

**Consultation on Planning Application: Erection of Single Wind Turbine
on Site at Laurels Farm, Shipmeadow**
Report by Head of Development Management

Summary: The Broads Authority has been consulted by Waveney District Council in respect of an application for a single wind turbine on land at Laurels Farm, Shipmeadow.

Recommendation: That an objection is raised to the application on grounds of adverse impact on the landscape of the Broads.

1 Background

- 1.1 In February 2010, three planning applications were submitted to Waveney District Council for the erection of three wind turbines on three sites in the parishes of Ringsfield and Shipmeadow, giving a total of nine wind turbines. The applicant was Stamford Renewables Ltd.
- 1.2 The sites were Devonshire Farm to the east of Ringsfield on the southern side of the Waveney Valley. (2010/0270), land at Granary Farm to the north east of Ringsfield on the southern side of the Waveney Valley (2010/0271) and land to the west of Laurels Farm to the south of Bungay Road in Barsham on the southern side of the Waveney Valley (2010/0272).
- 1.3 The Broads Authority was consulted on the three applications and raised an objection to each, largely on the grounds of impact on the protected landscape of the Broads. The responses were prepared under delegated powers.
- 1.4 Waveney District Council proposed to determine the applications at their April 2010 meeting of the Planning Committee, with a recommendation for refusal of planning permission. The application was withdrawn prior to determination.
- 1.5 In July 2010 the three applications were resubmitted. The proposals were unchanged, however there was additional information provided in support of the applications.
- 1.6 The Broads Authority was consulted on the three applications and a report was considered at the 10 September 2010 meeting of the Planning Committee where it was resolved to raise a strong objection to all three applications on grounds of adverse impact on the landscape and protected species. Of the three applications, Members had particular concerns over the application which was sited closest to the Broads, at Laurel's Farm.

- 1.7 On 9 November 2010 refusal of planning permission was issued by Waveney District Council in respect of each of the three applications. The grounds of refusal for each of the applications included the detrimental visual impact on the landscape, in particular of the Broads area, and impact on the nature conservation interest of the Broads. In addition, it was considered that there was insufficient information to demonstrate that there would not be an adverse impact on birds, particularly in relation to the qualifying features of the Broadland SPA.
- 1.8 In May 2011 the applicant appealed against the refusal of planning permission issued by Waveney District Council in respect of the application at Laurel's Farm only. No appeal was submitted in respect of the applications at Devonshire Farm or Granary Farm.
- 1.9 In addition to submitting the appeal, and as part of this process, the applicant amended the Laurel's Farm proposal to reduce the number of wind turbines proposed from three to two (BA/2011/0171). The applicant also provided additional information in respect of the landscape impact of the proposals, information on the wintering bird population and the effects thereon of the proposals, plus details of the impact on the Grade 2* listed church of Saint Bartholemew in Beccles.
- 1.10 A report on the appeal proposals, both the original application for three and the amendments for two wind turbines, was considered by the Planning Committee at their meeting on 12 August 2011 where it was resolved to raise a strong objection. This response was forwarded to Waveney District Council.
- 1.11 The Public Inquiry was scheduled for May 2012. In February 2012 the appeal was withdrawn.
- 1.12 In November 2012 a revised application was submitted. The revised application is for the erection of a single wind turbine with a maximum height to tip of 125m and an output capacity of up to 2MW. The location of the proposed turbine is at Laurels Farm, Shipmeadow and lies approximately 15m to the west of the previously proposed site.

2 The Site and the Proposals

- 2.1 The site is located on land to the west of Laurels Farm to the south of Bungay Road and to the south of the village of Shipmeadow. The site is on agricultural land and the turbines would sit at a height of approximately 27m AOD. The site is on the southern side of the Waveney Valley and the Broads Authority boundary lies approximately 750m to the north.
- 2.2 The proposed turbine would have a hub height of 80m and a rotor (blade) diameter of 88m. The hub itself adds a further 1m to the height, giving a ground – blade distance of 125m. There are in addition associated ancillary structures and development proposed on each site, including a substation, hardstandings, access tracks and a permanent 60m high meteorological mast

to monitor wind behaviour. The associated power and telecommunications cables would be underground.

3 Planning Policies on Renewable Energy

3.1 As part of the EU-wide action to increase the use of renewable energy, the Government has committed to sourcing 15% of its energy from renewable sources by 2020 and this is set out in the UK Renewable Energy Strategy (2009). National planning policy on this issue was previously set out in Planning Policy Statement 22 'Renewable Energy' (2004) (PPS22) which, whilst it pre-dated the UK Renewable Energy Strategy, supported the positive policy direction of that Strategy.

