

<b>Committee</b>	<b>PLANNING AND ENVIRONMENT</b>
<b>Date of Meeting</b>	11 January 2011
<b>Type of Application</b>	<b>Renewable Energy</b>
<b>Application No</b>	09/00154/RENEIA
<b>Proposal</b>	Construction of a wind farm comprising 9 turbines 127 metres in height and ancillary equipment including 1 no. 80 metre anemometry mast, access tracks, control building and substation compound with 10 metre communications mast, crane hardstanding, underground cables, temporary construction compound, borrow pit and 2 no. 80 metre guyed monitoring masts for an operational period of 25 years.
<b>Applicant/Agent</b>	RES UK & Ireland Ltd. Beaufort Court Egg Farm Lane Kings Langley Hertfordshire WD4 8LR
<b>Date of Receipt</b>	17 September 2009

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## **1. Introduction**

- 1.1 This application relates to the proposed construction of a wind farm development comprising 9 turbines and associated infrastructure on land to the south of the village of Wingates, 11km to the north west of Morpeth.
- 1.2 Consultees raised a number of concerns regarding the content of the Environmental Statement and requested that additional information be submitted. On 10 November 2010, the applicant appealed to the Secretary of State on the grounds of non determination by the local planning authority. The applicant has requested a public inquiry. As a result of this course of action officers have been advised to seek a committee resolution from Members to refuse the planning application due to a lack of information. The applicant submitted additional landscape and ecological information on 8 December 2010 and this is currently the subject of consultation.

## **2. Consultation**

- 2.1 The following consultation responses have been received:

### **Netherwitton Parish Council**

The size and scale of the turbines are beyond that which the landscape can comfortably absorb. Widening of roads to accommodate the abnormal loads will lead to a loss of rural character and there is concern about the impact of traffic on Longhorsely. There is a lack of information on grid connection and impacts on wildlife. There is concern about the location of some of the visualisations used and the proximity of the turbines to houses with the resulting impacts from noise and shadow flicker and on health. There will be a negative impact on local businesses.

#### **Nunykirk Parish Council**

The cumulative effect of this proposal, with the others proposed in the area, will dominate the area and diminish standards of life for residents, walkers, riders and tourists. Wildlife will also be affected

#### **Coal Authority**

No objection subject to conditions.

#### **One North East**

Subject to the applicant satisfying aviation safety, highways, environmental, visual and cumulative impact issues, One North East would have no objections.

#### **Environment Agency**

No objections subject to conditions.

#### **Northumbrian Water**

No objections.

#### **Newcastle International Airport**

Objects to the proposal until the applicant can demonstrate that radar coverage would not be adversely affected by the proposal. Requests that the applicant submits an up to date Radar Impact Assessment.

#### **Ministry of Defence**

No objections.

#### **NATS**

Objects to the proposal as preliminary technical findings indicate that the proposal conflicts with safeguarding criteria.

#### **CAA**

Consider that the development would be located such as to have the potential to impact on Newcastle Airport operations.

#### **English Heritage**

On the whole are satisfied with that part of the ES dealing with cultural heritage. Of possible concern is the setting of Netherwitton Hall. Whilst there appears to be little, if any impact, on views of the site from

the Hall, there will be areas of the landscape from which both the Hall and the turbines will be seen.

### **Campaign to Protect Rural England**

Objects to the proposal on the following grounds: visual impact, damage to the character of the landscape, loss of amenity to local residents and visitors, damage to flora and fauna, impact on the setting of Netherwitton Hall and Wingates and Netherwitton, cumulative impacts.

### **Natural England**

Objects to the proposal as further information is needed to demonstrate whether the development would have an adverse effect on protected species and habitats. There are severe limitations with the desk study. There is no reference to Rayburn Lake SNCI. The bat survey provides an unreliable assessment and further survey work should be undertaken. Further survey and assessment work is required for great crested newts. It is not clear whether the ornithological surveys have followed the relevant guidance. The area is a regionally important breeding and wintering bird population and the assessment and mitigation proposed does not adequately consider this fact. There is no barn owl survey. There is no assessment of reptiles or white clawed crayfish. Clarification and full information is needed on the red squirrel, water vole, otter and badger surveys carried out.

