process. Two years ago the Council's views were sought on a potential wind turbine layout 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.
6. 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 and traffic impacts on a number of villages and individual residences within Darlington Borough and these are highlighted in the Main Report below.

7. 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 This application was withdrawn and replaced by the current Isles proposal.

Recommendation

8. That the Local Planning Authority objects to the proposed development for the following reasons:-
 - (a) It is recommended that the applicants are 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.
 - (b) 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.
 - (c) 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.

Ian Williams
Director of Economic Growth

Background Papers

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

Adrian Hobbs : Extension 2083

MAIN REPORT

Information and Analysis

9. The current proposal is for the construction of a windfarm comprising of 24 wind turbines and associated infrastructure on farmland to the east of Newton Aycliffe, County Durham. The site area is some 11.9 square kilometres and the turbine height is to be between 101m and 126m.
10. The site is characterised by low lying agricultural land known as the Carrs and is used for arable and pasture farming. It is a generally open landscape with isolated areas of woodland. The A1 Trunk Road and East Coast Main Line Railway bisect the site.
11. As a result of the 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.
12. 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.
13. 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.
14. 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 .
15. 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.
16. 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.

17. 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.
18. 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 a footpath near Great Stainton,
19. 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.
20. 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.
21. The application report suggests that there will be substantial flows of HGVs to and from the site (nearly 8000 over the period of construction of about twelve months). These vehicles would include access track aggregate delivery, crane hardstanding aggregate, sand for cable trenches, concrete and turbine components. There would also be substantial flows of other types of construction traffic; a detailed table will be available at the meeting giving specific figures for each type of delivery.
22. The suggested level 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.
23. Other issues that may effect residents such as noise, shadow flicker and effects on airport or Ministry of Defence radar are currently being addressed by Durham County Council . 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.
24. Our Conservation Officer has inspected the application and requested that the applicants submit further work on assessing what the impact of the proposal will have on the settings of a number of heritage assets. The County Archaeologist has made similar comments insofar as the proposals affect Darlington.

25. The Parish Meetings of East and West Newbiggin and Great Stainton have sent their objections to DCC raising the following issues

- (a) Area of turbine development is too great – visual impact will be overpowering
- (b) Cumulative impact of this and others approved nearby and already operating will be overpowering.
- (c) Character of Mordon, Bradbury and Great Stainton will be spoilt.
- (d) Construction traffic will cause considerable disturbance and disruption.
- (e) Noise impacts and shadow flicker will effect residents and livestock.