DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT PANEL 20 JUNE 2011

Case No: **1001741FUL (FULL PLANNING APPLICATION)**

Proposal: **ERECTION OF 4 THREE BLADED WIND TURBINES, UP TO A HEIGHT OF 130.5 METRES, AND ASSOCIATED ELECTRICITY TRANSFORMERS, UNDERGROUND CABLING, TWO NEW ACCESSES TO THE SITE AND NEW BRIDGE, TRACKS, HARDSTANDINGS, CONTROL BUILDING, SUBSTATION COMPOUND, MET AND COMMUNICATIONS MAST FOR A PERIOD OF 25 YEARS; TEMPORARY WORKS INCLUDING CONSTRUCTION COMPOUNDS LAY DOWN AREA AND 2 ANEMOMETRY MASTS.**

Location: **LAND EAST OF WHITLEATHER LODGE WOOLLEY HILL**

Applicant: **RES UK AND IRELAND LTD (FAO MR J KNIGHT)**

Grid Ref: **515821 272982**

Date of Registration: **11.11.2010**

Parish: **ELLINGTON & EASTON**

RECOMMENDATION - APPROVE

1. DESCRIPTION OF SITE AND APPLICATION

1.1 The site is located on land to the north of the village of Ellington and the A14 and is 219 hectares in total. The site boundary runs adjacent to the A14 on its southern side and includes the higher land known as Woolley Hill upon which the wind turbines are proposed to be sited. It is currently farmed with some small areas of woodland in some parts of the site. There is a public footpath running from north to south through the site and a number of drains pass through the site.

1.2 The site is located on a plateau at an elevation of approximately 50 metres AOD and the land rises steeply up from the A14 before flattening out to the plateau at the top.

1.3 This full application proposes the erection of 4 wind turbines up to a total height of 130.5 metres, with a typical hub height of 80 metres. The submitted drawings show positions and 50m micrositing positions for each of the turbines. Although the model of turbine to be used has not yet been confirmed the submitted drawings show that the turbines will be of the 3 blade type. Each turbine would have a maximum installed capacity of between 2-3 Mega Watts. As is the norm permission is sought for a period of 25 years.

1.4 The application also includes the related installation of underground cabling, access tracks, access to public highway, crane hardstandings, control building and substation compound, 10m high communications mast and permanent free standing wind monitoring

mast. During construction and commissioning phase there would also be 2 guyed meteorological masts up to 80 metres high. The application also proposes the construction of a new skew bridge to allow access to the site off the A14 eastbound slip road for abnormal loads. This new bridge would be 30 metres wide and 20 metres long on one side and 15 metres on the other and would be the entrance for abnormal loads only. After construction the abnormal loads entrance will be grassed over. A separate entrance via Malting Lane North, over Grove Bridge to the east, for normal vehicles will also be created. Close to the abnormal loads entrance a temporary enabling construction compound will be created. New or improved tracks within the site will also be provided.

1.5 Accompanying information states that the predicted wind speed of the site is in excess of 6 metres per second at 45 metres height. Connection to the grid would be to the north west of the site near Salome Wood and is likely to be underground but this would be subject to a separate application under the Electricity Act 1989.

1.6 The application states that access for delivery of the turbines will be by travelling east along the A14 to junction 20 at Ellington. Abnormal loads will then access the site via the new skew bridge.

1.7 The application is accompanied by an Environmental Statement, a Planning Statement and a Design and Access Statement.

1.8 On 28 January 2011 officers wrote to the applicants stating that further information was required under Regulation 19 of the Environmental Impact Assessment Regulations in order for the submitted ES to be an Environmental Statement. The information required under Regulation 19 was the submission of further information relating to landscape, flooding and ecology. Officers also requested further clarification, (not under Regulation 19) on highways and cultural heritage. The applicants responded on 17 March 2011 with the further information requested.

1.9 This information has been advertised and all consultees notified in accordance with the requirements of the regulations. The comments of consultees on this additional information, if received, have been summarised in the Consultations Section of the report.

2. NATIONAL GUIDANCE

For full details visit the government website http://www.communities.gov.uk and follow the links to planning, Building and Environment, Planning, Planning Policy.

2.1 **Climate Change Act 2008** became law on 26 November 2008 and sets legally binding targets for reducing UK greenhouse Carbon Dioxide emissions for 2020 and 2050.

2.2 **Renewable Energy Strategy 2009** – outlines the move to a low-carbon economy, and the need for a dramatic change in renewable energy use in electricity, heat and transport.

2.3 **PPS1: "Delivering Sustainable Development" (2005)** contains advice on the operation of the plan-led system.

2.4 **Planning Policy Statement: Planning and Climate Change - Supplement to Planning Policy Statement 1 (2007)** sets out how planning, in providing for the new homes, jobs and infrastructure needed by communities, should help shape places with lower carbon emissions and resilient to the climate change now accepted as inevitable.

2.5 **PPS5: "Planning For The Historic Environment" 2010** – sets out the Government's planning policies on the conservation of the historic environment. This requires an assessment of all heritage assets both designated and undesignated.

Historic Environment Planning Practice Guide 2010

2.6 **PPS7: Sustainable Development in Rural Areas, (2004)** aims to promote more sustainable patterns of development by protecting the countryside for the sake of its intrinsic character and beauty, the diversity of its landscape, heritage and wildlife, the wealth of its natural resources and so it may be enjoyed by all (paragraph 1 (iv). It advises in paragraph 16 iv) that in determining planning applications authorities should provide for the sensitive exploitation of renewable energy sources in accordance with the policies set out in PPS22.

2.7 **PPG8: Telecommunications (2001)** gives guidance on planning for telecommunications development - including advice on the potential for disturbance to television and other telecommunications signals and the need to investigate possible engineering solutions to such matters.

2.8 **PPS9: Biodiversity and Geological Conservation, (2005)** sets out Government's objectives for 'biodiversity and geological conservation'. Planning decisions should aim to maintain and enhance, restore or add to biodiversity and geological conservation interests. Development proposals should be permitted where the principal objective is to conserve or enhance biodiversity and geological interests. If significant harm cannot be prevented, adequately mitigated against, or compensated for, then planning permission should be refused. Para 14 notes that "development proposals provide many opportunities for building-in beneficial biodiversity or geological features as part of good design." LPAs are advised to maximise such opportunities.

2.9 **PPG17: Planning For Open Space, Sport and Recreation (2002)** sets out the policies needed to be taken into account by regional planning bodies in the preparation of Regional Planning Guidance (or any successor) and by Local Planning Authorities in the preparation of Development Plans (or their successors); they may also be material to decisions on individual planning applications. It supports the enhancing of rights of way networks in the countryside.

2.10 **PPS22: Renewable Energy 2004** has 8 key principles which are as follows:

- Renewable energy developments should be capable of being accommodated throughout England in locations where the

technology is viable and environmental, economic, and social impacts can be addressed satisfactorily.

- Regional spatial strategies and local development documents should contain policies designed to promote and encourage, rather than restrict, the development of renewable energy resources. Regional planning bodies and local planning authorities should recognise the full range of renewable energy sources, their differing characteristics, locational requirements and the potential for exploiting them subject to appropriate environmental safeguards.
- At the local level, planning authorities should set out the criteria that will be applied in assessing applications for planning permission for renewable energy projects. Planning policies that rule out or place constraints on the development of all, or specific types of, renewable energy technologies should not be included in regional spatial strategies or local development documents without sufficient reasoned justification. The Government may intervene in the plan making process where it considers that the constraints being proposed by local authorities are too great or have been poorly justified.
- The wider environmental and economic benefits of all proposals for renewable energy projects are material considerations that should be given significant weight in determining whether proposals should be granted planning permission.
- Regional planning bodies and local planning authorities should not make assumptions about the technical and commercial feasibility of renewable energy projects (e.g. identifying generalised locations for development based on mean wind speeds). Technological change can mean that sites currently excluded as locations for particular types of renewable energy development may in future be suitable.
- Small-scale projects can provide a limited but valuable contribution and planning authorities should not therefore reject planning applications simply because the level of output is small.
- Local Planning Authorities, regional stakeholders and Local Strategic Partnerships should foster community involvement in renewable energy projects and seek to promote knowledge of and greater acceptance by the public of prospective renewable energy developments that are appropriately located. Developers of renewable energy projects should engage in active consultation and discussion with local communities at an early stage in the planning process, and before any planning application is formally submitted.
- Development proposals should demonstrate any environmental, economic and social benefits as well as how any environmental and social impacts have been minimised through careful consideration of location, scale, design and other measures.

Advice is also given about appropriate policies to be included within local policy documents. It also states that regional planning bodies and local planning authorities should set out in regional spatial strategies and local development documents the criteria based policies which set out the circumstances in which particular types and sizes of renewable energy developments will be acceptable in nationally designated areas.

Care should be taken to identify the scale of renewable energy developments that may be acceptable in particular areas.