Additional information should be provided to demonstrate whether the development would have an adverse effect on the landscape.

### **RSPB**

The 2008 count of whooper swans falls just short of the threshold by which whooper swan populations are judged as nationally significant and it is therefore important that potential impacts on the SNCI are accurately assessed and the extent of the buffer zone reconsidered or justified. There is a need for additional breeding wader mitigation.

### **Northumberland Wildlife Trust**

There is insufficient survey data on bats and great crested newts. There is a lack of supporting information on the ornithology surveys carried out, including cumulative impacts. Overall, there are serious concerns regarding the apparently limited survey effort that has been undertaken to inform the ES, particularly with regard to bats.

### **County Ecologist**

Otter, water vole, badger and red squirrel surveys need to be updated. There is insufficient information to provide a reliable assessment of the bat population. Further bat surveys are required. Additional great crested newt surveys are required. There is no reference to the two SNCIs in the area. Additional ornithological surveys are required to establish the significance of Rayburn Lake during migration periods. Mitigation needs to be addressed.

**County Archaeologist**

No objections subject to conditions.

**Conservation Officer**

Has concerns about the impact of the proposal on the setting of Netherwitton Hall, in particular turbine T8 which should be relocated or removed from the scheme.

**County Highways**

No objections subject to conditions and a legal agreement to secure highway improvement works.

**Public Rights of Way**

Recommends that 6 of the turbines are moved further away from public footpaths and bridleways and that access roads are separate from the public rights of way.

**Public Protection**

No objections in principle. However there is insufficient information on the cumulative impacts of noise and acoustic measurements are based on background monitoring at only three local properties.

**3. Publicity**

- 3.1 The application has been advertised by site notice and in the local press. In addition individual properties surrounding the site have been notified by letter. 120 letters of objection have been received. The main issues raised by objectors are the scale of the proposal, visual impact, impact on the National Park, noise impacts, potential health risks, proximity to residential properties, impacts on wildlife, inadequacy of the local road network, traffic safety, impact on cultural heritage features, radar interference, potential for groundwater pollution, potential impact on local bridleways, cumulative impacts, impacts on tourism and change in character of the area. 173 letters of support has been received, raising issues about reductions in CO2 emissions, the production of clean energy and the need to reduce reliance on fossil fuels. One letter of general representation has been received. Copies of the letters of representation are appended to the report.

**4. Description of the proposals**

- 4.1 It is proposed to construct a wind farm comprising 9 turbines and associated infrastructure on land 11km to the north west of Morpeth, on land to the south of the village of Wingates. The application site is currently used as agricultural land. The site is situated around a depression in the landscape in which is located Rayburn Lake. The Northumberland National Park is located approximately 6.5 km to the north west of the site.

- 4.2 Settlements surrounding the site are located at Wingates (2km to the north), Longhorsley (4km to the west), Netherwitton (2.5km to the south). There is one residential property within the application boundary at Park Head Farm. It is understood that this property has a financial interest in the development. Other nearby residential properties include Low Southward Edge (785m) Doe Hill Farm (791m), Coal Houses (800m), Folly Houses (801m), Fiddlers Elbow (825m), High Southward Edge (1048m) and Wingates Moor Farm (1092m).
- 4.3 The application site is 264ha in area and the permanent development would have a total land take of 4.38 ha. The development comprises nine 3 bladed wind turbines with a maximum tip height of 127 metres. The turbines would incorporate tubular towers and three blades attached to a nacelle housing the generator, gearbox and other operating equipment. Each turbine would be capable of generating 1.8 – 3MW, giving a total installed capacity of 16.2 - 27MW. The application also includes associated infrastructure including foundations, transformers and crane hardstanding areas; approximately 4.8km of new tracks, a new substation building, an 80 metre high anemometry mast, two 80 metre guyed monitoring masts and a borrow pit during construction. Site access would be from the A697, turning west at Longhorsley and along the unclassified Longhorsley to Netherwitton Road.
- 4.4 The turbines would be connected to each other via underground cable. Connection of the wind farm to the local electricity supply network requires a separate consenting process under the Electricity Act 1989. The exact routing of the connection has not yet been determined. However, the applicant has stated that the preferred grid connection would be at Linton.
- 4.5 The applicant estimates that construction would take around 12 months. Once operational the turbines would be subject to servicing twice a year. Other visits would take place up to 4 times a month to ensure that the turbines are operating at their maximum efficiency. The wind farm has been designed to have an operational life of 25 years. At the end of this period the wind farm would be decommissioned.
- 4.6 The application is accompanied by an Environmental Impact Assessment in accordance with the Town and County Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 1999 (as amended).

