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**MAIN CASE**

Reference No: 14/01007/ESF

Proposal: Erection of 2 wind turbines, hub height of 75 metres with height to blade tip of 102 meters, concrete pads for crane use and small sub station

Site Address: Red Hill Farm Cambridge Road Stretham Ely CB6 3LR

Applicant: Mr Chris Attle

Case Officer: Julie Barrow, Planning Officer

Parish: Stretham

Ward: Stretham

Ward Councillors: Councillor Bill Hunt  
Councillor Charles Roberts

Date Received: 15 September 2014 Expiry Date:

[Q84]

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1.0 **RECOMMENDATION**

1.1 Members are requested to **REFUSE** the application for the following reasons:

***Reason 1 – Landscape and visual amenity***

*The application site is located within the low lying fenland landscape with the fen island ridges beyond. The special relationship between the two landscape character areas is such that it makes the landscape particularly sensitive to change. The introduction of two wind turbines of the size and scale proposed, together with the associated infrastructure, would have an urbanising effect and would significantly change the character of the area. The insertion of the turbines within the landscape would fundamentally alter the view from the public footpath running through Red Hill Farm. The turbines, together with the hardsurfacing of the existing access and new length of access, the crane/turning pads and substations, will appear as hard, unforgiving features in a soft, natural landscape. The landscape will become dominated by the turbines, to the detriment of the relationship between the island ridges and lowland fens.*

*The impacts on landscape and visual amenity have been identified by the community as a key concern, which cannot be addressed as it arises out of the nature of the landscape itself. These adverse effects bring the development into conflict with policies ENV1, ENV2 and ENV6 of the East Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2015 and the East Cambridgeshire Renewable Energy SPD, as well as the desire to protect the countryside outline in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and Planning Practice Guidance (PPG).*

**Reason 2 – Cultural heritage**

*The turbines by virtue of their size would appear as discordant and distracting elements on the skyline when viewed from the West Tower of Ely Cathedral, resulting in harm to the significance of the Cathedral and its setting within the wider fen landscape. The Cathedral forms the dominant vertical landmark within the District and there are no other intervening features of this scale when viewing the landscape from the West Tower. The blade tips would also appear in limited views from Stretham Old Engine and Denny Abbey Farmland Museum, to the east and south-east of the site, introducing an incongruous and distracting feature in the landscape for visitors, resulting in harm being caused to the remote and rural settings of both heritage assets. The applicant has failed to adequately consider the impact of the turbines within the wider landscape setting of a number of heritage assets. In particular, the turbines will become the dominant features in views across the landscape from the Twentypence Road towards Stretham which currently features both the church tower of St James' Church, Stretham and the chimney of Stretham Old Engine as the dominant vertical features. Similarly, the special qualities of the setting of North Mill, located in a prominent position on Haddenham ridge to the north-east of the site have not been adequately considered by the applicant. The harm caused to the setting of this heritage asset will be as a direct result of the insertion of the turbines in the foreground when viewed from public footpath immediately to the east of the application site. The proposal results in substantial harm being caused to the wider landscape setting of a number of heritage assets and this combined with the applicants inadequate assessment means that the development is does not comply with policy ENV12 of the East Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2015, the East Cambridgeshire Renewable Energy SPD and paragraphs 17 and 128 of the NPPF*

**Reason 3 – Aviation**

*The turbines will be located within close proximity to Mitchells Farm Airfield. The operators of the airfield have raised concerns in relation to the impact of air turbulence on the safety of light aircraft and the fact that alternative landing patterns may be required, taking aircraft over more densely populated areas. The airfield is in occasional use for visiting aircraft and is available as an emergency landing strip. The applicant has been unable to agree with the operators on the content of a set of planning conditions put forward by way of mitigation. On the basis of CAA advice that aerodrome operators are the experts in relation to matters concerning their operations, the applicant is unable to demonstrate that the development can be made acceptable in relation to the airfield. The development therefore fails to comply with policy ENV6 of the East Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2015, the East Cambridgeshire Renewable Energy SPD and the guidance contained within the NPPF and PPG.*