3.2 In March 2012, PPS22, along with most other national planning policy guidance, was replaced by the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). The NPPF takes a positive approach to the matter of renewable and low carbon energy, and seeks to incorporate the consideration of energy and energy need into all stages of the planning process. Paragraph 97 states:

“To help increase the use and supply of renewable and low carbon energy, local planning authorities should recognise the responsibility on all communities to contribute to energy generation from renewable or low carbon sources. They should:

- *have a positive strategy to promote energy from renewable and low carbon sources;*
- *design their policies to maximise renewable and low carbon energy development while ensuring that adverse impacts are addressed satisfactorily, including cumulative landscape and visual impacts;*
- *consider identifying suitable areas for renewable and low carbon energy sources, and supporting infrastructure, where this would help secure the development of such sources;*
- *support community-led initiatives for renewable and low carbon energy, including developments outside such areas being taken forward through neighbourhood planning; and*
- *identify opportunities where development can draw its energy supply from decentralised, renewable or low carbon energy supply systems and for co-locating potential heat customers and suppliers.”*

3.3 Local policy on the development of renewable energy is set out in the Development Management Policies DPD DP8 which requires that such development is of a scale and design appropriate to its locality and that it would not have an adverse impact, inter alia, on the Broads landscape. The supporting text to DP8 refers to renewable energy developments outside the Broads area and states that such development will not be supported where it would have a significant adverse impact on the Broads environment and the special landscape setting and character.

3.4 In spring 2012, mindful of the existing pressures and increasing demands for renewable energy development, the Broads Authority commissioned the

preparation of a study to examine the sensitivity of the Broads landscape to renewable energy development. This considered all forms of renewable energy and built on the Landscape Character Assessment study of 2006 in characterising the various landscapes of the Broads. The Study identified a set of criteria which are key contributors to the character of the Broads area, and these are as follows:

- Scenic and special qualities
- Enclosure and scale
- Landscape and land cover pattern
- Skylines
- Perception and experience of the landscape
- Historic landscape character
- Visual sensitivities and intervisibility with areas outside the Broads.

The purpose of this process was to provide a strong, consistent and objectively-derived basis on which to assess the impact of renewable energy development on the Broads landscape. A presentation on the Study was provided to full Authority at their meeting on 13 July 2012.

- 3.5 The Study has not been formally adopted and does not form part of the development plan, however it provides a useful and up-to-date basis for an assessment of the impact of renewable energy development on the Broads. Furthermore, although it does not specifically identify suitable areas for renewable and low carbon energy sources (as set out under bullet point 3 of paragraph 97 of the NPPF) it does give guidance on which areas are more or less sensitive to such development and so will enable an applicant to focus more precisely his search for sites. In this, it is considered to accord with the broad principle of point 3 of paragraph 97.

4 National Planning Policy on Landscape Protection

- 4.1 In March 2012, Planning Policy Statement 7 'Sustainable Development in Rural Areas' (2004) which set out national policy on rural development including the protection of designated landscapes, was replaced by the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). The NPPF continues the level of protection set out in the former PPS7 and paragraph 115 of the NPPF states:

“Great weight should be given to conserving landscape and scenic beauty in National Parks, the Broads and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, which have the highest status of protection in relation to landscape and scenic beauty. The conservation of wildlife and cultural heritage are important considerations in all these areas, and should be given great weight in National Parks and the Broads.”

5 Assessment

- 5.1 The 2006 Landscape Character Assessment identified and described the various Landscape Character Areas across the Broads. It identified that

within this part of the Waveney valley the local Landscape Character Area is typified by a strong pastoral characteristic which in the main feels secluded and tranquil. It also identified a strong visual and physical connection between the north and the south of the river. It found that longer distance views, intermittently interrupted by waterside vegetation, exist up and down the valley across the pastoral landscape, whilst views out of the Broads area are relatively uninterrupted by man-made vertical elements, with tree lined and arable field skylines and with the occasional church towers forming landmarks. It noted that traffic movement along the roads which traverse the valley sides is generally masked by intervening vegetation and that the scale of fringe development that exists adjacent to the local village settlements impacts only the local landscape character and is subservient to the overall character and perception of this highly valued and tranquil landscape.