With regard to determining planning applications which may affect nationally designated sites, such as National Nature Reserves, National parks, AONBs, SAMs, SSSIs, Conservation Areas or listed buildings, it states planning permission for renewable energy projects should only be granted where it can be demonstrated that the objectives of designation of the area will not be compromised by the development, and any significant adverse effects on the qualities for which the area has been designated are clearly outweighed by the environmental, social and economic benefits.

Local landscape and local nature conservation designations should not be used in themselves to refuse planning permission for renewable energy developments. Planning applications for renewable energy developments in such areas should be assessed against criteria based policies set out in local development documents, including any criteria that are specific to the type of area concerned.

It also states that the sequential approach e.g. favouring brownfield sites should not be used for renewable energy projects.

In assessing planning applications, local authorities should recognise that the impact of turbines on the landscape will vary according to the size and number of turbines and the type of landscape involved, and that these impacts may be temporary if conditions are attached to planning permissions which require the future decommissioning of turbines. Planning authorities should also take into account the cumulative impact of wind generation projects in particular areas.

Local Planning Authorities should ensure that renewable energy developments have been located and designed in such a way to minimise increases in ambient noise levels. Plans may include criteria that set out the minimum separation distances between different types of renewable energy projects and existing developments. The 1997 report by ETSU for the Department of Trade and Industry should be used to assess and rate noise from wind energy development.

The Companion Guide includes a very detailed technical annex on wind. It covers issues such as noise, low frequency noise, landscape and visual impact, driver distraction and shadow flicker. It states at Paragraph 5.4, that landscape and visual effects will only be one consideration to be balanced alongside the wider environmental, economic and social benefits.

2.11 **PPG24: "Planning & Noise" (1994)** guides planning authorities on the use of planning powers to minimise the adverse impact of noise.

2.12 **Circular 1/2003: 'Safeguarding Aerodromes etc'**, Paragraph 15 of this circular gives advice on the safeguarding requirements for civil aerodromes.

2.13 **Circular 2/99: 'Environmental Impact Assessment'** paragraph 112 of this circular provides advice on the provision of further information under Regulation 19 and concludes that if a developer fails to provide enough information to complete the ES the application can be determined only by refusal.

2.14 **English Heritage 'Wind Energy and the Historic Environment 2005**: aims to provide a strategic approach to the land-use planning system which will maximise the benefits of renewable energy projects, while minimising their adverse effects on the historic environment.

2.15 **English Heritage 'Conservation Principles Policy and Guidance April 2008**': sets out principles of Conservation.

2.16 **English Heritage: 'Climate Change and The Historic Environment 2008**': Developments designed to generate renewable energy – like any other infrastructure developments – can have a wide variety of impacts, both positive and negative, that vary from the insignificant to the unacceptable. The benefits delivered by these new technologies can also vary considerably, particularly when considered on a whole-life basis. It is always important, therefore, to evaluate these benefits and impacts on a case-by-case basis. Among typical issues that will need to be considered are:

- The construction of new renewable energy infrastructure, including hydro-electric and tidal plants and onshore and offshore wind farms, may have direct impacts on archaeological remains.
- Wind farms need to be carefully sited to avoid compromising significant landscapes or the visual setting of important sites or buildings where the integrity of that setting is an important part of their significance.

2.17 **English Heritage: The Setting of Heritage Assets 2010 Consultation Draft**

3. PLANNING POLICIES

Further information on the role of planning policies in deciding planning applications can also be found at the following website: http://www.communities.gov.uk then follow links Planning, Building and Environment, Planning, Planning Information and Guidance, Planning Guidance and Advice and then Creating and Better Place to Live

3.1 **East of England Plan - Revision to the Regional Spatial Strategy (May 2008)** Policies viewable at http://www.go-east.gov.uk then follow links to Planning, Regional Planning then Related Documents

- **SS1**: "Achieving Sustainable Development" – the strategy seeks to bring about sustainable development by applying: the guiding principles of the UK Sustainable Development Strategy 2005 and the elements contributing to the creation of sustainable communities described in Sustainable Communities: Homes for All.

- **ENV2**: “Landscape Conservation” - Planning authorities and other agencies should recognise and aim to protect and enhance the diversity and local distinctiveness of the countryside character areas identified on Figure 6 by: developing area-wide strategies, based on landscape character assessments, setting long-term goals for landscape change, targeting planning and land management tools and resources to influence that change, and giving priority to those areas subject to most growth and change; developing criteria-based policies, informed by the area-wide strategies and landscape character assessments, to ensure all development respects and enhances local landscape character; and securing mitigation measures where, in exceptional circumstances, damage to local landscape character is unavoidable.
- **ENV3**: “Biodiversity and Earth Heritage” it should be ensured that the region’s wider biodiversity, earth heritage and natural resources are protected and enriched through conservation, restoration and re-establishment of key resources.
- **ENV6**: “The Historic Environment” - Within plans, policies, programmes and proposals local planning authorities and other agencies should identify, protect, conserve and, where appropriate, enhance the historic environment of the region including Conservation Areas and Listed Buildings.
- **ENG2**: “Renewable Energy Target” – the development of new facilities for renewable power generation should be supported with the aim that by 2010 10% of the region’s energy and by 2020 17% of the region’s energy should come from renewable sources. These targets exclude off shore energy and are subject to meeting European and international obligations to protect wildlife. The onshore targets for installed capacity are for at least 820 MW by 2010 and 1620 MW by 2020 for the region.
- **T9**: “Walking, Cycling and other Non-Motorised Transport” – existing networks should be improved and developed as part of the Regional Transport Strategy.

3.2 Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Structure Plan (2003)

Saved policies from the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Structure Plan 2003 are relevant and viewable at http://www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk follow the links to environment, planning, planning policy and Structure Plan 2003.

- None relevant.

3.3 **Huntingdonshire Local Plan (1995)**

Saved policies from the Huntingdonshire Local Plan 1995 are relevant and viewable at www.huntingdonshire.gov.uk/localplan95

- **R15**: “Countryside Recreation” – will seek to improve access to the countryside, including the network of public rights of way with a view to modifying, extending and improving the network where appropriate.
- **En2**: “Character and setting of Listed Buildings” - indicates that any development involving or affecting a building of architectural or historic merit will need to have proper regard to the scale, form, design and setting of that building.

- **En5**: “Conservation Area Character” - development within or directly affecting conservation areas will be required to preserve or enhance their character and appearance.
- **En9**: “Conservation Areas” - development should not impair open spaces, trees, street scenes and views into and out of Conservation Areas.
- **En11**: Planning permission normally refused for development that would have an adverse effect upon a scheduled ancient monument or an archaeological site of acknowledged importance.
- **En12**: “Archaeological Implications” – permission on sites of archaeological interest may be conditional on the implementation of a scheme of archaeological recording prior to development commencing.
- **En17**: "Development in the Countryside" - development in the countryside is restricted to that which is essential to the effective operation of local agriculture, horticulture, forestry, permitted mineral extraction, outdoor recreation or public utility services.
- **En20**: Landscaping Scheme. - Wherever appropriate a development will be subject to conditions requiring the execution of a landscaping scheme.
- **En22**: “Conservation” – wherever relevant, the determination of applications will take appropriate consideration of nature and wildlife conservation.
- **En23**: “Conservation” – development within or which adversely affects, a site of special scientific interest, a national or local nature reserve or has a significant adverse effect on the interests of wildlife will not normally be permitted.
- **En25**: "General Design Criteria" - indicates that the District Council will expect new development to respect the scale, form, materials and design of established buildings in the locality and make adequate provision for landscaping and amenity areas.

3.4 **Huntingdonshire Local Plan Alterations (2002)**

Saved policies from the Huntingdon Local Plan Alterations 2002 are relevant and viewable at www.huntingdonshire.gov.uk/localplan - Then click on "Local Plan Alteration (2002)

- None relevant.

3.5 **Adopted Huntingdonshire Local Development Framework Core Strategy 2009**

Policies from the Adopted Huntingdonshire Local Development Framework Core Strategy 2009 are relevant and viewable at http://www.huntsdc.gov.uk click on Environment and Planning then click on Planning then click on Planning Policy and then click on Core Strategy where there is a link to the Adopted Core Strategy.

- **CS1**: “Sustainable development in Huntingdonshire” – all developments will contribute to the pursuit of sustainable development, having regard to social, environmental and economic issues and including maximising opportunities for renewable and low carbon energy sources and on site renewable energy provision and improving energy efficiency. All

aspects will be considered including design, implementation and function of development.

- **CS9**: "Strategic Green Space Enhancement" - coordinated action to safeguard existing and potential sites of nature conservation value, create new wildlife habitats and contribute to diversification of the local economy and tourist development through enhancement of existing and provision of new facilities.

3.6 **Development management DPD: Proposed Submission 2010**
Policies from the Development Management DPD: Proposed Submission 2010 are relevant.