**Reason 4 – Ecology**

*The application site is adjacent to a length of wet ditch, across which access is required to install and maintain the turbines. The ditch has the potential to accommodate watervoles and otters. The applicant has not carried out any survey work in this regard and on this basis the Council is unable to fully assess the impact of the development on these protected species. In addition, the level of ornithological survey work carried out by the applicant is below that recommended by Natural England with no consideration of collision risk or cumulative assessment.*

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*The Council therefore has insufficient information on which to assess the effects of the proposal on ornithology and consider any potential mitigation measures. The proposal therefore fails to comply with policies ENV6 and ENV7 of the East Cambridgeshire Local Plan, the East Cambridgeshire Renewable Energy SPD and the guidance contained within the NPPF and the PPG.*

### **Reason 5 – Traffic and Transportation**

*The construction and decommissioning phases of the development are likely to have a significant impact on local roads as well as the access track leading to the site of the turbines themselves. The Council considers that the traffic and transport implications of the scheme have not been fully investigated by the applicant. In particular, a detailed analysis of the local roads has not been presented and no attempt to assess the significance of effects on receptors has been made in relation to noise and vibration, driver severance and delay, vulnerable road users and road safety, hazardous and dangerous loads and dust and dirt. It is also unclear how the public right of way within the application site will remain open or diverted during the construction and decommissioning phases. In addition, there is at present no agreement with the Internal Drainage Board in respect of the carrying out of the works required to cross the New Cut Drain within the site. The proposal is therefore contrary to policy COM7 of the East Cambridgeshire Local Plan and the East Cambridgeshire Renewable Energy SPD.*

### **Reason 6 – Flood risk, hydrology and pollution**

*The construction of the turbines and associated infrastructure will require significant ground works to be undertaken. The applicant has indicated that spoil will be spread on adjacent fields, however, no details of the volume of spoil or thorough assessment of the environmental implications of such action has been supplied. The applicant has also failed to demonstrate how surface water run-off from the significant areas of hardstanding will be dealt with. The applicant has also failed to satisfactorily address the potential for pollution to air quality and surface and ground water, particularly during the construction and decommissioning phase. The proposal is therefore contrary to policies ENV8 and ENV9 of the East Cambridgeshire Local Plan, the East Cambridgeshire Renewable Energy SPD and the guidance contained within the NPPF and the PPG.*

### **Reason 7 – Support of the local community**

*The written Ministerial Statement issued on 18<sup>th</sup> June 2015 is clear in that the Government intends that local people should have the final say on wind farm applications. A significant number of objections from individuals have been received by the Council during the course of the application and the Stop Stretham Wind Farm Action Group has campaigned on behalf of a large number of people. The overwhelming view of the local community is that the proposal should not be granted planning permission. In addition, the Council is not satisfied that the planning impacts in relation to landscape and visual amenity, cultural heritage, aviation safety, ecology, traffic and transportation and flood risk, hydrology and pollution have been satisfactorily addressed. The proposal is therefore in direct conflict with the written Ministerial Statement and guidance contained within PPG.*

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### 2.0 SUMMARY OF APPLICATION