- 5.2 Concurrent to the landscape characterisation work being done by the Broads Authority in 2006, the neighbouring Local Planning Authorities at Waveney and South Norfolk were each, too, undertaking similar studies. These found that the landscape outside the valley floor on the valley sides and beyond forms part of the “setting” of the “typical” Broads landscape of low lying marsh and grazing land. Subsequently these authorities, with mid-Suffolk District Council have completed a branding exercise for the Waveney valley which emphasises the undeveloped and tranquil character of the area.
- 5.3 In terms of the relationship with the surrounding landscape, it is noted that the Waveney valley exhibits subtle differences in character to the rest of the Broads area, with the valley itself relatively narrow and with well pronounced valley sides. This increases the sense of connectivity to the adjacent landscapes which lie outside the Broads and which form the “setting” of the typical Broads landscape. This is identified in the 2006 Broads LCA, which noted that there is considerable inter-visibility between the Local Character Areas identified in the Broads assessment and those of the landscape types identified in the character assessments of the adjacent Districts. On this basis, it is considered that the “setting” and hence development within this “setting” has the potential to influence the character and visual amenity of adjacent areas.
- 5.4 As part of the work on the Study into the sensitivity of the Broads landscape to development associated with renewable energy, the 2006 Landscape Character Assessment work was revisited and updated to include some of the more experiential and perceptual qualities that are valued within the Broads landscape. This work highlighted the importance of the relatively uninterrupted character of the skylines in the Landscape Character Areas and the contribution this makes to the local character.
- 5.5 The Landscape Character Assessment work which was done in 2006 (and updated in 2012) is useful in its identification and description of the various Landscape Character Areas across the Broads, however it is how this is developed in the 2012 Study in terms of assessment of sensitivity that is of particular relevance in commenting on this proposal.

- 5.6 The application site is located adjacent to Landscape Character Areas 1 (Outney Common and Bath Hills area), 2 (Bungay/Ditchingham to Shipmeadow/Geldeston) and 3 (Barsham, Gillingham and Beccles Marshes). Within LCAs 1 and 2 the Study identifies that overall these areas have a high sensitivity to wind turbine development, whilst when considering the land outside the Broads executive area but adjacent to areas 1 and 2 it states:

“H4 character area [the site lies in this] displays a strong visual association with the Broads and is therefore of high sensitivity. The rising ridges are sensitive to wind turbine developments of most typologies, particularly those at the higher end of the scale due to their prominence”.

- 5.7 In respect of land within LCA 3, the Study identifies that the sensitivity to wind turbine development is moderate-high, however this represents an average over the whole of area 3. When looked at in more detail it is noted that this value of moderate-high is affected by the presence of the A146, which lessens sensitivity. However, the effect of the A146 diminishes towards the application site and therefore the sensitivity increases and achieves the higher end of the moderate-high value. When considering the land outside the Broads executive area, but adjacent to LCA 3, the Study states:

“Turbines at the smaller end of the range (below 20m to tip height) would have less effect on landscape character and perceptual aspects within the Broads, due to the closer relationship to existing landscape scale elements. However fieldwork confirms that the relative prominence of the valley sides and ridges in the adjacent areas means that larger turbines would appear more dominant in relation to the Broads, resulting in a high landscape sensitivity.”

- 5.8 Whilst the outcome of the Study is that LCA 1, 2 and 3 (and the areas outside of the Broads executive area adjacent to them) are sensitive to renewable energy development, in order to come to a justified conclusion on any specific proposal, it is necessary to assess the actual impact of that specific proposal on the Broads. In doing this, it is necessary to look at three factors: the sensitivity of the landscape receptors, the magnitude of the effect and the significance of the effect (ie its importance taking into account the sensitivity of the receptor and the magnitude of the effect).
- 5.9 Looking first at the sensitivity, this has been detailed above, where it is concluded (drawing on the 2006 Landscape Character Assessment work and the 2012 Study) that the sensitivity in LCAs 1 and 2 is high, whilst it is also high in that part of LCA 3 adjacent to the application site.
- 5.10 In terms of magnitude, the judgement as to how far the high magnitude effects extend is subjective and is based on an assessment of the distance from the site of the proposed development that the existing landscape characteristics reassert themselves as the dominant features in the landscape, rather than the proposed development. The magnitude is usually directly proportional to the distance – ie if the dominant landscape reasserts itself over a short distance, the magnitude of the effect is likely not to be substantial. This

distance can depend on the viewpoint, the intervening landscape features and the local character of the area with its existing features and elements. In this case, it is considered that as a consequence of topography and the extremely elevated views of the proposed turbine and the nature of the existing skyline features with its characteristic fields and woodland blocks and the lack of other vertical manmade features in the landscape that the magnitude of the effect would be high. It is also considered that potentially the magnitude of the effects could be high for a distance of up to 1.5 km.