## **5. Policy Considerations**

- 5.1 When determining any application for renewable energy, appropriate weight must be given to any national and development plan policy and informal planning guidance. In particular, as set out in Section 38 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, the planning application must be determined in accordance with any relevant development plan

unless material considerations indicate otherwise. The relevant policies are listed below:

## 5.2 Climate Change Policy

- The Kyoto Protocol adopted in Kyoto, Japan, on 11 December 1997 (came into force on 16 February 2005)
- UK's Climate Change Act 2008.
- UK Renewable Energy Strategy July 2009.
- The UK Low Carbon Transition Plan

## 5.3 National Planning Guidance

- PPS1: Delivering Sustainable Development (2005)
- PPS 5: Planning and the Historic Environment (2010)
- PPS7: Sustainable Development in Rural Areas (2004)
- PPS9: Biodiversity and Geological Conservation (2005)
- PPS22: Renewable Energy (2004) and its companion guide: Planning and Renewable Energy – A Companion Guide to PPS22
- PPS23: Planning and Pollution Control (2004)
- PPG24: Planning and Noise (1994)

### Development Plan

## 5.4 Regional Spatial Strategy

- Policy 39: Renewable Energy Generation
- Policy 40: Planning for Renewables
- Policy 41: Onshore Wind Energy Development

## 5.5 Saved Policies from the Castle Morpeth Local Plan: RE2 (renewable energy), RE3 (windpower area of search), C3 (AHLV), C8 (SSSIs), C9 (SNClS), C10 (sites of local conservation interest), C11 (protected species), NWC2 (Netherwitton Hall), C38 (listed buildings), C39-42 (archaeology)

### Other Relevant Guidance

## 5.6 Landscape Character Assessments

- The Countryside Character Volume 1: North East, Countryside Commission, 1998 Assessment (the Countryside Character Assessment)
- The North East of England Renewables Energy Strategy, Landscape Appraisal for Onshore Wind Development 2003 (The Benson Report)
- Alnwick LDF Planning for Renewable Energy SPD (2009)
- Alnwick LDF Landscape Character Assessment SPD (2010)

## 5.7 Noise Guidance

- ETSU-R-97: The Assessment and Rating of Noise from Windfarms.
- BS5228: Part 1:1997 'Noise and Vibration Control on Construction and Open sites

## 6. **Appraisal**

6.1 This is a major development proposal for a new wind farm. A full Environmental Statement was submitted in accordance with the Regulations. This sought to identify and address the potential environmental impacts of the scheme and set out proposed mitigation measures. Following an independent audit of the Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment commissioned by the County Council and carried out by Woolerton Associates and initial consultation with statutory consultees it was identified that the Environmental Statement was seriously deficient in the following areas:

- Landscape and visual impacts
- Ecology
- Aviation
- Noise.

6.2 The need for further ecological information was identified in terms of the following:

- updated phase 1 habitats survey
- updated otter, water vole, badger, red squirrel survey
- white clawed crayfish survey
- additional bat surveys to a recognised methodology
- additional great crested newt surveys to a recognised methodology
- an assessment of potential impacts on the nearby SNCIs
- additional ornithological surveys
- barn owl survey
- reptiles assessment
- mitigation proposals

6.3 Additional information to address some of the consultees concerns was submitted in February 2010. This provided some additional information on ornithology surveys undertaken, justification as to why barn owl surveys were not carried out and a justification of the extent of the buffer zone around Rayburn Lake. Informal discussions took place with Natural England and the applicant on this. Natural England have not amended their comments on the proposal, but were awaiting the comprehensive submission of information. Further information was submitted in December 2010 and is currently subject to consultation.