- **C3**: "Renewable and Low Carbon Energy" – proposals for free standing renewable or low-energy generating schemes will be considered in accordance with PPS22 and considered favourably where: careful siting and design ensures the scheme does not have an unacceptable impact on the environment and local amenity; where located outside the built-up area has regard to the capacity of the surrounding landscape and provision is made for the removal of redundant apparatus and re-instatement of the site to an acceptable condition should the site become redundant.
- **E1**: "Development Context" – development proposals shall demonstrate consideration of the character and appearance of the surrounding environment and the potential impact of the proposal.
- **E3**: "Heritage Assets" – proposals which affect the District's heritage assets or their setting should demonstrate how these assets will be protected, conserved and where appropriate enhanced.
- **E4:** "Biodiversity and Protected Habitats and Species" – proposals shall be accompanied by assessments of the likely impacts on biodiversity and geology including protected species, priority species and habitats or sites of importance for biodiversity or geology.
- **H7**: "Amenity" – development proposals should safeguard the living conditions for residents and people occupying adjoining or nearby properties.
- **P7**: "Development in the Countryside" – development in the countryside is restricted to those listed within the given criteria.

  a. essential operational development for agriculture, horticulture or forestry, outdoor recreation, equine-related activities, allocated mineral extraction or waste management facilities, infrastructure provision and national defence;
  b. development required for new or existing outdoor leisure and recreation where a countryside location is justified;
  c. renewable energy generation schemes;
  d. conservation or enhancement of specific features or sites of heritage or biodiversity value;
  e. the alteration, replacement, extension or change of use of existing buildings in accordance with other policies of the LDF;
  f. the erection or extension of outbuildings ancillary or incidental to existing dwellings;

g. sites allocated for particular purposes in other Development Plan Documents.

3.7 **Natural England and The East of England Regional Spatial Strategy** shows that the site falls within the National Character Area 88 (NCA88) "Bedfordshire and Cambridgeshire Claylands". Natural England has further detail on each NCA and describes the claylands as gently undulating characterterised by large scale arable farms with open fields.

3.8 **Huntingdonshire Landscape and Townscape Assessment (2007)** – identifies the site where the turbines are proposed as being within the Northern Wolds Landscape Character Area. To the north and east of the site at a distance of approximately 1 km is the Central Claylands Character Area and to the south, at a distance of less than 1km, is the Southern Wolds Character Area.

The **Northern Wolds** has 5 main characteristics:

- A strong topography of ridges bisected by pronounced valleys
- Valleys are well vegetated and intimate in scale, while ridges/ plateaux feel more open.
- An historic landscape, containing many medieval features.
- Dispersed pattern of historic villages, with little modern development.
- Distinctive square church towers topped with spires form characteristic landmarks.

The SPD refers to the landscape character of the Northern Wolds being achieved through the distinctive and repeated pattern of ridges, valleys and settlements. The ridges are generally in arable production. They have a relatively open feel, with long views and few hedgerow trees. In contrast, the valleys have a higher proportion of land in pastoral use. They feel more enclosed and intimate in scale, due to the lack of views out, and the smaller field sizes. The repeating patterns of topography, and changes in the scale of the landscape between ridges and valleys creates a rhythm which is particularly strong when travelling north-south through the area. Where the A14 passes through the Northern Wolds, tranquillity is reduced, but the visual impact of the road on the surrounding area is localised.

Key issues are Protection and enhancement of the distinctive characters of the valley and plateaux landscapes through the protection of smaller fields and meadows in the valleys, and the maintenance of long views from the upland areas; preservation and interpretation of archaeological features, with improved public access where appropriate; protection of key views towards the distinctive skyline of ridge tops, church towers and woodland; protection and enhancement of historic settlement character through good siting and design of new buildings, and maintenance of village greens; protection of the parkland setting to Kimbolton village and School, and improving traffic management in the village; protection of the existing watercourses; opportunities to improve the nature conservation value of the streams should be explored; and protection of ancient hedgerows and oaks within the valleys.

Of the two adjacent landscape character areas:

The **Southern Wolds** has 4 main characteristics:

- Relatively gentle topography, including the broad valleys of the river Kym and the Ellington Brook.
- A well-wooded landscape, with hedged fields, and some more recent plantations
- Scattered villages and few isolated farms
- Significant modern influences on the landscape, including conifer plantations, power lines, housing estates, industrial areas, airfield, prison and the Anglian Water buildings around Grafham Water.

The **Central Claylands** has 6 main characteristics:

- Gently undulating arable farmland.
- Large scale field pattern with few hedgerows or hedgerow trees, giving rise to a predominantly open landscape.
- Relatively large scale developments, including airfields at Alconbury and Wyton, the major transport corridor of the A1/ A14, and significant northern extensions to the towns of Huntingdon and St Ives.
- Extensive cover of ancient woodland in the north west.
- Regularly spaced traditional villages, often clustered around village greens.
- Numerous Medieval moats visible as earthworks in the landscape.

3.9 **Huntingdonshire Wind Power (2006)** - identifies the Northern Wolds area as having a high capacity to accommodate both a single turbine and a small scale group at the lower end of the range, the range being defined as 2-12. The lower end of the range is defined as up to 2 or 3 turbines. It states that although a more obvious and dominant feature in the landscape a small scale development could respond well to the landscape structure and land cover pattern. Key sensitivities relate to the more intimate valleys, historic villages and valued elements, particularly with respect to historic features and distinctive church spires. The location of a small scale group should take into account guidance in the form of 10 criteria:

a) Respect existing landmark features such as key views to church spires;
b) Respect the landform and relate turbines to the strong ridges and plateau; avoid locating turbines within the more intimate landscape of the valleys and along valley crests where they will be out of scale with the landscape and settlements such as Kimbolton;
c) Avoid siting turbines on areas of pasture with ridge and furrow;
d) Respect the site and setting of the historic villages which characterise the Northern Wolds;
e) relate to existing building clusters in the landscape, for example the occasional large farm buildings, utility buildings or industrial areas (such as disused airfields);

f) relate to the land cover pattern, in particular the woodland edges and field patterns with a consistent and repetitive spacing between turbines;
g) consider the impact on views of the horizon from the Central Claylands, Fen Margins and Fens;
h) Consider a linear arrangement along contours as opposed to crossing contours;
i) avoid the introduction of new pylon lines into the Northern Wolds. The area is currently characterised by the absence of disruptive features and pylon lines would be difficult to accommodate in relation to the distinctive ridge and valley topography; and,
j) seek opportunities to achieve wider landscape management objectives identified in the Huntingdonshire Landscape and Townscape Assessment in association with any proposed development.

The SPD also states that there is very little scope for the Northern Wolds to accommodate more than 1 small scale group. This is a landscape highly valued in the district for its 'unspoilt' quality and harmonious character; turbine development should not affect the perception of this special character. Decisions will need to be taken on a case-by-case basis.

Since the Southern Wolds and Central Claylands Character areas are relatively close to the site boundaries the advice for this area in the Wind Power SPD also needs to be taken into account. The former states that there is a high capacity for the landscape to accommodate a single turbine and a small scale group of turbines and the latter states that there is a high capacity for a single turbine, a small scale group and a moderate capacity for a medium scale group.

4. PLANNING HISTORY

0502693FUL – Erection of Anenometer Mast for temporary period – approved.
0701688S73 – renewal of planning permission 0502693FUL to retain anemometer mast for further temporary period – approved.
1001577FUL – Temporary siting of 80 metre high Anenometer mast for 18 months – approved.

5. CONSULTATIONS

5.1 **Ellington Parish Council** – First Response – **Objection**; Second Response to Regulation 19 information – disappointed with response to landscape issues and concern about impact upon cultural heritage. COPY ATTACHED.

5.2 **Stukeleys Parish Council** – recommend **REFUSAL**. COPY ATTACHED.

5.3 **Barham and Woolley Parish Council** – recommend **REFUSAL**. COPY ATTACHED.

5.4 **Spaldwick Parish Council** – recommend **APPROVAL**. COPY ATTACHED.

5.5 **Alconbury Parish Council** – recommend **APPROVAL**. COPY ATTACHED.

5.6 **Easton Parish Council** – recommend **REFUSAL**. COPY ATTACHED.

5.7 **HDC Environmental Health Officer** – **No objections** subject to conditions.

5.8 **HDC Transportation** – no objections.

5.9 **County Council as Highway Authority** – **no objection** subject to the receipt of dimensioned plans and conditions upon any planning permission granted.

5.10 **Highways Agency** – **does not object** but directs that if planning permission is granted a condition be imposed upon the consent requiring no construction to commence until the required temporary access works have been completed.

5.11 **English Heritage** – **First Response** - additional information required to assess the impact upon Ellington Church and Conservation Area. **Second Response** – the proposal will result in a degree of harm to the setting of Ellington which could be mitigated through a revised layout and/or a reduction from 4 to 3 turbines.

5.12 **County Council Archaeology** – The proposed mitigation in the ES is appropriate and proportionate to the significance of the archaeological remains. Recommend that a condition be imposed upon any planning consent granted requiring an archaeological investigation.

5.13 **Environment Agency** – **First Response** - objection to the originally submitted application as the FRA does not adequately consider the impact of the proposed new access bridge and subsequent ground raising within the floodplain. **Second Response** to the Regulation 19 information removes the objection subject to conditions and makes additional comments stating that the development will be acceptable if ecological enhancement and protection of the watercourses are provided for and making it clear that they are opposed to the culverting of watercourses.

