

**Planning Applications Committee
31st August 2011**

THE ISLES WIND FARM PROPOSAL

**CONSTRUCTION OF WINDFARM COMPRISING OF BETWEEN 25 AND 45 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 consultation document within Durham County Council's area of jurisdiction and to invite comments thereon bearing in mind similar proposals that have been submitted to this Council at Moor House and 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 Infrastructure Planning Commission (IPC), as set out in the 2008 Planning Act. If the IPC is content with the proposed development then it will grant a Development Consent Order (DCO).
 5. The Planning Act requires formal consultation before an application for a DCO 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 initial first stage consultation. Our views are being sought on a number of potential wind turbine layouts. This will aid in the preparation of a preliminary wind farm layout which will be the subject of a second stage of consultation.
 6. It is not anticipated that an application for a DCO will be submitted before winter 2012/2013.
 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.
 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.
-

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. It is proposed that a planning application is submitted 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 is some 11.8 square kilometres and the turbine height will be between 100m and 126m.
11. No specific details have been submitted at this stage, however the applicants have submitted three sets of visualisations of the visual impact of the three different options of either 45 turbines – Layout A, 30 turbines – Layout B or 29 turbines – Layout C. These scenarios will give an installed capacity of between 50 – 115 MW; enough to supply electricity for between approximately 23,000 and 53,000 homes.
12. 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 contribute towards the 2020 target of 20% of energy being provided by renewable resources.
13. In August 2008 Arup completed a study – resourced in part by Darlington Borough – to assess the potential of the East Durham Limestone and Tees Plain wind resource areas to accommodate further wind turbine development.
14. 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.
15. 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 .
16. 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 45 wind turbines – obviously well in excess of the above figures.
17. 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.
18. 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, however none of these are from the South, that is from the direction of the Borough of Darlington boundary.

19. **It is considered that this is a serious omission from the consultation document as there is no indication at all as to what the visual impact of what is potentially the largest wind farm development in England will have upon the residents of Darlington Borough.**
20. Notwithstanding the above, Members are invited to comment on the submitted montages which show a “before” and “after” visualisation of the potential visual impact of the wind turbines when viewed from four specific locations at Chilton, Newton Aycliffe, Mordon and Sedgfield.
21. Other issues that may effect residents such as noise, shadow flicker and effects on airport or Ministry of Defence radar will eventually be addressed by the IPC. 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

22. It is recommended that Members note the content of this report and request that the applicants provide full and detailed photomontages of the views of the proposed development as seen from viewpoints within the Borough of Darlington in time for the next consultation stage.
23. It is recommended that Members consider whether they are minded to express a preference for one of the submitted layouts
24. In addition 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.

