

MINUTES OF A SPECIAL MEETING OF THE MILTON ABBOT GROUPED PARISH COUNCIL HELD ON TUESDAY 30th SEPTEMBER 2014 AT MILTON ABBOT VILLAGE HALL AT 7.30PM.

(also available at www.chillaton.net)

PRESENT: Cllrs J. Anderson (MA), H. Asbridge (C), P. Hough (MA), J Spurr (MA), Robert Tucker (MA) and Mrs A Westcott (C) (Chair)

Cllr Bob Baldwin (WDBC)

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Brewer.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Cllr Tucker declared a non-pecuniary interest in both items on the agenda.

**3. APPLICATION 01013/2014 PROPOSED WIND TURBINE
– RAMSDOWN, MILTON ABBOT**

In considering this application, Milton Abbot Grouped Parish Council was aware of:

(i) the outcome of a public meeting held at Milton Abbot on the 24th September, attended by over one hundred people, where the views expressed were all opposed to the proposed development.

(ii) the response to the leaflet circulated by the applicant to residents within 1km of the site, whereby 37 opposed the development and two supported it.

(iii) the representations on WDBC's website showing, on Tuesday 30th September, 118 against and one in favour.

The Parish Council acknowledged the emphasis in the NPPF on the encouragement of the use of renewable resources, especially renewable energy and the reflection of that approach in Local Plan policies adopted by WDBC. The Parish Council therefore reviewed this application to determine whether or not, in its view, this particular proposal would have a net adverse impact sufficient to justify the application of other national and local planning policies that prevent such developments in inappropriate locations.

The Parish Council noted that its previous decision regarding community benefit payments was supported by those present at the public meeting on 24th September. It therefore confirmed that, in its opinion, such payments did not constitute an adequate means of offsetting the adverse effects of an inappropriately sited wind turbine.

The Parish Council gave particular consideration to the following factors:

Visual impact and effect on the landscape: The wind turbine would be sited 1.1km from the Tamar Valley AONB and 0.5km from the Tamar Valley Discovery Trail. Although it was accepted that a very small percentage of the overall area of the AONB would be affected, the large area of the AONB [195 sq km], and its linear nature, following as it does a river valley, made that calculation less relevant than the fact that 180 hectares [445 acres] of the AONB would, according to the submitted Landscape and Visual Impact assessment [LVIA], be subjected to adverse landscape effects of moderate/major significance and visual effects of medium to high magnitude.

The site lay within the Tamar Valley Upland Fringe, described in the LVIA as an open, quiet landscape of high scenic quality and part of the setting of Dartmoor National Park. The LVIA describes the local landscape as having a medium to high sensitivity to the proposal. Given the characteristics of the area and the description of the turbine in the LVIA as 'a striking engineered local landmark', the Parish Council did not accept that the turbine 'would have a coherent relationship to the local landform'. Its 'prominent' position standing on the horizon above Milton Abbot was inappropriate, as evidenced by the statement in the LVIA that medium to high magnitude effects of moderate to major significance would occur from

viewpoint 3 [Milton Abbot School]. Viewpoint 3 was the nearest relevant viewpoint in the LVIA, as none were located in the village.

All properties within 2km of the site had a potential view of the turbine. The likelihood of that occurring was dependent on the amount of blocking or screening that affected individual homes. Where the turbine could be seen, the effects would be of medium to high magnitude and of moderate to major significance, decreasing as the distance from the turbine increased.

Heritage assets and Listed Buildings: There were a large number of listed buildings and Scheduled Monuments within the area in which the turbine had a visual impact, although it would not have a significant effect on many, due to their distance from the site and screening effects. However, the Environmental Statement submitted by the applicants indicated that 'the presence of a new, modern and visually intrusive vertical element in the landscape would impinge on a large number of heritage assets in a minor way and have a moderate negative effect on a small number, mainly parish churches and local farmhouses.

Cumulative Impact: The combined local effects of this proposal and the turbines at Tredown and Beckwell, if they were installed, would be significant, with the cumulative impact decreasing according to the distance from the application site. However, that cumulative effect did not take into account the proposed turbine at Cardwell Farm, Long Cross. This would not have a visual impact on Milton Abbot village or the AONB, because of the height of Ramsdown, but would add to the cumulative effect of those on the other side of Ramsdown, who would be able to see both turbines. If the status of the Cardwell Farm proposal was such that it should have been taken into account, then if necessary the cumulative impact of the Ramsdown turbine should be re-assessed.