5.14 **Alconbury and Ellington Internal Drainage Board** – **First Response** - require more details of the efficacy of the design of the proposed sustainable drainage system. **Second Response** – any planning permission should be subject to conditions.

5.15 **Anglian Water** – no objection.

5.16 **National Grid** – initial response that no decision is made as proposal is in close proximity to National Grids Transmission Assets – further response has been requested (twice) but not received.

5.17 **Natural England** – **First respo**nse – holding objection until further information is provided on bird collision risk, clarification on the siting of turbines in relation to the 50m Bat Habitat Buffer and clarification

on monitoring. **Second Response** – no objections subject to conditions relating to post construction monitoring and mitigation.

5.18 **Royal Society for The Protection of Birds – First Response** - no objections subject to construction work being undertaken outside the breeding season, an improved Ecological enhancement Management and Monitoring Plan to be submitted and approved, and post construction monitoring to be carried out. **Second Response** – no objections confirmed subject to the above.

5.19 **NERL Safeguarding** – no objections.

5.20 **Directorate of Airspace Policy Civil Aviation Authority** –comment that consultation should take place with Peterborough/Connington airport; that there may be a need for lighting; that the rotor blades, nacelle and upper 2/3 of the supporting mast be painted white and that the local emergency air support units be consulted. (Consultations with Peterborough/Connington airport and local air emergency support units have been carried out.)

5.21 **Ministry of Defence (MOD**)– **no objections** subject to a condition to mitigate the impact upon the RADAR at RAF Cottesmore

5.22 **Cambridge Airport** – no objections.

5.23 **Peterborough Connington Airport** – no response received.

5.24 **Local Air Emergency Support Services** – no response received.

5.25 **Huntingdon Ramblers** – comments that any footpath must be a safe distance from public rights of way, would be against the stopping up of any rights of way, and that any diversions must be as attractive and convenient as at present.

5.26 **County Council Footpaths Officer** – no objections subject to conditions.

5.27 **County Council Policy Strategy** – an Ecological and Landscape Mitigation and Monitoring Plan should be required by condition if consent is granted.

5.28 **British Horse Society** – objection to the siting of turbines T1 and T2 because it does not comply with advice from the British Horse Society.

5.29 **Council For The Protection of Rural England** – no response received.

5.30 **Cambridge Gliding Centre** (at Gransden Lodge Airfield) – no objections.

5.31 **Cambridgeshire Police Architectural Liaison Officer** – consideration should be given to security fencing around the control building to prevent theft of cabling and the underground cabling to be sufficiently buried to prevent theft. Comments that the hubs should be fitted with a navigation light.

5.32 **UK Paramotors Brooklands Farm** – an objection has been received from UK Paramotors who run a school for pilots operating flying machines which are similar to microlites or paragliders, in that they run with small motors and have inflatable wings. They object to the proposed wind farm as it would affect the existing flying route and any changes to the route would be likely to give rise to complaints.

6. REPRESENTATIONS

6.1 The **Woolley Hill Action Group (WHAG)** has been formed of local residents from the area who are opposed to the proposal. They have submitted a lengthy submission, objecting in relation to the originally submitted application on the following grounds:

- Domination of landscape and particularly adverse effect on those dwellings within 1km.
- Adverse impacts upon local businesses, examples being Paramotor Training School and Fithaven a Nordic Walking Business who use local trails.
- Loss of recreational amenity when using local footpaths and bridleways
- Loss of visual amenity
- Misleading information in the ES in the use of photo-montages
- Cumulative effects of other windfarms proposed locally
- Planning process inappropriate for this national infrastructure project
- Precedent has been set by Linton, Boxworth and other appeal decisions for rejecting this planning application.
- Distinctive church spires in 'valley of the spires' will be dominated
- The setting of the listed buildings of Ellington church, college farm and Grove Cottage will be overwhelmed.
- The setting of Easton Church and other listed buildings in the village will be overwhelmed
- The Church and remains at Barham will be compromised
- The Church at Spaldwick and 13 other listed buildings will be dominated
- Substantial highways dangers on the A14 including: the volume of traffic; driver distraction; disruption to strategic routes; if increased risk of accidents impacts upon local economy; precedent in the Boxworth appeal where it was felt that this road corridor was unsuitable for wind farm developments
- Impact of noise on nearby dwellings especially at night
- ETSU not reliable for measuring the effects of noise
- Sleep deprivation
- Cumulative effect of turbine noise
- Effect of noise during long period on construction on people and wildlife
- Conflict with Wind Power SPD as a wind farm has already been given permission at Hamerton
- Conflict with Core Strategy as it does not safeguard the unique character of Huntingdonshire
- Conflict with MOD
- Flood issues
- Would not be viable
- Lack of time for people and Parish to research objections

- Lack of consultation by developers
- Has been rushed through in advance of the Localism bill and proposed private members bill on separation distances
- Deficient ecology data

6.2 In response to the Regulation 19 information and further information submitted WHAG have made the following points:

- The impact of these structures has been understated
- The further montages show a much greater impact upon the village of Ellington, particularly the church
- The cumulative effects with Bicton, Molesworth and other sites cannot be dismissed
- Urge councillors to visit the site to see for themselves
- The lack of information in the original Flood Risk Assessment was unprofessional and discourteous
- The ecological assessment was carried out without drawing on any local or impartial advice and believe that the impact upon local ecology will be substantial
- Believe that the issue of driver distraction has not been considered properly
- The impact upon cultural heritage features is comparable to Bicton
- Further consideration should be given to the issue of sustainability
- The MOD position has been mis-represented
- Impact upon Paramotors business will be adverse
- Impact upon companies supplying Paramotors
- Urge that the application should be refused

6.3 Of the letters that have been received in connection with the application, 276 were in support of the proposal and 316 objected to the application. The main issues of **objection** raised, which have been listed with the most frequently raised issue at the top and the least frequently raised issue at the bottom of the list, were:

- Visual distraction and potential increase in accidents on A14
- Noise pollution
- Visual blight/out of scale
- Impact on Wildlife
- Inefficient and costly project with little electricity
- Impacts on villages and countryside on landscape
- Devaluation of property value
- Will not provide many benefits to the community or jobs to the economy
- Low wind speed of site
- Health impacts
- Impact on Heritage Assets
- Health and safety
- Impact upon safety on A14 of construction traffic
- Proximity to residential dwellings
- Inefficient form of energy only promoted because of subsidies
- Impact on rural activities such as walking, cycling and horse riding
- Adverse impact upon Red Kite birds and osprey migration

- Contrary to HDC Wind Power SPD policy on northern wolds
- Dominating impact on Ellington
- Light and shadow flicker
- Excessive amounts paid to landowners
- Wind power intermittent and variable
- Effect on TV reception
- Offshore or coastal siting would be better
- Area already suffers from recycling plant
- Has been established that no wind farm should be closer than 2km to a residential dwelling
- Environmental or carbon footprint negative
- Cumulative impact of this and others proposed nearby
- Applicants only concerned with commercial profit
- Turbines will be amongst highest in the country
- Aircraft safety including small aircraft
- Excessive cost of windfarms ultimately paid for by households with higher bills
- Other forms of renewable energy better
- Benefits not justified by harm
- Impact on horses and horse riding
- Industrialisation of area
- Area already suffers noise from A14
- Consultation poor
- ES and photomontages misleading or errors
- Offering of monetary incentives to community
- No compensation is available
- Nuclear power would be better
- Views of local people being ignored contrary to principle of localism
- Failure to provide much energy in recent cold spell
- Contrary to many planning policies
- Likelihood of more turbines later
- Solar power would be better
- Impossible to mitigate impact upon with landscaping
- Better locations away from homes
- Impact upon tourism and business
- Will not reduce local electricity costs as goes straight to national grid
- No guarantee that they would be moved at the end of their life
- Site already 52 metres above road level and therefore overall height of turbines 180m
- Would not oppose smaller turbines
- In favour of wind farms but this is the wrong site
- Flood issues
- Applicants not carried out research properly
- No consideration of colour of turbines
- Legacy left to future generations
- More effort should be put into energy conservation rather than building more turbines
- Turbine industry should be regulated by UK/EU not left to planning regulations
- Solar panels on rural establishments would be more efficient and acceptable to local people
- Alternative forms of renewable energy should be considered

- Would result in the removal of trees
- Loss of local amenities
- Much smaller extensions get refused
- Woolley hill has little landscaping or vegetation
- There are already turbines at Hamerton
- Credibility and sufficiency of evidence doubtful
- Councils response to climate change is piecemeal – applications should not be determined until strategy in place

6.4 The points raised in **support** of the proposal which have been listed with the most frequently raised issue at the top and the least frequently raised issue at the bottom of the list, were:

- We cannot rely on coal and gas and wind power is sustainable
- Will help secure energy supplies and be less dependant on imported fuels
- It is a good appropriate site for a wind farm
- They will benefit 5000 homes in Huntingdonshire
- Will help Huntingdonshire deliver a local commitment to renewable energy
- 80% of the population support wind power
- Several European countries already generate 20% of their electricity from wind power
- Climate change is the most urgent issue facing the planet
- Wind power does not produce emissions of acid rain, carbon dioxide or particulates
- Many objections are NIMBY
- Fits into local landscape
- Essential for UK's energy needs
- It is for the future and younger generation
- Renewable resources are the right way to go
- It is efficient, clean and sustainable
- Climate change means we need more renewable energy
- It will not result in car accidents
- Lower country's carbon footprint
- They will be a temporary feature
- They look elegant
- It results in minimum interference in people's lives
- Good amount of wind
- Needed for commitment to EU targets
- Objectors are small minded and selfish
- Why are there so few positive comments
- We are running out of natural resources and it is better than nuclear
- Cheaper fuel needed
- If it is needed then why not
- Lower energy costs
- Need to consider alternative energy
- Environmentally healthy and friendly
- Important to harness nature's gifts
- Using natural resources
- We all got used to pylons

A petition with 574 signatures stating that they support the development of Woolley Hill Wind farm has been received.