- 5.11 Looking finally at the significance of the effects, it is considered that as a consequence of the sensitivity of the area (particularly the eastern area of LCA2 and the western area of LCA3) and the magnitude of the effects, that there would be effects of major and major-moderate significance.
- 5.12 The conclusion of high sensitivity and high magnitude impacts and major/major-moderate significance of effects is that the impact of the proposed development on the landscape of the Broads would be significant.
- 5.13 It is noted that to support the application, the applicant has produced an Environmental Impact Assessment which sets out his own assessment of the landscape impacts of the proposal. The EIA concludes that the impacts are less than has been assessed above. This conclusion notwithstanding, it identifies a number of viewpoints from which the assessment of impact is undertaken and acknowledges that from a number of these viewpoints the impact is significant. Two of these viewpoints, from which the impacts are accepted as of 'major-moderate' significance are from within the Broads area looking out; three of these viewpoints are from beyond the Broads area looking towards the Broads. All of them are within the setting of the Broads and affect that setting.
- 5.14 In conclusion, it is considered that the landscape character of this part of the Broads would be seriously compromised by the proposed turbine development. The significance of the potential effects on the scenic and special qualities, enclosure and scale, skylines, perception and experience of the landscape and historic landscape character would be substantial across parts of the area and would be unacceptable. In addition, the potential adverse impact on visual amenity for users of the Broads would be unacceptably high. It is considered that this would compromise the delivery of two of the Authority's statutory purposes, namely:
- Conserving and enhancing the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage of the Broads;
 - Promoting opportunities for the understanding and enjoyment of the special qualities of the Broads by the public.
- 5.15 It is noted that the NPPF places great weight on the conservation of the landscape and scenic beauty of the Broads, which benefits from the highest status of protection. Whilst it is noted that it is not appropriate to create 'buffers' adjacent to protected landscapes, in respect of development proposals on adjacent land, it is important to take full account of the host

landscape and its intrinsic qualities which, in this case, are comparable of those of the Broads to the north, and the contribution of that host landscape and its contribution to the setting of the protected landscape. Members are advised that there are a number of useful appeal decisions elsewhere which support this approach.

- 5.16 Finally, in reaching a conclusion on the proposal, it is also appropriate to take account of the work which is currently underway to secure the undergrounding of overhead electricity cable within the Waveney valley. This is a project on which the Broads Authority is leading and the purpose of which is to improve visual amenity in protected landscapes by the removal of pylons and overhead wires. Work to the value of £1.5 million will be funded through a special allowance granted by OFGEM. It is considered that approval of the wind turbine scheme here would have the effect of neutralising the improvements that could be made through the removal of these lines.
- 5.17 Taking all of the above into account, it is concluded therefore that it is appropriate to raise a strong landscape objection to the proposals.
- 5.18 In terms of the impact on protected species, the designation of the Broads recognises its importance for wildlife, including wetland species, birds and bats. Natural England guidance advises that:

“...Wind energy turbine and track construction can result in habitat and species disturbance and loss. Wind turbine operation and maintenance may disturb sensitive species, and there is a risk of bird and bat collision with moving blades and any additional overhead wires For these reasons, the presence of Sites of Special Scientific Interest, National Nature Reserves, and sites designated under Natura 2000 (i.e. SAC and SPA) will substantially reduce the degree to which wind energy development can be accommodated.”

Some species (particularly bats and birds) that are protected under EU and UK law are particularly sensitive to wind energy development. Collision risk is greater where wind turbines straddle regular flight lines, such as between roosting and feeding grounds or where birds such as raptors make use of a site for hunting. The presence of these species may generally reduce the degree to which wind energy development can be accommodated.”¹.

- 5.19 The EIA prepared by the applicant identifies potential adverse impact on Marsh Harriers, which are a component species of the Broads SPA, and this will require further investigation, including a Habitats Regulations Assessment. In the absence of such an assessment a holding objection on grounds of potential adverse impact on protected species is appropriate.

¹ It is recommended that species risks/impacts be mitigated through design or operation of the wind farm, avoiding the need for species licensing; however there is potential for the construction to result in offences relating to damage/destruction of habitat. Developers should be encouraged to undertake early surveys to either rule this risk out, enable avoidance measures to be taken (e.g. timing of construction) or allow timely preparation for meeting licensing requirement.

6 Conclusion and Recommendation

- 6.1 Climate change is one of the key challenges for the future and The Broads, as a low lying area, is one of the areas most vulnerable to change and most at risk from the damaging impacts of that change. On this basis, there is a general support for of mechanisms to reduce contributions the climate change and this will include an in principle support for renewable sources of energy.
- 6.2 An 'in principle' support, however, is not support at any cost and in determining whether or not to support any particular scheme, the impact on The Broads and particularly the reasons and qualities for which it was designated must be taken into account.
- 6.3 In this case, whilst the contribution of the proposed wind turbines to meeting the objectives of the UK Renewable Energy Strategy (2009) is recognised, it is not considered that this can be used to justify the significant and adverse impact on the protected landscape of the Broads and therefore, on balance, it is concluded that the proposed scheme is unacceptable.
- 6.4 It is therefore recommended that the Broads Authority raise a strong objection to the applications.

Background papers: Nil

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Appendices: APPENDIX 1 – Location Plan

BA/2012/0393/WNDTUR - Laurels Farm, Bungay Road, Barsham
Erection of a single wind turbine of up to 2MW rated output capacity