6.4 The LVIA audit identified a number of concerns about the method used to assess the landscape and visual impact of the proposal, identified a number of inconsistencies in the LVIA and identified additional information that should be submitted to enable a comprehensive assessment to be carried out. This included

- further assessment of the likely visual effects of the proposal, both standalone and cumulatively with other proposals, in views from residential properties
  - Additional photomontages
  - The resubmission of a number of photomontages
- 6.5 Additional LVIA information was submitted in December 2010. This included a commentary on the inconsistencies identified, clarification of the methodology used, an assessment of the impacts on the wider landscape character and a residential amenity survey. No additional information has been received on noise or aviation.
- 6.6 The key issue to consider is whether the local planning authority has sufficient information to enable a decision to be made on the acceptability of the proposed development.

The principle of a windfarm in this location and the benefits of this proposal

- 6.7 National energy policy and national planning policy all provide a positive framework of encouragement for renewable energy projects. Wind power, together with other renewable forms of energy, is seen as an essential element of the strategies of the UK Government and European Union in tackling climate change. The UK has committed, under the Kyoto Protocol, to a binding target to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. This target is complemented by the UK's domestic goal of reducing carbon dioxide emissions by 34% on 1990 levels by 2020 as set out in the UK Low Carbon Transition Plan. The UK government has set out a range of policies to meet these targets. In the Renewable Energy Strategy, the UK Government's target is to generate 30% of UK electricity by 2020 from renewable sources. PPS22 makes it clear that in assessing proposals for renewable energy development significant weight should be given to the wider environmental, economic and social benefits arising from higher levels of renewable energy. The creation of a wind farm development would assist in achieving these targets.

Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment

Impact on Landscape Fabric

- 6.8 Landscape fabric comprises the physical components of the landscape such as trees and hedges. Direct effects occur where changes to the fabric arise as the result of physical disturbance, for example, the removal of trees. Indirect effects can also occur, for example, changes to vegetation as a consequence of changes to surface water patterns. The ES assessed the impacts on the landscape fabric of the site and the access improvement works.

- 6.9 There would be some effect on landscape fabric as a result of the disturbance of ground vegetation around the turbine bases, crane hardstandings and substation, along the cable trenches and tracks, at the temporary site compound and as a result of some improvements along the proposed access route. However, the loss of vegetation would be minimal and it is considered that the physical development associated with the wind farm would not result in an unacceptable impact on the fabric of the local or wider landscape.

#### Impact on Landscape Character

- 6.10 The site of the proposed Park Head windfarm does not lie within a nationally protected landscape area such as the Northumberland National Park or the North Pennines or North Northumberland Coast Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty. PPS22 recognises that of all renewable technologies, wind turbines are likely to have the greatest visual and landscape effects. Wind turbines are large structures (127m to blade tip in this case) with moving components which can draw the eye and they are generally visible over a wide area. PPS22 also advises that the impact of turbines on the landscape will vary according to the size and number of turbines and the type of landscape involved. It also advises that landscape and visual effects should be minimised by appropriate siting, design and landscaping schemes. PPS7 aims to continue to protect the open countryside for the benefit of all. It seeks to protect and enhance the quality and character of the wider landscape but recognises the need to provide for the sensitive exploration of renewable energy schemes.
- 6.11 Many of the concerns raised by the local parish councils and nearby residents relate to the impact of the proposed windfarm on the character and appearance of the local and wider landscape. In assessing the potential impacts of the proposed windfarm development on the landscape character both local and wider impacts must be considered. These include the identification of the key characteristics of the landscape, the sensitivity of the landscape, the physical effects of the proposed development, the effects on the character of the landscape and the effects on views over the landscape from construction through to operation and decommissioning.
- 6.12 The national, regional and locally defined character areas within which the Park Head wind farm site is located are:
- Mid Northumberland character area (national)
  - Rolling Lowland Farmland (regional)
  - Wingates Ridge (local)
- 6.13 The national Countryside Agency assessment describes the area as an intermediate plateau of upland fringe forming a transitional area between the Pennine uplands to the west and the low lying coastal plain to the east, with a series ridges and intimate river valleys in the northern part of the area opening out to a broader, flatter landscape in

the south. There is varied woodland cover, with well wooded river valleys; mixed and ornamental woodlands of the country estates and small coniferous blocks and belts in the more open farmland areas. There are large reservoirs and ornamental lakes that provide distinctive areas of open water.