In simple terms, the views westwards from Dartmoor and Brent Tor were already being affected by existing turbines but not yet dominated by them. That position would deteriorate if other turbines in the planning process, or already approved, were erected. The Parish Council considered that a tipping point had now been reached, whereby the approval of any further wind turbine developments in the Tamar and Lyd valley area would degrade its character below that which was appropriate for the hinterland of a national park and below the expectations of the tourists who were a key part of the local economy.

Energy Production: The average output from turbines in the southwest was about 23%. As a newer, more efficient machine, the proposed turbine should be more productive. The average actual output for the same model turbine installed at Camelford, was 52.58% for the period from July 2013 to April 2014. If that output was achieved, it would equate to the energy consumption of 448 homes in West Devon. The Parish Council could not determine whether or not the conditions at Ramsdown would be similar to those at Camelford, but considered it reasonable to assume that a significantly higher percentage output would be achieved by this turbine, when compared with the regional average.

Earlier this year, a screening and scoping application had been submitted for a 77m high 900kw turbine on this site. This application was for the same size turbine, but with a 500kw output. Unless there was some technical reason why a 900kw output could no longer be obtained, then either a smaller turbine with less visual impact could have been proposed, or a greater benefit could have been obtained from the equipment currently envisaged.

Local water supply: About 50% of the properties in Milton Abbot obtained their water from a local source that was apparently near to the proposed site of the turbine. Any disturbance to this water supply could have serious consequences, but this issue did not seem to have been addressed in the applicant's submission.

Having reviewed the application and taken into account the views of the great majority of local residents who expressed an opinion, the Parish Council objected to the proposed development in application 01013/2014 for the following reasons:

1. The effect on the landscape and the overall visual impact of this particular proposal on Milton Abbot village, the surrounding area and the Tamar Valley AONB are significant enough to warrant the application of the exceptions to the general presumption in favour of renewable energy development, contained in the NPPF and in Local Plan policies. The increasingly adverse cumulative effect of turbines in this area on the hinterland of Dartmoor National Park provides further justification for that

presumption to be set aside in this instance. This conclusion has been reached despite the anticipated output of the turbine because a) that could be produced by a more appropriately sited turbine of the same type and b) the current rate of achievement of Government targets for on-shore wind production makes it unnecessary to approve turbines in locations as unsatisfactory as this one.

2. The proposal is in conflict with WDBC Strategic Policy 17, which states that development will not be permitted on sites outside AONBs if it would damage their natural beauty, character and special qualities. That Policy also states that within Landscape Character Types, development should conserve, enhance and where appropriate restore landscape character.
3. The adverse effect on historic assets in the area is in conflict with WDBC Strategic Policy 18, which, in addition to defending specific sites, provides protection to areas of historic importance and other elements of the historic environment.
4. The proposal is in conflict with WDBC Strategic Policy 3 which restricts the granting of planning permission for renewable energy developments to cases where the developer has addressed the use of the most appropriate technology, because the turbine proposed by the applicant constitutes over-development, given its restricted power output.
5. No development on this site should be permitted unless adequate safeguards are in place to ensure the safety of the local water supply.

4. APPLICATION 01013/2014 – PRE-APPLICATION CONSULTATION PROCESS

The Parish Clerk reported on aspects of the pre-application consultation process carried out in respect of this application. In this case, a public meeting held about three years ago to discuss a different turbine of a different height on a different site had been held to be a public consultation in accordance with the new duty to consult before making an application. That might be perfectly acceptable; the current proposal was still on land owned by the original applicant, the turbine would be lower and probably quieter. The current application could therefore be seen as a positive response to the original concerns of residents.

On the other hand, it was unsatisfactory that WDBC's guidance lacked a timescale for an application to follow a consultation before a fresh consultation is required and had no constraints on changes in location, output and design of the turbine. In this case, after three years, new residents would have moved near the location. Also, other turbines have been erected or are planned, that might have caused some residents to alter whatever view they held three years ago.

The applicant stated that the turbine would have a visual impact of medium to high magnitude on properties within a 2km radius of the turbine, obviously decreasing as the distance from it increased. However, the pre-application consultation letter had only been sent to properties within a 1km radius of the proposed site. Whether or not residents living between 1km and 2km of the site should have received a consultation letter is something that should surely have been assessed by WDBC, when either giving the applicant initial advice or considering whether or not to validate the application as complying with the pre-application process.

Although the Parish Clerk had attempted to obtain guidance and clarification from WDBC on this issue so that he might advise the Parish Council, none had been received.

The Parish Clerk was therefore instructed to seek clarification from WDBC on these issues and on the future involvement of parish councils in determining the scope of any pre-application consultation process, given their detailed knowledge of the local circumstances relating to such applications.

The meeting closed at 8.40pm