- 2.1 The application seeks consent for the installation of two wind turbines, each with a hub height of 75 metres and a maximum height to blade tip of 102 metres. The applicant's chosen supplier currently offers a turbine with a nominal power output of 500kW and a turbine with a nominal power output of 900kW. Both turbines are identical in height and appearance. At this time it is uncertain whether the 500kW turbine will remain in production and the applicant has therefore submitted the application on the basis that the 900kW only turbine may be available in the future.
- 2.2 In addition to the turbines, the application also seeks consent for a crane pad/turning area beside each turbine measuring 25 metres by 40 metres. These will be permanent hard standing areas. A sub-station is also proposed alongside each turbine occupying a footprint of 5.1 metres by 2.5 metres with a flat roof height of 2.7 metres. Works to upgrade the existing footpath leading to the site of the turbines will also be required together with improvements to an existing culvert and the creation of an access track between the two turbines.
- 2.3 The applicant has stated that he is currently in discussions with UK Power Networks in relation to grid connection and it is anticipated that all cabling will be sub-surface. The specific details of the grid connection will need to be the subject of a separate planning application.
- 2.4 The proposed operational lifetime of the project is 25 years, following which the wind turbines would be decommissioned. Construction is anticipated to last approximately four months with a similar time period for decommissioning.
- 2.5 The full planning application, plans and documents submitted by the Applicant can be viewed online via East Cambridgeshire District Council's Public Access online service, via the following link <http://pa.eastcambbs.gov.uk/online-applications/>. **Alternatively a paper copy is available to view at the East Cambridgeshire District Council offices, in the application file.**
- 2.6 The development is considered to be a Schedule 2 project in terms of the Town and Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2011 (as amended). An Environmental Statement (ES) has therefore been submitted with the application.
- 2.7 An independent review of the ES was carried out by Nicholas Pearson Associates (NPA), which found that there were a number of areas where further information should be requested by the Council, under Regulation 22 of the Town and Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2011, to complete the ES and to inform the determination of the planning application. It also identified where other areas of the ES required clarification to ensure the likely significant effects of the development are clearly assessed and reported in the ES.
- 2.8 The applicant responded to the Regulation 22 request by submitting a revised version of the ES (July 2015). The Council is satisfied that the revised ES is sufficiently complete to inform the determination of the planning application.

3.0 PLANNING HISTORY

3.1

05/01116/OUM	Outline application for new settlement comprising up to approx. 5,000 homes, up to approx. 8,000 sq.m retail & related uses (including foodstore of approx. 2,500 sq.m, comparison retail of approx. 4,000 sq.m & A2/A3/A4/A5 uses of approx. 1,500 sq.m); up to approx. 45,000 sq.m employment uses (B1, B2 & B8); & supporting leisure, community & education uses; & infrastructure including highway works to the A10	Refused Dismissed at Appeal	10.01.2006
09/00154/FUL	Construction of a 10kw vertical axis wind turbine	Approved	12.05.2009
13/00672/SCREEN	SCREENING OPINION - Erection of two wind turbines		28.08.2013
14/00769/ESF	Erection of 2 x wind turbines, hub height of 75 metres with height to blade tip of 102 metres	Withdrawn	07.08.2014

4.0 THE SITE AND ITS ENVIRONMENT

- 4.1 The application site is located within the Parish of Stretham, approximately 2km south-west from the centre of the village of Stretham and approximately 2.2km south-east from the centre of the village of Stretham. The site forms part of Redhill Farm, a 300 acre mixed-farming business run by the applicant.
- 4.2 The application site comprises the site of the two turbines, crane pad/turning area and sub-station for each turbine and the access route. The A10 is situated to the east of the site and access is proposed from a lay-by off the main road. The site lies within an area of low lying fenland on undeveloped agricultural land, with open views to the north and north-east towards the Fen Island ridges.
- 4.3 Public Footpath No.18 Stretham runs to the east of the site and the site access shares part of this footpath. A small copse sits alongside part of the shared footpath/access with the surrounding area featuring scattered blocks of woodland and hedgerow.

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- 4.4 The site is approximately 1200m from the River Great Ouse County Wildlife Site (CWS). There are a number of listed buildings 2km-5km from the site including Stretham Old Engine and Denny Abbey Farmland Museum. Stretham, Wilburton and Haddenham Conservation Areas are to the north-east, north and north-west.
- 4.5 The closest residential dwellings are 58 and 60 Cambridge Road, Stretham (approximately 850 metres from the nearest turbine); Snoots Bridge, Cambridge Road, Stretham (approximately 550 metres from the nearest turbine); Elford Farm, Cambridge Road, Stretham (approximately 620 metres from the nearest turbine) and Red Hill Farm (approximately 700 metres from the nearest turbine). Mitchells Farm is located approximately 820 metres from the nearest turbine and the north-west corner of the Lazy Otter complex on Cambridge Road is approximately 880 metres from the nearest turbine.