- 6.14 At a regional level (North East of England Renewables Energy Strategy, Landscape Appraisal for Onshore Wind Development 2003) the landscape character is broadly described as being a medium to small scale landscape with large arable fields enclosed by hedgerows and some stone walls. It is a gently undulating landform with small gentle hills and ridges dissected by small rivers. The Environmental Statement has included details of the Alnwick and Castle Morpeth Landscape Character Assessment (2006). Although not within the former Alnwick District Council area, the application site does fall within the Wingates Ridge character area identified in the Alnwick Landscape Character SPD (2010) which described the character of the area as being an exposed upland ridge consisting of medium to large scale fields divided by wire fences, gappy hedgerows and occasional dry stone walls, with the sense of openness being interrupted by numerous small scale conifer plantations and shelter belts.
- 6.15 As well as identifying landscape characters, the regional study "Landscape Appraisal for Onshore Wind Development" also assessed the relative sensitivity of these landscape characters to wind farm development on the basis of the physical landscape and perceptual criteria. The application site lies within an area identified in the "Landscape Appraisal for Onshore Wind Development" as having a medium-high sensitivity to wind farm development. The Alnwick Planning for Renewable Energy SPD (2009) identifies the Wingates Ridge Landscape Character area as having a low-moderate landscape sensitivity to wind farm development.
- 6.16 The independent Audit of the LVIA has identified some concerns about the methodology used to assess landscape sensitivity, the magnitude of landscape change and the significance of the effects and a lack of information on the impacts on the wider landscape.
- 6.17 The Wingates Ridge is contained by the Harwood Forest and Rothbury Forest sandstone hills to the west and north, and to a lesser extent by the Longwitton Ridge to the south. These areas limit longer distance views. However, from the higher edges of the sandstone hills, the proposal would be seen as a prominent element in the landscape and would have a significant effect on the local landscape character.
- 6.18 The Northumberland Coast AONB lies approximately 18km from the proposal. The Zone of Theoretical Visibility predicted that views of the turbines may be possible from an area of coastline to the north and east of Warkworth (19km from the proposal) and in the vicinity of Seaton Point and Marmouth Scars (25km from the proposal).

However, given the distances over which the turbines would be viewed, it is considered that they would represent a small and distant element, would not have an adverse impact on the special qualities of the AONB.

- 6.19 The Northumberland National Park lies approximately 6.5km to the north east. The Zone of Theoretical Visibility predicted that views of the turbines may be possible from an area of Harwood Forest and the crags and south east facing slopes of the Simonside Hills. The LVIA submitted with the ES concluded that the effect on the Simonside area from the Park Head proposal both standalone and cumulatively with other proposed development in the area would be significant.

#### Visual Impact

- 6.20 Wind turbines are large, tall structures which as a consequence will inevitably impact on the visual amenity of an area. The proposed windfarm site is surrounded by a number of properties, located at Low Southward Edge (785m) Doe Hill Farm (791m), Coal Houses (800m), Folly Houses (801m), Fiddlers Elbow (825m), High Southward Edge (1048m) and Wingates Moor Farm (1092m). There are also a number of properties located in the small settlements within 3km of the site, located at Wingates (2km to the north) and Netherwitton (2.5km to the south) . In addition there are a number of local roads and public rights of way in the surrounding area and the impact of the users of these routes must also be assessed. To assist in the assessment of the potential visual impact of the proposed development, the LVIA identifies a 30km radius study area, within which the extent of the theoretical visibility of the proposed turbines has been assessed: the 'zone of theoretical visibility' (ZTV). The extent of the visibility of the turbines as shown in the ZTV is 'theoretical' as it does not take into account the potential screening effect of landscape features such as buildings and trees. However it does identify those areas where the turbines would not be visible. In essence the ZTV demonstrates a worst case scenario from which more detailed assessments of visual impact can be developed.
- 6.21 A total of 18 viewpoints are considered in detail in the LVIA within the 30km ZTV study area. The 18 selected viewpoints include a range of residential receptors and publicly accessible locations around the proposed site to provide both near and distant views. Within the LVIA photomontages, photographs and/or wire frames are used to illustrate the potential visual impact from these locations.
- 6.22 The Audit has identified some concerns about these viewpoints. It considered that four of the viewpoints are unsatisfactory. This is because one is at a location where the ZTV predicted that there would be no turbine visibility and the other 3 involve locations where intervening vegetation would obstruct views of the wind turbines. This is contrary to the guidance set out in the document: "Visual

Representation of Wind Farms: Good Practice Guidance” which advises that the aim should be to choose viewpoints from where there are likely to be significant effects.