6.5 A letter has also been received from Shailesh Vara MP who states that the proposed site is inappropriate for 131 metre high turbines as it would have a negative impact upon the surrounding countryside, carry the risk of noise disturbance and reduce householders enjoyment of their homes. He also fears that the risk of accidents on the A14 will increase due to driver distraction and that the turbines will pose a threat to wildlife given the proximity of the site to Grafham Water. He states that the RSPB have expressed concerns.

7. SUMMARY OF ISSUES

7.1 The main issues to be considered in respect of this application are central and local government policy on renewable energy, renewable energy targets, landscape and visual impact, historic built environment, residential amenity, wildlife, traffic and highways issues, footpaths including the use of bridleways by horse riders, safety and aviation issues.

Environmental Statement

7.2 An ES which is considered to meet the requirements of the Town and Country Planning Environmental Impact Assessment Regulations 1999 has been submitted.

Renewable Energy Policy

7.3 The main thrust of central government policy is to help counter the serious effects of climate change which are considered to be significant and include potential increases in flooding, subsidence, water shortages and increased insurance associated with damage to buildings. The importance to Huntingdonshire District and Cambridgeshire as a whole cannot be underestimated since much of the area is low lying close to sea level. In addition Huntingdonshire's residents have, on average, one of the highest annual per capita carbon footprints figures in the region at 9.2 tonnes of C02 (as calculated by DEFRA under the methodology for national indicator NI 186).

7.4 It is therefore imperative that the District takes all appropriate steps to try and mitigate these impacts through maximising its contribution to carbon reduction as rapidly as possible. Huntingdonshire District Council is committed, as a signatory to the Nottingham Declaration, to taking steps to mitigate the negative effects of climate change. Woolley Hill Wind Farm will have an installed capacity of between 8 and 12 megawatts which is estimated to meet the annual power needs of approximately 5,250 households. This proposal would therefore make a significant contribution towards the production of renewable energy.

Renewable Energy Targets

7.5 The raft of Government documents from the Energy White Paper, Meeting the Challenge May 2007 to the July 2009 Renewable Energy Strategy leave no reasonable room or dispute regarding the seriousness of climate change and its potential effects, the necessity to cut carbon dioxide emissions or the seriousness of Central

Government's intention regarding its commitment to the generation of energy from renewable sources.

7.6 The key principles as set out in Planning Policy Statement PPS22 Renewable Energy, which was published in 2004, include the fundamental provision that renewable energy developments should be capable of being accommodated throughout England in locations where the technology is viable and environmental, economic, and social impacts can be addressed satisfactorily (key principle i). The wider environmental and economic benefits of all proposals for renewable energy projects are material considerations that should be given significant weight in determining proposals (key principle iv). Key principle (vi) goes on to advise that small-scale projects provide a limited but valuable contribution to overall outputs of renewable energy and to meeting energy needs both locally and nationally; with key principle (viii) advising that development proposals should demonstrate any environmental, economic and social benefits as well as how any such impacts have been minimised through careful consideration of location, scale, design and other measures.

7.7 Since the publication of PPS22 there have been several further publications that reinforce the national energy policy position with the Renewable Energy Strategy of July 2009 clearly identifying that wind generation both onshore and offshore has an important role to play in the provision of renewable generation in the UK. The EU Renewable Energy Directive requires the UK Government to ensure that at least 15% of energy consumed comes from renewable sources by 2020 whereas at present only 3% of consumed energy comes from renewable sources. National policy therefore is and remains strongly supportive of appropriately located proposals to generate renewable energy.

7.8 The Government has announced its intention to abolish the Regional Spatial Strategies; however at the time of writing this report they are still a material planning consideration. The latest up to date information on meeting those regional targets is contained within the East of England Renewable Energy Statistics December 2009 produced by Renewables East; an updated document is expected soon but at the time of writing this report had not yet been produced. The East of England in 2009 had 659MW (10%) of installed renewable energy both on and off shore; and 436MW (7.6%) for onshore only. The region's adopted target is for 10% of electricity consumption to come from onshore sources by 2010 and 17% by 2020. Paragraph 3.2 of the report refers to 92MW of approved wind schemes not yet implemented of which some may be implemented by the end of 2010. This report did not include the 10 turbines subsequently approved at Bradwell on Sea (15-25MW), the 13 turbines approved at West Wratting Cambridgeshire (26MW), or the 8 turbines approved at Cotton Farm Huntingdonshire (16MW).

7.9 Delivery of renewable energy will therefore need to increase as the region refocuses on the 2020 target and therefore significant contributions will be needed from the onshore wind sector. Significant weight will therefore need to be attached to this aspect of the proposal.

7.10 Of relevance to the delivery of regional targets is the research into the renewable resource potential of the region carried out by EERA and called 'Placing Renewables in the East of England' Feb 2008. (The appeal into the Linton Wind Farm and Cotton Farm Wind Farm confirmed that this was a relevant material consideration.) This provided an assessment of landscape sensitivity at national level to identify areas where on shore commercial turbine power generation may be appropriate. The report is based on research into the renewable resource potential of the region against the electricity consumption up to 2020. The report also identifies a broad area where it is considered that there is the greatest potential for onshore wind and describes this as "an area of the region extending to the north of Bedford, St Neots and Cambridge, and west of Ely, Downham Market and Swaffham." This broad area is termed as an area for the likely concentration of onshore wind and suggests that the intensity of development is encouraged to be higher than the national average. In its summary the national Joint Character Area (JCA) 88, which this site falls within, is assessed as low-medium/medium sensitivity but that the sensitivity of the area is increased by the variety of scale in some parts of the area. This report explicitly states that it is not to be used for development control purposes; nor does it conclude that every site within JCA 88 would be suitable for a wind farm.

Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment

Information in The ES

7.11 The ES has assessed the landscape and visual impact of the proposal using current best practice guidelines and in particular the Landscape Institute and the Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment's Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment 2002. The methodology establishes the current character, condition and sensitivity of the landscape and nature of existing views and visual amenity as a baseline against which the impacts of the proposal can be assessed. Pre-application advice was given on the viewpoints to be considered and visualisations have been produced in the form of photo-montages and wireframe visualisations from 26 viewpoints. A further 4 viewpoints were added after a Regulation 19 request for further information. The ES has considered a number of documents including the national landscape character assessments, HDC Landscape and Townscape Assessment and HDC Wind Power SPD.

7.12 The ES looks at the predicted impacts upon the landscape, landscape character, and visual amenity. The ES concludes that the proposed development would have no significant effects (in terms of the EIA Regulations 1999) upon landscape and landscape character, other than that occurring at a localised level within a 5km radius of the site, and that even at that level the impacts would be much diluted by topography, settlements, trees, hedgerows and other local features. Landscape effects are also considered to be reduced in their significance by the lower sensitivity of the application site when compared with the main body of the Northern Wolds Landscape Character Area (LCA) of which it forms a small eastern spur. This lower sensitivity is due to the presence of the A14 corridor and nearby overhead power cables and pylons. These conclusions are accepted.

7.13 In terms of visual impact the ES concludes that there would be significant effects of viewpoints 5/10/18/19/21/24 (High St Ellington, West Perry Visitor Centre, Barham, bridleway north of Brampton Wood, Blacksmiths Lane Ellington, and eastern edge of Easton Village). Officers are of the view that there would be additional significant visual effects at viewpoints 1/7/8/11/12/23 (sliproad west of A1/A14 junction, public footpath northern edge of Stow Longa, west of Leighton Bromswold, east of Hamerton, south western edge of Alconbury, and Three Shires Way north of Grafham Water). However it is acknowledged that many of these views would be transitory in nature with views of the proposed wind farm varying in degree from full to none as one moves through the surrounding landscape, and this coupled with the presence of the major transport corridor and existing pylons and overhead cables, which have already led to a degradation in visual amenity, mean that although significant visual effects will be experienced, these are not considered to warrant refusal of the application. The ES concludes that cumulative landscape and visual effects will be moderate at most, and again this conclusion is accepted.

