

# REDHILL FARM WIND TURBINES PLANNING APPLICATION

**East Cambridgeshire District Council: 14/01007/ESF**

**PLANNING OBJECTION SUMMARY REPORT BY**

## STOP STRETHAM WIND FARM ACTION GROUP

**September 2015**

**Stop Stretham Wind Farm** (SSWF) was formed in August 2014 as a result of an application being submitted to East Cambs. District Council (ECDC) to install 2 102m high Wind Turbines at Redhill Farm, just south of Stretham.

The not-for-profit group was established to raise local awareness of the damage to our local landscape if it is installed and to co-ordinate local opposition and objections to the Wind Farm.

This document is a summary of objections submitted by SSWF in October 2014, March 2015 and August 2015 in response to the Application and 3 versions of the Environmental Statement.

SSWF object to the application and recommend that the application is refused for the following reasons :

## **1 Local Consultation**

A single local consultation event was held more than a year ago on a weekday afternoon. Since then, no local consultation has taken place. The second and third Environmental Statements (ES) have not taken into account the objections and views of the local community and the consultation is totally inadequate for an application of this size.

New government considerations issued on 18<sup>th</sup> June with immediate effect require that :

*When determining planning applications for wind energy development involving one or more wind turbines, local planning authorities should only grant planning permission if:*

- *the development site is in an area identified as suitable for wind energy development in a Local or Neighbourhood Plan; and*
- *following consultation, it can be demonstrated that the planning impacts identified by affected local communities have been fully addressed and therefore the proposal has their backing.*

No such consultation has taken place, impacts identified have not been addressed and the proposal does not have the backing of the local community.

SSWF have carried out an information campaign following the issuance of the above statement. This resulted in an additional 61 objections to the application, bringing the total objections to more than 400. In addition, five local parishes representing more than 8,600 local people have also objected. We are aware of only a single supporting statement in favour of the application.

## **2 Alternative Technologies**

In each of the Environmental Statements, the applicant says that Solar Photovoltaic was considered, but rejected because the applicant wants to continue to farm the land. However, our analysis clearly shows that only 1% of the land would be required to generate the same amount of electricity as that of the application. This would not have a significant impact on his ability to continue to farm the land.

Solar Photovoltaic is clearly a viable alternative, given the other Solar PV farms in the area, but this option has been rejected out of hand by the applicant.

We believe the real reason is that Onshore Wind attracts a higher subsidy than Solar PV. This application is not about generating electricity, it is about extracting the maximum subsidy, to the detriment of the local community.

### 3 Planning Policy

The ministerial statement mentioned above is ignored by the applicant. As quoted above, the same statement also requires planning permission should only be granted if :

- *the development site is in an area identified as suitable for wind energy development in a Local or Neighbourhood Plan;*

The Local Plan of April 2015 does NOT identify Stretham as an area suitable for wind energy development.

There is no mention of a decommissioning bond, meaning that the local community will likely be stuck with the turbines, even after their useful life is over.

In terms of planning policy, the application conflicts with :

- *National Planning Policy Framework*
- *National Planning Statement EN 1/3*
- *National Planning Practice Guidance for Renewable and Low Carbon Energy*
- *East Cambridgeshire Core Strategy (2009)*

#### **Policies:**

- **CS 1 - Development in the Countryside** - *the development will adversely affect the appearance and character of the countryside.*
- **CS 6 - Environment** - *the scheme will fail to conserve the quality and distinctiveness of East Cambridgeshire's towns and villages.*
- **EN 1 - Landscape and Settlement Character** - *the development will fail to protect visually sensitive skylines, geological features such as the Aldreth Causeway and the nocturnal character of the area.*
- **EN 2 - Design** - *the development does not have regard to local context and does not preserve or enhance the character, appearance and quality of the area.*
- **EN 4 - Renewable Energy** - *the wider environmental, social and economic benefits will be completely outweighed by significant adverse effects on the environment and amenity, views of Ely Cathedral, aviation safety and residential amenity.*
- **EN 5 - Historic Conservation** - *the development will harm the visual value and setting of locally listed buildings and Stretham Conservation Area.*

- **EN 6 – Biodiversity and Geology** - *it has not been shown that the development will not have significant adverse effects on protected species.*

## **Local Plan**

Policies:

- **ENV 1 - Landscape and Settlement Character** - *the development has not demonstrated that it will protect, conserve and where possible enhance the pattern of distinctive historic and traditional landscape features, the wider landscape setting of settlements. Visually sensitive skylines and geological features, key views into and out of settlements, the unspoilt nature and tranquillity of the area, public amenity and access and the nocturnal character.*
- **ENV 6 - Renewable Energy Development** - *the wider environmental, social and economic benefits are significantly outweighed by significant adverse effects that cannot be remediated or made acceptable.*
- **ENV 11 - Conservation Areas** - *the development will not preserve or enhance the character or appearance of Stretham Conservation Area.*
- **Stretham Village Vision** - *the development is in conflict with the village vision.*
- **Stretham Conservation Areas SPD** - *the development is in conflict with the need to conserve key views.*

## **4 Landscape and Visual Amenity**

One of the objections by the inspector to the proposed Mereham village development (2008) referred to the "slightly mystical character" of the landscape in the same area as the proposed wind turbines. (The applicant strongly opposed this development). This slightly mystical character would be ruined by the proposed Red Hill Farm development.

SSWF assert that there will be significant adverse effects on both the LCA 1 East Cambridgeshire Fens and LCA2 Haddenham to Sutton Village Fen Islands.

There will be significant effects on the views of Ely Cathedral and Stretham Landmarks such as the Church and Windmill.

This is the wrong area for installation of wind turbines.

## **5 Cultural Heritage**

The turbines will be four times the height of the pumping station and five times the height of the steeple of the 12th century Stretham parish church. They will replace these historic assets as the key focal point in the surrounding area, they will dominate the landscape and degrade the important view across the fens from the ridge.

## **6 Residential Amenity**

The turbines are situated close to residential properties:

- *Snoots Bridge - 560m*
- *58/60 Cambridge Road - 560m*
- *Efford Farm - 660m*
- *Redhill Farmhouse - 680m*
- *Lazy Otter Meadows - 880m*

The turbines will be too close to these properties.

## **7 Aviation**

Mitchells Farm Airfield is situated just 650m to the west of the proposed development. The airstrip has been in continuous operation since 1986 and is the base for four recreational aircraft including two microlights.

Light aircraft circling the airfield fly to the east of the airfield, just 300m from the proposed turbines which would be far too close to an active airfield and the turbines will be a danger to light aircraft.

The CAA offers guidance in CAP 764 that suggests that turbulence can occur within 864m of the proposed development, given the height of the turbines, so there is a significant risk to flight safety.

The proposed development is also in the flight path of Cambridge Airport and special mitigation measures would need to be taken to avoid impacting on the Cambridge Airport radar.

## **8 Flora and Fauna**

SSWF consider that the bird and bat surveys carried out are insufficient and incomplete (1 hour 10 minutes and 2 hours for the bird surveys). Objections on these grounds to the first 2 versions of the ES have not been addressed by additional surveys in the later revisions of the ES.

## **9 Noise**

An additional noise survey was carried out for the third ES, showing only that a house at Snoots Bridge would be above the noise limit.

The third ES does not address Amplitude modulation, providing only an excuse why this work has not been carried out. Again, impacts identified by objections have not been addressed.

## **10 Planning Balance**

The overwhelming list of adverse effects and issues raised above will not be outweighed by the minimal benefits of the development.

The application is generally of such a poor quality that it is not easy to identify the benefits of the development (other than the benefits of subsidies to the applicant). Indeed, the planning balance is not even addressed in the ES, though this is required by the NPPF.

The business case is not clearly laid out and even the generation capacity is not clearly stated, so the amount of electricity to be generated is not defined. No measurements were taken to assess actual wind speeds, even though East Anglia is one of the lowest wind-speed areas in the country.

The government is already on target to meet wind energy objectives and is now actively cutting back on subsidies to avoid overshooting the targets – this development is not needed.

The development has no plan for or agreement to a grid connection, so has no way to get generated electricity to the grid.

Any benefit from the minimal suggested contribution (deferred for an indeterminate number of years) to the local parish is massively outweighed by the negative impact on the local house prices and therefore the effect on social mobility as people seek to sell their house and move.

In summary, there are no significant benefits to be set against the adverse effects.

## **11 Application Quality**

As mentioned above, the application has been of poor quality, having been rejected as providing inadequate information to form an opinion by the planning officer on two occasions.

SSWF consider that the quality of the application is still not good enough and still contains inaccuracies, even though SSWF have pointed out a number of these in our objections.

**This applicant should be refused.**