### 5.0 RESPONSES FROM CONSULTEES

- 5.1 The consultees are listed below. A number of consultation responses are lengthy and/or technical in nature. Where this is the case, these have been attached as appendices. All other consultation responses are summarised below. The full responses are available on the Council's web site.

#### Councillors

- 5.2 **Anna Bailey, County Councillor – Ely South & West and District Councillor – Downham Villages: Opposes** for the following reasons: Contrary to policy, environmental and amenity impacts cannot be minimised, visual impact, Inspector for Mereham development detailed the site as having high value that would be damaged by large scale development, noise pollution and flicker, will erode agricultural enterprise in the area, effect on social mobility, developer has failed to secure a grid connection, UK has enough sites to reach quota of wind energy.
- 5.3 **Stephen Cheetham, Haddenham: Opposes** for the following reasons: Public benefits fail to outweigh harm, proposal is contrary to policy, environmental and amenity impacts cannot be minimised, visual impact, Inspector for Mereham development detailed the site as having high value that would be damaged by large scale development, noise pollution and flicker, will erode agricultural enterprise in the area, effect on social mobility and contrary to ministerial statement on wind farm applications.
- 5.4 **Mark Hugo, Haddenham: Opposes** for the following reasons: Contrary to policy, environmental and amenity impacts cannot be minimized and contrary to ministerial statement on wind farm applications.
- 5.5 **Bill Hunt, County Councillor - Haddenham Division and District Councillor - Stretham: Objects** for the following reasons: The Environmental Statement is incorrect, the turbines will be over 1.5 times the height of Ely Cathedral, threat to safety of aircraft using Mitchells Farm airstrip, distraction to drivers on the A10, noise will have a damaging effect on health of nearby residents, too close to domestic buildings, fatal effect on birds and bats, property values and social mobility will be affected, affect on livestock and food production, impact on “Big Skies”,

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contrary to Renewable Energy SPD, it has not been established that the harm this applications would cause has been outweighed by community benefit, lack of consultation and against the principle of localism.

- 5.6 **Stuart Smith, Haddeham: Opposes** for the following reasons: Visual impact, noise, disruptive effect on television reception and application of ministerial statement.

### Parish, District, City and Borough Councils

- 5.7 **Stretham Parish Council: Object:** Visual impact, European Law dictates that wind farms must be a minimum of 2km away from residential property and this site would be much closer, Same site as Mereham development – high value put on landscape and this is no different, noise pollution, negative effect on property prices leading to effect on people's livelihood, mobility and health, Stretham is a rural village with historic values, the Parish Council has supported solar farms in the area and two anaerobic digesters also exist – East Cambridgeshire has more than enough renewable energy, no statutory planning notifications have been put up in Stretham, inadequate consultation, applicant has failed to secure a grid connection, wind turbines do not have good safety records and interference with television signal.
- 5.8 **Haddenham Parish Council: Object:** In favour of renewable energy but having been consulted as a neighbouring parish has serious concerns in relation to impact on key views of a valuable landscape and Ely Cathedral, contrary to policy and findings of Mereham Inspector, noise, impact on wildlife, could allow for expansion to more turbines in the future, no provision for a bond/funding to cover demolition and removal of turbines and associated works and contrary to ministerial statement.
- 5.9 **City of Ely Council:** No concerns subject to the application complying with both ECDC's policy on wind farms and also Government policy.
- 5.10 **Swaffham Bulbeck Parish Council:** No comment on the proposal as the Parish Council does not have any criteria on which to make a judgment.
- 5.11 **Soham Town Council: Object:** Concerned about the visual impact of the large surrounding area.
- 5.12 **Waterbeach Parish Council: Object:** Turbines would be of an excessive height, problems with air safety, Waterbeach airfield may come back into use in the future, negative impact on environment including homes within Waterbeach Parish, concerns about proximity to Wicken Fen.
- 5.13 **Wentworth Parish Council: Object:** Concerned about the visual impact and the adverse impact on house prices in the area.
- 5.14 **Wicken Parish Council:** Although the turbines would be visible from the eastern boundaries of Wicken the Parish Council has no particular concerns or objections to the proposal.
- 5.15 **Witchford Parish Council:** Will not object provided the application complies with the Parish Council's adopted Wind Farms Policy which states:

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- No turbines should be erected to the south of the village of Witchford to prevent flicker affecting the village
- The maximum angle of visibility of any turbine from the nearest residential property should be 5°
- No turbine should be erected within 500m of any residential property
- No turbine should be erected in any sensitive or aesthetically pleasing location

5.16 **Burwell Parish Council:** No objections.

5.17 **Witcham Parish Council:** No comments to make.

5.18 **Borough Council of King's Lynn and West Norfolk:** No comment to make.

5.19 **Fenland District Council:** No comments to make regarding this proposal.

5.20 No response was received to consultation letters sent to the following: Sutton Parish Council; Wilburton Parish Council; Little Thetford Parish Council; Coveney Parish Council; Swaffham Prior Parish Council; Lode Parish Council; Cottenham Parish Council; Earith Parish Council; Breckland District Council; St Edmundsbury Borough Council; South Cambs District Council; Wilingham Parish Council; Cambridge City Council.

### Aviation

5.21 **National Air Traffic Services Ltd:** No safeguarding objection.

5.22 **Civil Aviation Authority (CAA):** Provided clarification of procedural matters and highlighted the following points:

- The CAA encourages councils/planning authorities to undertake relevant consultation with known local aerodromes regardless of status or the existing of any aerodrome/council safeguarding agreement.
- There is an international civil aviation requirement for all structure of 300 feet (91.4 metres) or more to be chartered on aeronautical charts.
- Any structure of 150 metres or more must be lit in accordance with the Air Navigation Order and should be appropriately marked.
- Cumulative effects of turbines may lead to unacceptable impacts in certain geographic areas.
- The Ministry of Defence will advise on all matters affecting military aviation.

5.23 **Ministry of Defence (MOD): Objects:** The turbines will be detectable by and will cause unacceptable interference to the ATC radar at Cambridge Airport.

5.24 **The General Aviation Awareness Council (GAAC) (also representing owner/operator of Mitchells farm Airstrip):** Objects: Impact on flight safety at Mitchells Farm. The proposal is contrary to good safety practices and planning guidelines recommended by the CAA, lack of consultation with the operator. The turbines would impact on visual approaches and landings, which are flown to the east of the airfield to minimize noise disturbance. Concerns relating to the risk of collision and the effect of shadow flicker. The turbines may be expected to generate downwind turbulence, which is a clear risk to flight safety. Similar



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applications elsewhere have been rejected and supported airfield operators' cases against inappropriate development.

- 5.25 **British Microlight Aircraft Association (BMAA): Objects:** Support pilots using Mitchells Farm airstrip. Concerns in relation to air turbulence in relation to light aircraft, aircraft will be forced to re-route taking them closer to the village of Wilburton which will increase the potential for noise nuisance for local residents.
- 5.26 **East Anglian Air Ambulance:** No formal response – verbal confirmation received that they would not wish to comment provided all other relevant bodies have been consulted.
- 5.27 **Cambridge International Airport:** Without suitable mitigation the proposed wind turbines will have an impact upon the safe operation of Cambridge Airport radar services. We have been in consultation with the developer's representative and have agreed a mitigation scheme that will allow the safety of aircraft to be maintained. **No objection** subject to the use of a condition to secure appropriate mitigation.

