

MILTON ABBOT GROUPED PARISH COUNCIL

(Parishes of Milton Abbot (MA), Chillaton (C), Dunterton (D) and Bradstone (B))

To all Members of the Council

You are hereby summoned to attend a special meeting of the Parish Council to be held on **Wednesday 10th June 2015 at Milton Abbot Village Hall at 7.30pm**, for the purpose of transacting the business set out below.

Howard Asbridge
Acting Clerk to the Council

3rd June 2015

AGENDA

Part 1

1. Apologies for Absence

2. Declarations of Interest

3. Application 00484/2015: Proposed wind turbine – Cardwell Farm, Longcross

To consider this application for the erection, 25 year operation and subsequent decommissioning of a single wind turbine generator with a maximum overall height to blade tip of 57.64m [189ft] and a height to hub of 40.15m [131ft], plus access track, temporary and permanent hardstandings and the removal of 13m of hedgerow.

This proposal was the subject of a pre-application consultation during 2014 that included a public meeting on 11th December 2014, attended by over 70 people, when all of those expressing a view were opposed to the proposed turbine.

At its meeting on 7th January 2015, the Parish Council noted that the following issues had been raised at the public meeting:

The turbine height had been increased because the latest version of this model was 2m higher, but it generated 20% more power and should be quieter than the previous version. In theory, it should power 107 homes.

The original location would have had too great an impact on the AONB and so a lower position, requiring a taller turbine had been chosen, but local wind-speed studies had not yet confirmed its suitability.

The turbine would be connected to the National Grid and the majority of the power generated would not be consumed on the farm.

The applicants would investigate the potential for the contamination of the water supply currently extracted from bore holes in the area.

The applicants undertook to have the turbine and its concrete base removed after the expiry of the 25 years of operation that would be approved, should planning permission be granted. They would set aside the necessary funds to ensure this took place.

The postal survey had not included a property that was one of the nearest to the turbine site, because it was not occupied.

The Parish Council decided:

(i) that the determination of its views regarding this proposal would be deferred until such time as the application for planning permission and the associated Environmental Impact Statement had been submitted to WDBC.

(ii) that in view of the additional action taken by the applicants, no further representation need be made to WDBC regarding the pre-application process, the question of whether the scope of the postal survey was appropriate, being a matter for WDBC to determine.

According to the Consultation Statement now submitted with the application, the applicants have “taken account of the feedback received from local people into account during the preparation of this planning application as far as possible.”

The application and its associated reports and plans create a pile of paper nearly two inches thick and it is impossible to provide a comprehensive précis of their contents. However, the Clerk has attempted to summarise some of the key issues in each document, as set out below. The statements made are taken from the documents concerned and do not necessarily represent the views of the Parish Council.

Design and Access Statement

In selecting the exact location of the turbine, the applicant has tried to minimise the visual impact of the turbine, whilst ensuring that it is sufficiently high enough to access ‘clean wind’.

The estimated electricity generated by the proposed turbine has been calculated to be equivalent to the electricity consumption of 119 households, based on average British household consumption.

Noise Assessment

None of the dwellings identified as noise receptors would receive sound levels in excess of the criteria in ETSU-R-97 [the current guidance on turbine noise levels]. It should be noted that one property is at that level [35dba] and four of the remaining five are within less than 2db of 35db.

However, the noise assessments have been made using manufacturer’s data for the Endurance X-29. In the Non-Technical Summary, it is stated that the preferred option is the Endurance X-35. In the Planning Statement, it is reported that this model is 5db quieter, although it has a larger rotor.

Beechwood, a property near the proposed site, is referred to in the Planning Statement as having been effectively abandoned and officially described as unfit for human habitation. It has therefore not been used as a residential receptor of noise from the turbine.

Preliminary Ecological Appraisal and Bat Activity Survey

Natural England states that, ideally, a buffer of 50m should be maintained between all parts of a turbine and hedgerows, to minimise the risk of fatalities to bat populations. The turbine mast is 51 metres from the northern and southern hedgerows, but the blade sweep reduces that distance to 45 metres.

A bat survey revealed low levels of activity for high-risk species and low to medium levels for medium risk species. The survey concluded that the turbine would represent a limited risk of individual casualties, but not a level of mortality that would affect bat populations.

EIA Screening and Scoping Opinion Responses

This document is a review of the need to carry out an Environmental Impact Assessment and was therefore a preliminary appraisal. It contains statements from West Devon Borough Council regarding what it sees as the cumulative impact from this and other sites that could become significant.

It states that the turbine is not within 'topple distance' of any public right of way or road. However, the Highway Authority has now objected to this proposal on the grounds that it is nearer to a highway than current guidance allows.

West Devon considered that there are a significant number of heritage assets nearby that could be significantly affected and that the potential impact of the turbine on the landscape was likely to be high. Amongst those consulted, the Conservation Officer stated that the proposal was very likely to have a significant adverse impact on the setting of several listed buildings and that views from Brent Tor Church 'will most certainly be affected'. The National Park Authority's Trees and Landscapes Officer was also of the opinion that the turbine would be 'very visible' from Brent Tor.

The Borough Council determined that the proposal was considered to require an EIA.

The applicants then sought a screening direction from the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, who upheld the Borough Council's view that an EIA was needed. In doing so, he took into account various factors, including the views of Natural England who concluded that there were no significant impacts on statutory designated sites, landscapes or protected species, but that the views of the Tamar Valley AONB and Dartmoor National Park should be taken into account.