- 6.23 Photomontages were prepared for only 6 of the 18 viewpoints. The guidance set out in the document: “Visual Representation of Wind Farms: Good Practice Guidance” advises that photomontages should be prepared where significant visual impacts are likely to occur. The Audit has advised that a number of additional photomontages would help to illustrate the likely visual impact of the wind farm in its landscape setting. The Audit also identified a number of concerns about the quality of some of the photomontages.
- 6.24 The LVIA did not include an assessment of the following receptors:
- Farmsteads, individual properties, groups of properties, caravan/camping sites that are outwith settlements and within 3km of the proposed site
  - The local network of minor roads
  - The local footpath network
- In addition, there was no assessment of the visual impacts during construction and decommissioning.
- 6.25 The Audit concluded that, due to important omissions in the receptors identified, visual effects have not been comprehensively assessed. The Audit therefore recommended that additional information be submitted:
- Further assessment of the likely visual effects of the proposal, both standalone and cumulatively with other proposals, in views from residential properties
  - Additional photomontages
  - The resubmission of a number of photomontages
- 6.26 It was considered that, until this information was received, a comprehensive assessment of the visual impact of the proposed wind farm development could not be carried out. Additional information has now been provided by the applicant following the submission of the appeal against non-determination. A verbal update on the adequacy of this information will be provided at committee.

### Impact on Ecology

- 6.27 The ecological consultees have all identified significant omissions in the ecological information submitted with the Environmental Statement. To address this, the need for further ecological information was identified in terms of the following:
- updated phase 1 habitats survey
  - updated otter, water vole, badger, red squirrel survey
  - white clawed crayfish survey
  - additional bat surveys to a recognised methodology

- additional great crested newt surveys to a recognised methodology
- an assessment of potential impacts on the nearby SNCIs
- additional ornithological surveys
- barn owl survey
- reptiles assessment
- mitigation proposals

6.28 It was considered that a comprehensive assessment of the impacts on ecology could not be carried out until the other information requested had been provided. Additional information has now been provided by the applicant following the submission of the appeal against non-determination. A verbal update on the adequacy of this information will be provided at committee.

### Cumulative Impacts

6.29 PPS22 advises that LPAs should take into account the potential impacts of wind generation projects in particular areas. Guidance on landscape and visual impact including the assessment of potential cumulative effects is set out in the Landscape Institute and Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment (20020), Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, Second Edition. The Environmental Statement has identified wind farm developments within a 30 km radius of the application site. The independent Audit identified the need for additional information on cumulative impacts. This, together with the lack of ecological, visual impact and noise information, meant that it was not possible to undertake a comprehensive assessment of the cumulative impacts of the proposal. Additional landscape and ecological information has now been submitted by the applicant following the submission of an appeal against non-determination. A verbal update on the adequacy of this information will be provided at committee.

### Impact on Residential Amenity

6.30 Potential impacts on local communities can result from the construction of wind farms in terms of borrow pits, lorry movements within the local road network, site compounds and general construction activities in rural areas. Other impacts include those from the operation of the windfarm and views of the development when moving through the area. Finally impacts from the decommissioning of windfarms can result in adverse impacts on communities in a similar way to those experienced during construction.

### Noise

6.31 Local residents have raised concerns regarding the potential for noise to impact nearby properties. In assessing noise levels for windfarm development PPS 22 recommends that local planning authorities 'ensure that renewable energy developments have been located and

designed in such a way to minimise increases in ambient noise levels,' through the use of 1997 report by ETSU to assess and rate noise from wind energy developments. ETSU-R-97 requires windfarm noise to be limited to 5db(A) above the prevailing background or a fixed minimum level within the range of 35-40 DB  $L_{A90, 10mins}$  whichever is the higher. For nighttime periods, noise levels are limited to 5dB(A) above prevailing background or a fixed minimum level of 43 dB  $L_{A90, 10mins}$ .

