



JOINT AREA COMMITTEES IN SOUTH SOMERSET

Officer Report on Planning Application

09/01910/FUL

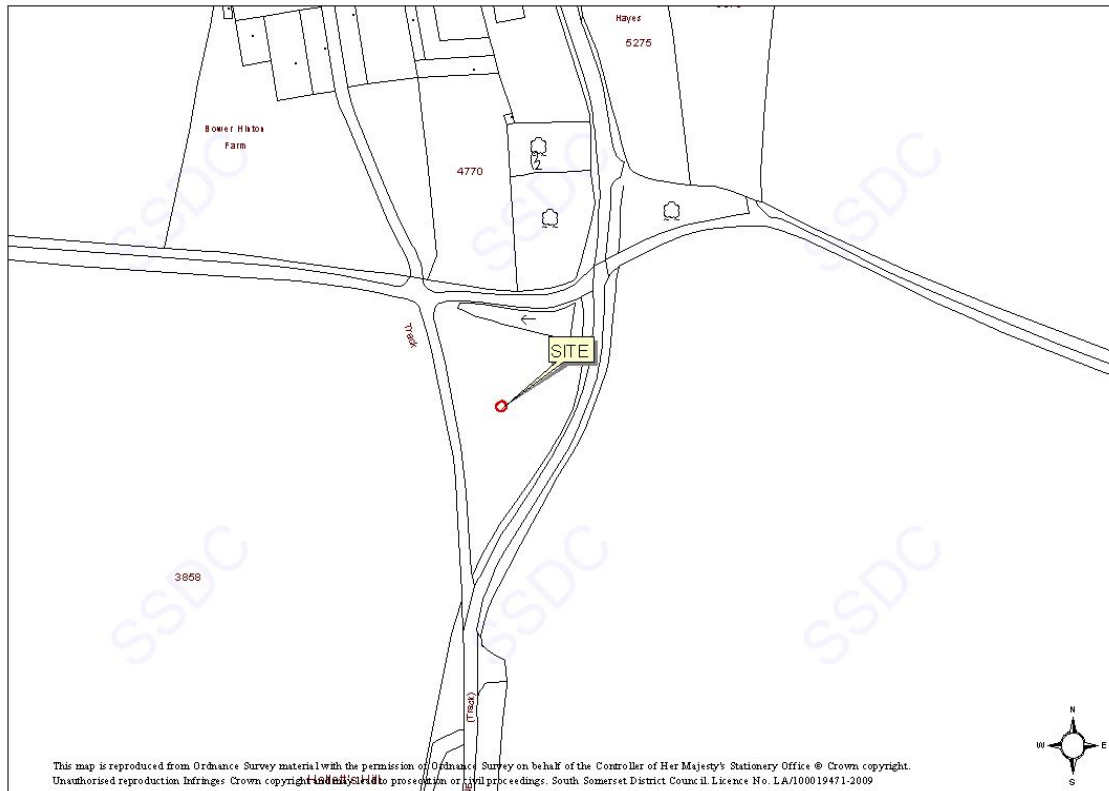


Proposal :	The erection of a 15kw wind turbine on a 15m high tower (GR: 345477/117644)
Site Address:	Land At Bower Hinton Farm Bower Hinton Martock
Parish:	Martock
Ward : (SSDC Member)	MARTOCK Ann Campbell (Cllr), Patrick Palmer (Cllr)
Division (SCC Member)	MARTOCK John Bailey (Cllr) (previously Douglas Campbell)
Recommending Case Officer:	Dominic Heath-Coleman Tel: 01935 462643 Email: dominic.heath-coleman@southsomerset.gov.uk
Target date :	8th July 2009
Applicant :	Mr Patrick Palmer
Agent: (no agent if blank)	Mr Tony Carver Natural Energy 11 Strensham Business Park, Strensham, Worcester WR8 9JZ
Application Type :	Minor Other less than 1,000 sq.m or 1ha

REASON FOR REFERRAL TO COMMITTEE

The applicant is the chair of Joint Area Committee – North

SITE DESCRIPTION AND PROPOSAL



The proposal seeks permission for the erection of a 15kw wind turbine on a 15 metre high tower.