Landscape Character and Capacity

7.14 Huntingdonshire Landscape and Townscape Assessment SPD locate the site within the Northern Wolds Landscape Character Area. The Huntingdonshire Supplementary Planning Document: Wind Power 2006 sets out the capacity of the different landscape character areas within the District to be able to accommodate different scales of wind turbine developments. A grouping of between 2 – 12 turbines is defined in the document as a small scale group. The SPD states that the Northern Wolds Area has a high capacity to accommodate both a single turbine and a small scale group at the lower end of the range. The lower end of the range is defined as up to 2 or 3 turbines. Since the site is close to the boundary with the Central Claylands and Southern Wolds character areas it is also necessary to consider the impact upon these two landscape character areas. Both these LCA's are considered in the SPD to have a high capacity to accommodate a small group (2-12) of turbines. In relation to both the Central Claylands and Southern Wolds areas the SPD states that although it would be a more obvious and dominant feature in the landscape, such a small group, appropriately sited, could respond well to the landscape structure and pattern.

7.15 The SPD also offers further guidance in the form of a list of criteria to be considered for each category of turbine development within each Landscape Character Area. The SPD stresses the importance of addressing these criteria in detail when considering site specific issues, as opposed to wholly character-based ones. The 10 criteria are:

- Respect existing landmark features
- Respect landform and relate turbines to ridges and plateau
- Avoid areas of pasture or ridge and furrow
- Respect site and setting of historic villages
- Relate to existing building clusters in landscape
- Relate to land cover pattern with consistent and repetitive spacing between turbines

- Consider impact upon views of horizon
- Consider linear arrangement along contours as opposed to crossing contours
- Avoid introduction of new pylons as Northern Wolds currently characterised by absence of disruptive features
- Achieve wider landscape management objectives

Officers conclude that analysis of the proposal against these criteria is satisfactory and shows that the criteria have been met.

7.16 In addition it should be noted that the SPD explicitly states:

"While the SPD provides an initial indication of the relative sensitivities and capacity of different areas it should not be interpreted as a definitive statement that a particular landscape is suitable for a particular development. Every site is unique and any proposal involving wind turbines must be informed by a detailed site-specific analysis of land constraints and impacts."

7.17 The cumulative impact of this proposal also needs to be considered in relation to the recently approved 2 turbines at Hamerton also in the Northern Wolds Area. These were small wind turbines of only 25 metres in height. The SPD when referring to the capacity of the landscape character areas makes specific reference to turbines of 120 metres height + or – 20 metres. The Hamerton 25 metre turbines would therefore fall well below these parameters and is not therefore considered that they have 'used up' anything other than a minimal amount of the capacity of the area.

Conclusion on Landscape and Visual Impacts

7.18 Rigid application of the Wind Power SPD would dictate that the Northern Wolds landscape area can only accommodate 1 small scale wind farm at the lower end of the range: up to 2 or 3 turbines. However this site, which is a spur of land protruding out from the Northern Wolds is within 1 kilometre of two other landscape character areas, the Central Claylands and the Southern Wolds. Both of these character areas have a high capacity for small scale groups of between 2-12 turbines, not limited to a single group within each character area.

7.19 The landscape character of the application site which rises up from the A14 to a plateau and then gently falls away into the Central Claylands area is quite different in character from the more intimate landscape of the rest of the Northern Wolds. It is a large scale landscape characterised by large arable fields which would not be dwarfed by the turbines.

7.20 In considering the scale and significance of landscape and visual effects, together with analysis of landscape capacity and site specific guidance, officers have concluded that whilst causing significant change to the landscape, the 4 turbines proposed can be assimilated into the landscape and would therefore be acceptable on this site. This proposal for 4 turbines does not comply with the wording of the SPD, but it is considered that support for this proposal does not compromise the aims and objectives of the SPD.

Cultural Heritage

7.21 Section 66 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 states: "In considering whether to grant planning permission for development which affects a listed building or its setting, the local planning authority or, as the case may be, the Secretary of State shall have special regard to the desirability of preserving the building or its setting or any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses."

Section 72 states "In the exercise, with respect to any buildings or other land in a conservation area, of any functions under or by virtue of any of the provisions mentioned in subsection (2), special attention shall be paid to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of that area."

7.22 Central government advice in the form of PPS22 advises that permission for renewable energy projects should only be granted where it can be demonstrated that the objectives of the designation of the heritage asset will not be compromised. Further advice in PPS5 states local authorities should deliver sustainable development by ensuring that policies and decisions concerning the historic environment recognise that heritage assets are a non-renewable resource; take account of the wider social, cultural, economic and environmental benefits of heritage conservation; and recognise that intelligently managed change may sometimes be necessary if heritage assets are to be maintained for the long term. It also states local authorities should conserve England's heritage assets in a manner appropriate to their significance by ensuring that decisions are based on the nature, extent and level of that significance, and the positive contribution of such heritage assets to local character and sense of place is recognised and valued; and that consideration of the historic environment is integrated into planning policies, promoting place-shaping.

7.23 Assessment of the level of harm needs to be quantified and there are levels of the degree of harm: no harm, less than substantial harm and substantial harm. The relevant tests for assessing the level of harm are set out in PPS5. Policy HE9.4 states that where a proposal has a harmful impact on the significance of a heritage asset, but where the harm is less than substantial then that level of harm needs to be weighed against the public benefit of the proposal. Policy HE9.2 states that where the proposal would lead to substantial harm or total loss of significance then consent should be refused unless it can be demonstrated that the substantial harm to or loss of significance is necessary in order to deliver substantial public benefits that outweigh that harm or loss.

Sufficiency of Information

7.24 It was considered that the originally submitted information was not adequate to assess the impact upon cultural heritage assets and further information was therefore requested. Four further viewpoints were provided by the applicants to show the impact upon All Saints Church Ellington and Ellington Conservation Area. The written response of English Heritage upon these additional viewpoints has

been considered by the applicant who has responded that they wish the application to be considered as submitted.

Impact Upon Heritage Assets

7.25 Within the 5km zone of this proposed wind farm there are 133 listed buildings, 6 scheduled ancient monuments, 1 historic park and garden and 8 Conservation Areas. There are 11 Grade 1 and 2* listed buildings which include the churches of Ellington, Alconbury, Grafham, Spaldwick, Easton, Buckworth and Barham; and Manor Farm Alconbury, The Castle Leighton Bromswold, The Limes and The George Public House Spaldwick. Ellington Church will be discussed in more detail later in the report, but the impact of the proposal upon the above buildings have been considered in detail and it is concluded that the setting or significance of all the listed buildings will either not be harmed by the development or will suffer 'less than substantial' harm. The impact upon Spaldwick, Easton, Alconbury, Alconbury Weston, Little Stukeley, Leighton Bromswold and Brampton Conservation Areas will also be less than substantial.

7.26 All Saints Church Ellington has a prominent spire which is visible in some long distance views especially when experienced along the A14 with the succession of other church spires. The turbines will not interfere with these east/west views, views from the south are fleeting due to vegetation and changing land levels and there will be no views of the turbines and the church from the north unless from within the turbine field itself. In the areas closer to the church the turbines will be visible from some parts of the churchyard, and from some areas immediately in front of the church where the street widens out which is within the Conservation Area. Turbine 2 will be particularly prominent from the main path leading to the church door, although if one moves off the path either left or right the view of the turbine becomes masked by vegetation or other intervening buildings. There may be limited views of the turbines from inside the church from the windows which face north, although these views will be restricted because of the relative height of the bottom of the windows.

7.27 The significance of the church is in its architectural, historic, artistic and communal values. As the building is at the spiritual and social heart of the village these values are high. Because of the limited views of the turbines which will be experienced it is considered that the proposal will result in some harm to the significance of the church, but that the harm will be less than substantial.

7.28 The impact of the turbines will be experienced more fully within the area surrounding the church where the street widens out to form an informal parking area. A number of other listed buildings also front onto this space. This forms the heart of the Ellington Conservation Area. Elsewhere the Conservation Area has less unity and cohesion and the character of the buildings are more vernacular with limited settings. From these areas it is evident that the turbines are located within the landscape outside the village, rather than being seen as part of the village. There will therefore be substantial harm to the character and significance of the very small part of the Conservation Area around the church and less than substantial harm to the other parts of the Conservation Area. Overall therefore it is considered that there will be a substantial impact upon a very small part of the

Ellington Conservation Area and a less than substantial impact upon the majority of the Conservation Area.

Conclusion on Cultural Heritage

7.29 Officers agree that the proposal will result in a degree of harm to the heritage assets of Ellington Church and the Conservation Area and this harm will need to be weighed against the benefits of the renewable energy which will result from the proposal.

Residential Amenity and Noise

7.30 The ES has considered noise from both the construction and operational phases of the development. This concludes that the noise impact from the operational phase of the windfarm will meet the Amenity Hours and Night-time Criteria proposed within ETSU-R-97 for all dwellings. The data has been scrutinised by the Council's Environmental Health Officer and he recommended further monitoring which he has personally carried out. This shows the impact upon residential properties to be acceptable within the criteria of ETSU-R-97. Therefore the conclusions on noise are accepted and it is considered that the noise impact of the proposal is acceptable and meets the relevant guidance. If planning permission were to be granted conditions should be imposed to deal with post construction monitoring and any complaints received. It is likely that for the construction phase details of piling and a working hours condition would be required to ensure that the impact during the construction phase is acceptable.