English Heritage strongly believed that the proposal would have likely significant effects and that there was potential for significant harm to designated heritage assets and it would be highly visible in views from Brent Tor. It was also likely to cause 'substantial harm' to the setting of Brent Tor and its Church.

Following a site visit, the Secretary of State concluded that although the local landscape is not protected, it is nevertheless an attractive area in its own right, as well as being close to a National Park and an AONB. For these reasons and taking into account the views outlined above, the Secretary of State agreed that an EIA was necessary.

Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment [LVIA]

The visual impact identified in the LVIA does not reflect the level of concern expressed in the EIA assessment, by English Heritage or the relevant professionals at West Devon Borough Council and Dartmoor National Park.

In essence, the LVIA concludes that 'scattered single wind turbines within the wider landscape quickly become absorbed by the undulating and well-vegetated landscape'. The LVIA makes reference to the screening effect of 'dense linear vegetation' on settlement boundaries and within the wider landscape.

However, it also states that the turbine will be visible and 'potentially perceived' over a 'relatively large area' but that the majority of effects will be 'neutral' due to the screening effect of the undulating landform and 'dense screening vegetation around settlements and transport corridors'.

The LVIA concludes that, at worst, there will be moderate – minor effects on landscape relevant designations and moderate effects on landscape character areas, especially near to the proposed turbine, as well as major – moderate effects on the adjacent sports field.

No specific reference is made to Brent Tor in the LVIA's conclusions, but in the body of the report the proposed turbine is described as having a moderate – minor effect.

The LVIA does acknowledge that there is potential for the proposed turbine to be seen in combination with other turbines either operating or at various stages in the planning process. What the LVIA does not appear to take into account are the proposed turbines at Ridgecombe Farm, Lifton and at Wreys Barton, Stowford.

Heritage Assessment

Again, the views of the consultants concerned do not reflect the level of concern expressed by English Heritage or specialist officers at West Devon Borough Council. Grade 1 listed buildings affected by the proposed turbine include St Mary's Church at Marystowe and St Michael de la Rupe at Brent Tor.

According to the consultants, the rotor of the turbine would be visible from the churchyard at Marystowe, although partial screening would restrict its effect. The photograph offered to illustrate this [Plate 6.] was taken from the gate to the school house. The Clerk is of the view that when a balloon was flown to represent the turbine, it was more visible from the open area of the graveyard that is still in use.

As far as the Church on Brent Tor is concerned, the consultants' opinion is that there would be no substantial harm to the significance of the church, but there would be a minor to negligible effect on views from Brent Tor and Gibbet Hill, plus a moderate effect on the Church near Ramsdown Cross.

Having said that there would be no substantial harm to the Church at Brent Tor, the report then states that although 'these effects would not be considerable or moderate, it is recognised that neither would it be negligible, as the effect would be notable and result in some harm, even if in only a few views out of many.'

The degree of harm to the Church is assessed as 'minor adverse'. The report then states that because of the high significance of the church, this effect is still considered to be of consequence and....'would require clear and convincing justification'.

The consultants conclude that the proposed development would not contravene national policy designed to protect the setting of heritage assets.

Aviation and Telecommunications Responses

No issues were raised except by the Defence Infrastructure Organisation, which said that the MoD may have concerns about the proposal as it might impact on low flying operations. They may require visible or infrared aviation safety lighting for the turbine, if approved.

This may be a standard response by the MoD and not necessarily result in an objection.

Non-technical Summary

This draws together the detailed assessments referred to above and concludes that the site is suitable, because of its sensitive layout and design, that no significant environmental effects have been identified and that the proposal can be accommodated at the location concerned and will provide social, environmental and economic benefits.

Planning Statement

This has been referred to above, where appropriate, and is a detailed assessment of the proposal in the context of national and local planning policies and other material considerations.

Written Statement

This is a detailed review of the methodologies used in various technical assessments of the impact of the proposal, the EIA process and relevant legislation.

Issues for the Parish Council to consider

The Council is already aware of the scale of this proposal and there do not appear to have been any noticeable changes since the pre-application consultation. It therefore has to consider its views on this application against the background of:

- (i) consultants' reports that conclude there would be minimal impact

- (ii) the previously expressed views of residents that the effects would be significant
- (iii) any other issues raised at this meeting.

The Clerk therefore simply draws attention to several points of detail, as follows:

(i) It does seem surprising that there is no reference to the turbines proposed at Ridgecombe Farm and at Wreys Barton, Stowford. The Parish Council has previously asked for careful consideration to be given to the cumulative effect of turbines that are 'in operation, consented or in planning'. The applicants state that in September 2014, WDBC asked for operational turbines at Lifton Farm Shop, Wortham Farm and Rixon Cross to be considered in the LVIA. That list was then increased by Beckwell Farm and Ramsdown. Although both Ridgecombe and Wreys Barton were in the early stages of the planning process during 2014, they were omitted.

From the Zone of Theoretical Visibility, it would appear that part of the Cardwell turbine would be seen from that at Ridgecombe Farm and there would therefore be some cumulative effect that has not been assessed in the LVIA.

More important, is the likely cumulative effect of turbines in the area, as seen from Brent Tor, if that assessment included the Ridgecombe and Wreys Barton turbines. Given the significance of Brent Tor and its Church, the Parish Council may wish to draw this apparent omission to the attention of the Borough Council.

(ii) As stated above, the ideal distance of 50m between a turbine and a hedgerow is not met in some instances.

(iii) Although primarily a matter for the Highway Authority, it does appear that the proposed turbine would be in breach of the approved distance of a turbine from a public highway.