6.32 The Environmental Statement acknowledges the potential for cumulative impacts from the nearby proposals but does not consider these in detail, particularly with reference to noise impacts. Further detailed information on this would be required before an assessment of the acceptability of the proposal could be made. The Environmental Health Officer has raised concerns about the methodology used to predict noise levels, in particular the fact that the acoustic measurements are based on background monitoring at only 3 properties. There is no indication that this data is indicative and that either additional monitoring is to be carried out or data from nearby wind farm proposals is to be used for modeling and prediction purposes. A comprehensive assessment of the impacts from noise in terms of the construction, operation and decommissioning cannot be carried out to ascertain if the proposed Park Head windfarm development complies with national guidance.

Shadow Flicker

6.33 Local residents have raised concerns regarding the potential for shadow flicker at residential properties near to the site. Shadow flicker is an effect that can occur when the shadow of a moving turbine blade passes over the opening of a small window, briefly reducing the intensity of light within the room and therefore causing a flickering to be perceived. The likelihood and duration of this flickering depends on a combination of sun, turbine and window location, turbine orientation, time of day, time of year and other weather conditions. In addition to this, the flicker effects only occur within a limited distance from a turbine. An assessment of the local area in relation to shadow flicker has been carried out as part of the Environmental Statement. This has highlighted that potentially four properties could be affected by shadow flicker. However, no mitigation is proposed by the applicant.

Health Issues

6.34 Some objectors have raised concerns about health impacts arising from the wind farm. However, there is no evidence to suggest that wind turbines give rise to any health effects from low frequency noise or as a result of shadow flicker.

Impact on Cultural Heritage

Hadrians Wall World Heritage Site

- 6.35 The proposed site lies approximately 24km from the World Heritage Site. Views of the proposed turbines from Hadrians Wall was assessed from one viewpoint. This indicates that there may be partial views of the turbines. However, given the distances over which the turbines would be viewed, it is considered that they would represent a small and distant element, would not have an adverse impact on the outstanding universal value of World Heritage Site or its setting, or visitors experience of it.

#### Listed Buildings

- 6.36 The Environmental Statement includes an assessment of the impact of the proposal on the setting of listed buildings within an inner study area (the application site) and a middle study area (up to 5km from the site). 81 Listed buildings were identified within 5km of the site: six grades I and II\* and 75 grade II. The Environmental Statement concludes that there would be no significant effects on any of the listed buildings or their settings. It concludes that there would be only a minor impact on the setting of Netherwitton Hall, a grade I listed building.
- 6.37 Whilst there is some concerns about the methodology used to define the sensitivity of listed buildings, the limited assessment carried out and the contradictions in the assessment, the main concern relates to Netherwitton Hall. The Conservation Officer was consulted on the proposal and has raised concerns about the impact of the turbines on the setting of Netherwitton Hall. Four turbines would be visible on the skyline behind the Hall when viewed from the road in to the village and would therefore affect the setting of the Hall. The turbines would appear above the Hall, would be alien features within the views of the Hall from this direction and would compete for prominence, particularly when in motion. The most prominent of these turbines is turbine T8. It is therefore considered that the proposal is contrary to PPS5 Policy HE9 which states that substantial loss or harm to assets of the highest significance, including grade I listed buildings, should be wholly exceptional. The County Conservation Officer has advised that the impact on the setting of the Hall could be substantially addressed by the relocation or deletion of turbine T8.

#### Archaeology

- 6.38 The site has been subject to a phased programme of archaeological assessment including evaluation trenching focused on the wind turbine locations and crane pads, the construction compound and the borrow pit. The results of the trenching were generally negative. Given these negative results, the County Archaeologist has advised that the potential for unrecorded significant archaeological features to occur within the site is considered to be low and mitigation of potential impacts could be undertaken via an archaeological watching brief.