7.31 The issue of radio communications and TV reception has been considered in the ES. Advice in PPS22 is that careful siting of turbines can mitigate any potential impacts. Consultation with telecoms operators and Anglian Water have confirmed that none of the organisations object to the proposal. There is some potential for TV interference and analogue signals are more affected than digital signals. Since the switchover has now taken place the extent of the effect upon TV reception will be minimal. If planning permission were to be granted mitigation measures such as an improved aerial system, installation of digital TV or installation of a new self help transmitter could be implemented. These would be secured by way of an appropriate planning condition.

7.32 The visual impact upon homes and the living conditions of the occupants also needs to be considered. The ES has only considered the impact of shadow flicker, noise and telecommunication interference upon individual properties, rather than the visual impact. In terms of visual impact the test is whether the turbines are present in such numbers, size and proximity that they represent an unpleasantly overwhelming and unavoidable presence in the main views from a house or garden such that the property concerned would come to be widely regarded as an unattractive and thus unsatisfactory place in which to live. (This is commonly known as the Lavendar Test, as used by Inspector Lavendar at the Inquiry into the wind farm at Dover and is now used regularly by Inspectors determining windfarm applications.) Those properties nearest to the proposal are on Thrapston Road in Ellington which are approximately 0.8 km from Turbine 4. Weybridge Lodge and Whiteleather Lodge 0.9

km and 1.04km from the nearest turbine respectively. The nearest residential properties have been specifically evaluated in respect of this test and some or all of the turbines would be visible from some parts of the dwelling or garden at the nearest properties within the village of Ellington and other nearby dwellings. However individual assessment of the effects leads officers to conclude that the effects would not be such that the living conditions in the dwellings would become unsatisfactory.

Shadow Flicker

7.33 The ES has considered shadow flicker and the advice in the Companion Guide to PPS22. This states that about 0.5% of the population are epileptic and of these around 5% are photosensitive. It states that the extent of shadow flicker is in practice limited to the distance of 10 rotor diameters from the wind farm. The analysis was therefore performed on occupied houses within 1010 metres of any proposed wind turbine. There is one residential dwelling within this area: Weybridge Lodge. (Houses in Ellington, although within this distance, are to the south of the proposed turbines and therefore would not experience any shadow flicker.) Weybridge Lodge could experience shadow flicker on 75 days of the year for a maximum of 48 minutes at any one time. This represents a worse case scenario assuming clear skies all of the time and that the wind turbines are operating all the time.

7.34 The ES states that the turbines will have a control system utilising a photo cell to ensure that should climatic conditions be right they will shut down during these periods to prevent shadow flicker occurring at Weybridge Lodge. This will be covered by a condition which will approve a protocol for dealing with complaints relating to shadow flicker – this is an accepted methodology for dealing with this issue and is commonly imposed upon appeal decisions. It is therefore concluded that the proposal will not result in an unacceptable impact upon residential amenity due to shadow flicker.

Wildlife Issues

7.35 The site lies within 3.5km of Grafham Water SSSI which is nationally important for wintering and breeding bird interest. There are 2 Local County Wildlife sites within 1km of the site and these are roadside verges noted for their calcareous grassland interest. There are also some legally protected species within 2km of the survey area boundary. The ES details those surveys which have been carried out including a habitat survey, badger survey, survey of potential bat roost sites and bat activity surveys, otter and water vole survey, and amphibian survey. The survey results reveal the location of hedgerows, watercourses, and other vegetation. Natural England initially registered a holding objection until further information on the collision risk for gull species and raptors, and clarification about the position of turbines T1 and T2 in relation to the 50 metre Bat Habitat buffer was provided. Following receipt of further information Natural England considers that there will be no significant effect upon Grafham Water SSSI or any other statutory wildlife site. They have requested post monitoring conditions in relation to predicted impacts upon bats and birds. In addition they have requested a condition requiring specific enhancements to benefit wildlife in the area. They

conclude that they do not object to the proposal. Similarly the RSPB do not object subject to conditions relating to clearing being carried out outside the bird breeding season, details of ecological enhancement, management and monitoring to be approved and a minimum of 3 years post construction monitoring.

7.36 The potential for ecological enhancement measures, is encouraged by PPS9, and wider landscape management objectives set out in the relevant section of the HDC Landscape and Townscape Assessment.

7.37 There is therefore no fundamental objection to the proposal in terms of its impact upon SSSI's or protected species, but it is considered that monitoring, enhancement and mitigation measures would be necessary to ensure that the scheme was made acceptable in terms of its impact upon wildlife.

Traffic and Highway Issues

7.38 The ES has considered the impacts of development generated traffic, during the construction, operation and decommissioning phases of the proposal. For the construction phase four options have been considered and the chosen route is one where abnormal loads travel east along the A14 until Junction 20 where the vehicles would access the site via the new skew bridge. The proposed access route for normal loads would be via Grove Lane. Signage for the abnormal load entrance to avoid driver confusion is also proposed. Following the construction period the abnormal load entrance will be grassed over and camouflaged to avoid unintentional unauthorised access. The construction period is predicted to last approximately 12 months and it is during this period that the heavy goods vehicles, including abnormal loads would take place. During the 12 month construction phase an average of 27 two way vehicle movements per day using the abnormal loads entrance is anticipated. The ES proposes construction site working would be Monday to Saturday from 0600 – 2000 hours, but 7 days a week during the turbine erection period. For the operational phase light vehicles of approximately 4 per month represents a very low increase in traffic using local roads which would have a negligible impact in highway safety terms.

7.39 It is considered that the construction impacts can be managed by means of a Traffic Management Plan to be agreed with the local highway authority and this has been proposed in the ES. This is to minimise delay to other road users. Since there is little pedestrian activity along the trunk road the impact on pedestrians is likely to be insignificant. The County Council as Local Highway authority have been consulted and they have no objection to planning permission being granted subject to conditions.

7.40 The issue of driver distraction has been raised and advice in paragraph 54 of PPS22 is that wind turbines should not be treated any differently from other driver distractions and should not be considered particularly hazardous. The A14 trunk from which the wind turbines will be viewed is very heavily trafficked and the issue of driver distraction has been specifically considered by the Highways Agency who manage the strategic highway network. They have not objected to planning permission being granted subject to a condition requiring that no work shall commence until the agreed temporary

works have been completed satisfactorily. There is therefore no objection to the proposal on the grounds of Highway Safety or traffic generation.

Footpaths and Bridleways

7.41 A footpath runs from the north side of the A14 through the site and two bridleways run outside and to the east of the site. The turbine development has been designed to result in no 'oversail' distance from the footpath running through the site and in addition a 200 metre separation distance from the bridleway outside the site. The shortest distance from a footpath to a turbine is therefore 150 metres and to a bridleway 230 metres. Some signage will be erected to inform walkers of vehicles in the area and where the access tracks cross the footpaths; and a temporary footpath on the eastern side of Grove Lane will be provided during the construction period. The County Footpaths Officer has commented that there appear to be few direct effects and he does not object subject to it being made clear to the applicant that footpaths must remain unobstructed and warning signs being erected where the access tracks cross the public footpath. The British Horse Society have objected specifically to the siting of turbines T1 and T2 as they would be closer to bridleways 71/16 and 71/17 than the British Horse Society Guidance as laid out in Wind Farms advisory Statement AROW20s08/1. This guidance recommends that as a starting point a distance of three times the overall height from bridleways should be the target with a minimum of 200 metres where in a particular case this is shown as acceptable. In this particular case the minimum separation distance as advised in PPS22 has been achieved and it is therefore considered that the impact of the proposal upon the footpaths and bridleways is therefore acceptable.

Safety Issues

7.42 Third party representations have raised issues of safety, in particular the proximity of the turbines to residential properties, and the possibility of structural collapse or ice collecting on the blades. The ES has considered this aspect and stated that no member of the public has been injured by a wind turbine. There have been some cases where a turbine has shed a part or all of their blade and these have occurred in extreme weather conditions. The build up of ice on the turbine blade has also been raised as an issue. However, ice can only form on a stationary rotor blade and therefore ice would only be thrown off when a turbine initially starts up with the risk being restricted to the area immediately beneath the turbine. PPS22 Companion Guide advises that the minimum distance between wind turbines and occupied buildings is the height of the turbine plus 10%. This has been achieved in this case as the nearest building is more than 200 metres away. Modern wind turbines are equipped with a number of safety devices to ensure safe operation during their lifetime. These typically include vibrations sensors and brake systems to turn the turbines off in the event of malfunction.