The location of the proposed wind turbine is a small plot of agricultural land, with high hedges to the northern and eastern boundaries and open to the west. The plot is located to the south of the main farm, which is itself located at the southern end of the village. The site is surrounded by open countryside and isolated from any other built form. A public footpath runs to the east and north of the site, screened from the site itself by the mature hedge boundaries. The site is located outside of the development and conservations areas as defined by the local plan.

The proposed turbine and blades will be covered in black polypropylene and mounted on a galvanized steel tower with a dull grey finish. The tower will be set on top of a concrete base.

HISTORY

None

POLICY

Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 repeats the duty imposed under S54A of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 and requires that decision must be made in accordance with relevant Development Plan Documents unless material considerations indicate otherwise,

Relevant Development Plan Documents

Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) for the South West (RPG10) (adopted September 2001):

VIS1 - Expressing the Vision
VIS2 - Principles for Future Development
RE6 - Energy Generation

Somerset and Exmoor National Park Joint Structure Plan (adopted April 2000):

STR1 - Sustainable Development
STR6 - Development Outside Towns, Rural Centres and Villages
Policy 64 - Renewable Energy

South Somerset Local Plan (adopted April 2006):

ST3 - Development Areas
ST6 - Quality of Development
ST5 - Principle of Development
EC3 - Landscape Character
EP2 - Pollution and Noise
EH5 - Setting of Listed Buildings
EH1 - Conservation Areas

Policy-related Material Considerations

Draft Regional Spatial Strategy for the South West (Proposed Changes June 2008):

SD1, SD2, SD3 and SD4.
Development Policies A, B, C, E and H
RE1 -5

PPS's/PPG's

PPS1 - Delivering Sustainable Development
PPS22 - Renewable Energy

South Somerset Sustainable Community Strategy

Goal 10

Parish/Town Plan - Martock

6.3 Culture and Environment

Other Relevant Documents:

None

CONSULTATIONS

SSDC Planning Policy - The 'Development Plan' for Land at Bower Hinton Farm consists of Regional Planning Guidance for the South West (RPG10), saved policies of the Somerset & Exmoor National Park Authority Joint Structure Plan and saved policies of the South Somerset Local Plan. RPG10 'Policy RE6: Energy Generation' and saved Structure Plan 'Policy 64: Renewable Energy' both encourage and support the greater use of renewable energy projects. As such the general principal for the erection of a wind turbine is supported.

Please note that former South Somerset Local Plan renewable energy policies EU1 & EU2 have not been saved beyond the 26th April 2009 and can therefore no longer be considered part of the 'Development Plan'.

As 'other material considerations' Policy RE4 of the emerging South West Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) requires applications for renewable energy facilities to take into account the wider environmental, community and economic benefits. These objectives are consists with PPS22: Renewable Energy, Paragraph 1 (viii) that states 'Development proposals should demonstrate any environmental, economic and social benefits as well as how any environmental and social impacts have been minimized through careful consideration of location, scale, design and other measures'.

With these issues in mind it is considered that a proposal for a wind turbine at Land at Bower Hinton Farm that generates approximately 24,000kWhrs per annum of power will have the economic benefit of supporting the farms viability, the environmental benefit of reducing reliance on fossil fuels and the wider social benefit of reducing climate change.

It is also considered that the wind turbine has been suitably located to maximise wind speed with resultant energy generation while minimising landscape impact. It is noted that from far views the wind turbine will match the height of adjacent trees on the skyline. Further, the supplementary noise assessment adequately demonstrates that a 15kw wind turbine does not generate noise above background noise, beyond a 60 meter radius. The site location plan confirms that the nearest dwellings are located well beyond this distance. Conclusion: Application is supported on Planning Policy grounds.

SSDC Landscape Architect - I note the above wind turbine proposal, and am familiar with the application site.