## Scheduled Ancient Monuments

- 6.39 There are 9 Scheduled Ancient Monuments (SAMs) within 5km of the proposed site. The Environmental Statement included an assessment of potential impacts on these SAMs as well as Lordenshaws Fort, 7.8km to the north west. The assessment concluded that there would not be a significant impact on the SAMs or their setting. English Heritage has not raised concerns about the impact of the turbines on the SAMs or their setting. The SAM on Simonside has not been included in the assessment. However, the County Archaeologist has advised that, on its own, the Park Head wind farm would be unlikely to have a significant impact on the SAM.

## Impact on Aviation

- 6.40 A number of concerns have been raised in letters of representation regarding airport safety. In Northumberland this responsibility has been delegated to Newcastle International Airport Limited (NIAL) (who control airspace around the airport up to 50 nautical miles or 93km) and National Air Traffic Services (NATS) (who provide air traffic services to all flights in the UK). NATS object to the proposal on the basis that their preliminary technical findings indicate that the proposals would conflict with their safeguarding criteria. Newcastle Airport has advised that the proposal may have a detrimental impact on appropriate and safe radar coverage at the airport and therefore objects to the proposal until such times as the applicant demonstrate that radar coverage would not be adversely affected. A comprehensive assessment of the impacts of the proposed Park Head windfarm on aviation cannot be carried out until receipt of the information requested.

## Highways considerations, including impact on public rights of way

- 6.41 Concerns have been raised by residents in the local area regarding the condition of the minor roads and large vehicles using these roads during the construction phase of the development. Construction traffic and abnormal loads would access the site via the A697 and the unclassified roads which run between Longhorsley and the site. The applicant has undertaken a route inspection to confirm that all escorted abnormal loads can satisfactorily negotiate the route with some improvements to the local highway network. These improvements may include the raising of tree canopies, corner/junction improvements, localised carriageway widening, piping of drainage ditches and the provision of adequate passing places. County Highways has been consulted on the application and is raising no objections to the proposed development subject to a number of planning conditions and legal agreements in terms of extraordinary maintenance work.
- 6.42 Public Rights of Way has recommended that the turbines are sited at least 200m from Bridleway no 7. and at least 127m from Footpath nos 9 and 10. It is not clear from the submitted plans and environmental

statement as to whether the proposed access roads would be shared by the Public Rights of Way across the site. Should this be the case then a number of conditions would be required to protect users of the Public Rights of Way.

## **7. Conclusion**

- 7.1 This is a proposal for a new onshore windfarm comprising 9 large turbines with associated infrastructure located to the north of Netherwitton and west of Longhorsley. The area where the proposed development would be located is the subject of much interest in terms of wind energy. The proposed development has generated considerable public interest in the local area and has given rise to strong objection from local residents and many letters of support from the wider area.
- 7.2 The LVIA submitted as part of the environmental statement has been independently audited and a number of statutory and non statutory consultees have made comments on the proposal. A need for a significant level of additional information was identified. It has therefore not been possible for the local planning authority or some of the statutory consultees to appraise the environmental impacts of the proposed windfarm development. It is therefore considered that the applicant has submitted insufficient information to enable a full and proper assessment of the impacts of the Park Head windfarm development on the wider landscape character, on the principal visual receptors (particularly those within 3km of the application site), on aviation in terms of impact on radar at Newcastle International Airport, on ecology, on noise and on cumulative impacts from the construction, operation and decommissioning of the development. The proposed development is therefore contrary to saved Policy RE2 of the Castle Morpeth Local Plan. It is therefore recommended that planning permission be refused as set out below.

## **8. Recommendation**

- 8.1 It is recommended that planning permission be **REFUSED** for the following reasons:
1. The proposed Park Head windfarm is a major development proposal that gives rise to a number of significant impacts which must be weighed against the benefits arising from the contribution to the national need to increase the generation of energy by renewable means. Insufficient information has been submitted to enable a full and proper assessment of the impacts of the windfarm development on:
    - a) the landscape character and on the principal visual receptors (particularly those within 3km of the application site);
    - b) ecology

- c) aviation in terms of impact on radar at Newcastle International Airport,
- d) residential amenity in terms of noise; and
- e) on cumulative impacts from the construction, operation and decommissioning of the development.

The proposal is therefore contrary to saved Policy RE2 of the Castle Morpeth Local Plan.

**Background papers:**

For further information contact Frances Wilkinson on (01670) 534064  
Development Management Files: 09/00154/RENEIA