Aviation and Communications

7.43 The relevant Consultees with regard to aircraft safety include Defence Estates, Civil Aviation Authority, National Air Traffic Control Service

and Cambridge Airport do not raise any objections to the proposal on the grounds of aircraft safety. The MOD have received a mitigation proposal from the applicants in relation to the Radar at RAF Cottesmore and this represents an acceptable mitigation proposal to MOD. MOD have therefore stated that they have no objections to the proposal subject to appropriate planning conditions being imposed should planning permission be granted. The Civil Aviation Authority have advised that there may be the need to install aviation obstruction lighting, that the rotor blades are painted white and either lighting or special paint colours. Consultation with Peterborough/Connington Airport and local air emergency air support services has taken place but no response has been received. To conclude the national bodies dealing with airfield safeguarding have not objected to the proposal and there is therefore no objection form the aviation perspective.

7.44 The objection from Paramotors UK and the effect of the proposed wind farm upon this business, including safety, must be considered. This business is located on land at Brooklands Farm approximately 1 km south of Alconbury in the 'triangle of land' formed by the A1, A14 and A14 spur south. The site is a grass field with two portable buildings and is accessed by an unmade access road. The site has been used by Paramotors UK since 1994 and the business is run principally by the instructor Mr Soden with additional help at busy times. Paramotors are motor assisted flying machines with inflatable wings. There are approximately 40 students with additional numbers coming for 'taster sessions'. There are between 50 – 100 flying days per year but this is weather dependant. The flying route currently used by students, which is an established route used for a number of years, is within 500 metres of the proposed turbines. Paramotors UK have confirmed that the sport is unlicensed but they have to operate by the rules laid out in the CAA Air Navigation Order. Their routes are included on all Civil Aviation Air Charts and on military charts also. Paramotors UK have stated that they would not be able to operate their current route if the wind farm was permitted and they do not wish to change the route they currently use as it is important for the instructor to be able to see students at all times and they are concerned that any changes would result in safety issues and noise complaints. It would appear that some modifications to the route to allow Paramotors UK to continue using their site are possible and an alternative route has been suggested by the wind farm developer. It should be noted that the CAA, whose rules Paramotors UK have to comply with, have not objected to the application on the grounds of aircraft safeguarding.

Community Involvement

7.45 Taking guidance from The Protocol for Public Engagement with Proposed Wind Energy Developments in England (May 2007) a community engagement strategy was produced with the objective of identifying key stakeholders, identifying a single point of contact with RES and describing methods of engaging with stakeholders. The stakeholders were identified and a Community Liaison Group (CLG) set up. The minutes of the CLG are available on the web site: www.woolleyhillwindfarm.co.uk. At the time of the application submission the group has met twice and is scheduled to meet every 2 months. Those attending the meetings are representatives of the

local Parish Councils, HDC ward members and the developers. The purpose of the meetings will be to ensure that there is a two way flow of information between RES and the local community. RES has also sought the views of the group and local community as to what initiatives could be introduced to provide benefits to the local community and to this end have offered a community benefit fund of £18,000 per annum. It is proposed that the CLG would administer the distribution of these funds.

The ES makes it clear that this is not a benefit directly related to the planning process, is not a material planning consideration, and does not influence the local planning authority in the determination of the planning application.

Efficiency of Wind Turbines

7.46 Many of the third party representations received have commented on the relative efficiency of wind turbines and questioning the amount of renewable energy which would be generated. PPS22, government guidance for renewable energy projects, makes it quite clear in Key Principles v) and vi) that local planning authorities should not make assumptions about the technical or commercial feasibility of renewable energy projects and that also they should not refuse such applications because the energy output may be small. This policy was also adhered to in the recent Cotton Farm decision. This issue does not therefore represent any basis for a reason for refusal.

Balance of Considerations and Conclusion

7.47 The recommendation in this case turns on a balanced judgement which has to be made between the benefits of renewable energy production and the adverse effects upon heritage assets, the changes and impacts upon the landscape and the people in the surrounding locality.

7.48 Subject to conditions, there are no objections to the proposal in relation to wildlife and nature conservation interests, the aviation industry, highways or on residential amenity grounds including noise, and the impact upon Paramotors is likely to be small. The development will undoubtedly have an effect on the landscape and cultural heritage but this must be weighed against the wider benefits of the development including the significant contribution to the renewable targets for the region.

7.49 In terms of the impact upon the landscape it is relevant to note that the Inspectors for both Cotton Farm and the Linton Wind Farm have confirmed that the study 'Placing Renewables in the East of England' is a material consideration and that this site falls within the area of least constraints. This study however is not to be used for development control purposes and the logical conclusion is not that every site within the area of least constraint is suitable for a wind farm. The proposal will undoubtedly result in a big change to the local landscape but in the context of the position of the site against the backdrop of the wider landscape of the Central Claylands and Southern Wolds, only just being sited within the confines of the more limited capacity of the Northern Wolds, and not conflicting with the

criteria or aims of the Wind Power SPD it is considered that the impact upon the landscape is acceptable.

7.50 It is also of relevance to note that the Inspector found the landscape around Cotton Farm to be large scale characterised by extensive arable fields which would not be dwarfed by the turbines. This site is higher than the Cotton Farm site, but turbines will be seen from at least three sides against the backdrop of a large scale landscape which also contain pylons. The weight that the Inspector placed on the Wind Power SPD is relevant in the context of this application because of the site being only just within the Northern Wolds and being less than 1 kilometre from character areas specifically identified as having a high capacity to absorb such a development as proposed in this case.

7.51 There are some similarities to be drawn between the Cotton Farm decision and this case: the LPA's single issue at Cotton Farm was the impact upon the Grade 11* building of Toseland Hall; in this case the single heritage issue is that of Ellington Church and part of the surrounding Conservation Area. Arguably the impact of the Cotton Farm proposal upon Toseland Hall is much greater than the impact of this proposal upon Ellington Church because of the restricted views of the turbines from the church. The other heritage assets described in the Cotton Farm decision were primarily churches in adjacent villages which were found to be inward looking with the church towers or spires not forming prominent landmark features within the landscape. There are direct similarities with this case.

7.52 In the case of the impact upon cultural heritage, whilst harm has been identified in relation to Ellington Church and Ellington Conservation Area this has been found overall to be less than substantial. The harm must therefore be weighed against the substantial public benefits accruing from the delivery of renewable energy.

Benefits of the Proposal

7.53 Government policy takes seriously climate change and its potential effects, the need to cut carbon dioxide emissions and the deployment of renewable energy generation. There is a strategic need for renewable energy provision in the UK to assist in tackling climate change and to ensure the security of energy supply with significant weight attached to the environmental benefits. The proposal may only provide a small percentage of the renewable energy requirement but each wind farm development would be important in incrementally contributing to meeting the target.

7.54 Huntingdonshire is supportive of appropriate renewable energy projects and recognises the wider environmental and economic benefits of renewable energy projects and the importance of meeting the targets for renewable energy. The granting of permission for the Red Tile wind farm at Warboys reflects that commitment. The subsequent granting of permission at appeal for 8 Turbines at Cotton Farm will also make a significant contribution towards the provision of renewable energy in Huntingdonshire. There are no targets for Huntingdonshire in terms of renewable energy, and the intention of the Secretary of State to abolish the Regional Spatial Strategies, (and targets contained therein), is a material planning consideration. Even

if there were targets government policy makes it clear that achieving a target does not mean that further proposals should be refused permission. This proposal will make a significant contribution towards renewable energy provision in the district and the benefits are therefore considerable.

7.55 This proposal will result in significant change to the surrounding landscape, but with no identified harm to that landscape, and limited harm to heritage assets, both of which it is considered will be outweighed by the benefits of the renewable energy which will be generated. It is therefore concluded that this application should be approved subject to the proposed raft of related conditions.

If you would like a translation of this document, a large text version or an audio version, please contact us on 01480 388388 and we will try to accommodate your needs.

8. RECOMMENDATION – APPROVE subject to conditions to include:

1. Standard Time limit for commencement (3yrs)

2. In accordance with approved plans

3. 25 years permission time limit

4. Decommissioning scheme for the site at the end of the 25 year period to be approved.

5. Removal of turbine which fail to operate

6. Construction hours limitation

7. Hours restriction for delivery of components

8. Details of appearance of turbines

9. Height to tip not to exceed 130.5 m

10. Turbines to rotate in same direction

11. Details of substation

12. Cabling to be underground

13. Micro siting of turbines not to vary more than 50 metres and to be in accordance with submitted plans

14. Noise condition

15. Radar mitigation scheme

16. Archaeological investigation

17. Works required by Highways Agency

18. Works to public highway to be agreed

19. Traffic management and local signage

20. Survey and repair of roads

21. Cleansing of vehicles

22. Minimum width access road

23. Shadow flicker protocol

24. Television interference

25. Confirmation of precise height and position of turbines

26. Nesting bird surveys

27. Landscape habitat management scheme

28. Protected species survey

29. Bat and bird post construction monitoring

30. Access tracks to be as shown in the FRA

BACKGROUND PAPERS:
Planning Application File Reference 1001741FUL
Huntingdonshire Local Plan 1995
Huntingdonshire Local Development Framework Adopted Core Strategy 2009
Development Management DPD: Proposed Submission 2010

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