The main landscape concerns regarding turbine proposals are those of (i) inappropriate scale, and (ii) adverse landscape impact.

I see that the overall height (turbine hub height plus blade radius) is a little less than 20 metres. This scale of development is equal to the form of a mature tree, and as such should not appear an incongruous feature providing the siting is not overly exposed to the wider view, and there are other landscape or built features which can act as a foil to the turbine. I have reviewed the photomontage submissions, and also looked at the turbine location from a number of sensitive visual receptors in the vicinity, and I note that the site is not on a major skyline, and that there are a number of mature oaks in the vicinity which are both vertical element, and dominant landscape feature.

Consequently, given the landscape context, I am satisfied that a turbine of the scale proposed could be accommodated at the site without undue landscape impact, and confirm that this application does not attract a landscape objection.

SSDC Climate Change Officer - This site is well chosen for wind turbine. At the average wind speeds documented, electricity generation of in excess of 35,000 kWh a year can be expected. This would be equivalent to that used in 6 average households and will contribute towards regional and national renewable energy targets.

SSDC Technical Services - No comment

County Highways - No observations

Town/Parish Council - No objections

SSDC Conservation Officer - No objection

SCC Archaeology - The site lies very close to a medieval settlement and in an area where prehistoric remains are very likely to be located. This development is a relatively small proposal and the impact on any remains will therefore be limited to the excavation for the base of the turbine. If remains are encountered during the excavation they should be recorded and for this reason I recommend that the applicant be required to provide archaeological monitoring of the development and a report on any discoveries made. This should be secured by the use of model condition 55 attached to any permission granted:

"No development hereby approved shall take place until the applicant, or their agents or successors in title, has secured the implementation of a programme of archaeological work in accordance with a written scheme of investigation which has been submitted by the applicant and approved by the local planning authority."

I am happy to provide a specification for this work and a list of suitable archaeologists to undertake it.

SCC Rights of Way Officer - No comments received 07/07/2009

SSDC Rights of Way Officer - No comments received 07/07/2009

REPRESENTATIONS

One letter of objection was received from the occupier of a property in Stapleton, Martock. The objector states "It would appear that no neighbourhood notification has been sent out in connection with this planning application. Surely this should be done automatically. If a blot

on the landscape, such as a hideous wind turbine is planned, residents and local people using the footpaths should have the opportunity to comment on the whooshing noise that may ensue."

CONSIDERATIONS

The main considerations in relation to this application are the impact of the proposal on the visual amenity of the landscape and the impact of any noise generated, weighed against the impact of the proposal on the environment and the economy of the area.

The SSDC Climate Change Officer and the SSDC Policy Planner both support the application in terms of the potential impact of the proposal on the environment. The proposal is considered to be in line with local and national policy relating to climate change and environmental issues. The SSDC Policy Planner also states "the proposal for a wind turbine at Land at Bower Hinton Farm will have the economic benefit of supporting the farms viability" As such the proposed turbine is considered to be in line with policy ST3 of the South Somerset Local Plan, which states, "Outside the defined development areas of towns, rural centres and villages, development will be strictly controlled and restricted to that which benefits economic activity."

The SSDC Landscape Architect has considered the impact of the proposed wind turbine on the character of the area and the wider landscape context. He supports the application noting that the overall height of the proposal is no higher than that of a mature tree and in the proposed location will not be unduly dominant. The site is not considered to be on a major skyline and the presence of several mature oaks in the vicinity already provide a vertical emphasis against which the proposal will not look incongruous.

Policy EP2 of the South Somerset Local Plan states, "Applications for potentially noise generating uses will be permitted only where they would not be detrimental to the amenity of noise sensitive developments in the vicinity". The noise emission report submitted as part of the application states that at 60 metres distance from the mast background noise is louder than the turbine. As Bower Hinton Farm is approximately 100 metres from the proposed mast, and the next nearest dwelling, Marrows Hayes, is approximately 130 metres from the site, it is considered that the proposed mast will not be detrimental to the amenity of the nearest noise sensitive developments.

Although no consultation response has been received from SSDC and SCC Rights of Way it is considered that the impact of the proposed turbine, in terms of visual amenity and noise pollution, on the users of the nearby public footpath will not be significant enough to warrant refusal of the application. As detailed in the submitted noise emission report the noise level generated, even at the base of the mast in high winds, is not significantly above average talking levels and certainly not high enough to cause a nuisance to the users of the footpath, especially considering the relatively short period they will be exposed to it.

The County Archaeologist was consulted in regards to the possible impact of the proposal on any nearby archaeology. He stated that there is a high likelihood of buried archaeology in the vicinity and that if any consent is issued a condition should be attached to ensure that archaeological monitoring takes place.

A letter of objection was received from the occupier of an unspecified property in Stapleton. The main thrust of the objection appears to be that proper consultation with the neighbourhood did not take place. However, with no immediate residential neighbours to the site it was considered that a site notice was adequate when combined with the statutory consultation with the parish council. The objector lives a significant distance from the site

and as such would not have received a neighbour notification letter under any circumstances. In any case the objector was clearly not prejudiced as their response was received well within the 21-day consultation period. The objector refers to the wind turbine as "a blot on the landscape". However as previously stated in this report the proposal is considered to satisfactorily respect the character of the area and wider landscape. The objector also refers to a 'whooshing' noise. Again as previously stated the impact of any noise generated is not considered to be significant enough to warrant refusal of the scheme.

The conservation officer was consulted in regards to the impact of the proposal on the setting of the nearby listed buildings and the views in and out of the nearby conservation area. He raised no objections to the scheme. The proposal is therefore not considered to have a significant impact on either the setting of the nearby listed buildings or the views in or out of the conservation area in accordance with policies EH1 and EH5 of the South Somerset Local Plan.

In conclusion, notwithstanding the objections received, the proposed wind turbine is considered to benefit the economic viability of the farm it will serve and to be in line with local and national policy on renewable energy. The proposal is not considered to cause demonstrable harm to either the residential or visual amenity of the occupiers of neighbouring properties nor to the users of the nearby footpath. The proposal is also considered to respect the character of the area and the wider landscape context, and to have no adverse impact on the setting of the nearby listed buildings or the views in or out of the conservation area.

As such, the application is considered to be acceptable and should be recommended for approval.

SECTION 106 PLANNING OBLIGATION / UNILATERAL UNDERTAKING

None

RECOMMENDATION

Grant permission for the following reason:

01. The proposal, by reason of its size, scale and materials, respects the character of the area, will not cause unacceptable harm to the distinctive character and quality of the local landscape and causes no demonstrable harm to residential amenity in accordance with the aims and objectives of Policies ST6 (Quality of Development), EC3 (Landscape Character) and EP2 (Noise and Pollution) of the South Somerset Local Plan (Adopted April 2006). The proposal is further considered to be in line with PPS22 (Renewable Energy), Policy RE6 (Energy Generation) of the Regional Spatial Strategy for the South West (RPG10) and Policy 64 (Renewable Energy) of the Somerset and Exmoor National Park Joint Structure Plan.

SUBJECT TO THE FOLLOWING:

01. The development hereby permitted shall be begun before the expiration of three years from the date of this permission.

Reason: To accord with the provisions of section 91(1) of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990.

02. The materials to be used in the development hereby permitted shall be those as identified within the planning application and no other materials unless the Local Planning Authority gives written consent to any variation.

Reason: In the interests of visual amenity and to comply with Policy ST6 of the South Somerset Local Plan (Adopted April 2006) and Policy STR1 of the Somerset and Exmoor National park Joint Structure Plan.

03. No development hereby approved shall take place until the applicant, or their agents or successors in title, has secured the implementation of a programme of archaeological work in accordance with a written scheme of investigation which has been submitted by the applicant and approved by the local planning authority.

Reason: To ensure that a programme for the recording of finds is entered in to in accordance with Policy EH12 of the South Somerset Local Plan (adopted April 2006).