### Highways

- 5.28 **Local Highway Authority:** The Highway Authority requests that the application is refused as the Access Study states that there is no entrance created at the moment which strongly infers that the field access is not suitable for their needs.

The Highway Authority's request for refusal can be overcome if the applicant provides a drawing showing in detail how the access to the site will be created and that all vehicles to be used within the construction phase can use the same without undue maneuvering on the adopted public highway.

- 5.29 **Cambridgeshire Public Rights of Way (Definitive Map Officer):**
- Public Footpath No. 18 Stretham runs to the east of the site and the site access shares part of this footpath.
  - The turbines are located a suitable distance away from the footpath.
  - Note that the applicant has stated that the footpath will remain open during site construction.
  - Concerned that the surface of the footpath is not up to sufficient standard. If the surface is damaged the applicant is required to repair any damage at his own expense. Any changes to the surface of a Right of way need to be approved by the Rights of way Officer.
  - A number of informatives are recommended.

### Heritage

- 5.30 **Historic England:** Summary - English Heritage were consulted at pre-application stage on these proposals. On the basis of information submitted, it was considered that the proposed turbines would cause harm to the significance of the designated heritage assets Ely Cathedral, Denny Abbey Farmland Museum and Stretham Engine due to the impact on their setting. Given the exceptional significance of Ely Cathedral the resultant harm would be a matter of considerable **concern**. However,

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it is for the local planning authority to determine whether or not the level of harm caused could be outweighed by the public benefits of the development, in accordance with paragraph 134 of the National Planning Policy Framework.

- 5.31 **ECDC Conservation Officer:** This application affects the wider landscape setting of a number of designated heritage assets; namely Ely Cathedral and Stretham Engine, to varying degrees.

The ES submitted is wholly inadequate and whilst it includes a number of photographic representations of the turbines in the landscape, it does little to show how consideration has been given to the impact the turbines will have on the fens and its relationship with the heritage assets.

Whilst it is accepted that there appear to be no positions or public views where the proposed turbines will be visible within the sight lines of the Cathedral itself, no consideration has been given to views from the Cathedral out into the fen landscape – in particular from the West Tower. Whilst perhaps not as significant, this is still a public view of the landscape that should be taken into account in any environmental assessment.

In terms of this and the impact on Stretham Engine, it is likely that the proposal would cause harm to the significance of these heritage assets and in particular to their wider setting within the landscape, introducing incongruous features that sit well above the existing building line (particularly relevant to Stretham). However, as noted by English Heritage the NPPF states that in this instance the harm should be weighed against the potential public benefits of the scheme.

At this time, the **applicant has not submitted sufficient justification or assessment** to show how they have applied this principle from the NPPF, nor how their scheme would outweigh the harm caused.

**ECDC Conservation Officer** (on ES July 2015): Heritage assets are covered under section 7 of the report and it appears to be relatively biased towards archaeological remains.

The applicant has identified 4 main heritage assets that will be affected by the proposal: Stretham Old Engine; Possible Roman Villa (Tiled House Farm); Denny Abbey; and Ely Cathedral

The applicant has also looked at the impact of the proposal on the conservation areas of Wilburton, Stretham and Haddenham. They have concluded that the impact would be negligible due to the existing topography. I would agree as within all of the conservation areas the built form is very tight to the roads and views out of the conservation area are very limited. The turbines will not be visible from within any of the conservation areas identified.

Stretham Old Engine - The applicant has advised that the turbine blades will likely be visible above the existing trees/hedges when standing on the road in front of the engine building. The building is grade II listed and is publically accessible. The building forms part of the Fen landscape and the industrial heritage of the area, the turbines could be regarded as an industrial feature, however this would not

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overcome the fact that by only the blades being visible that this would potentially be a distraction when viewed from this location. It is likely that from this point, the proposal would cause less than substantial harm to the setting of the heritage asset and the public benefit argument would come into play.

Ely Cathedral - The applicant states that the turbines will be located some 8km away from the Cathedral tower and will appear as small features in the landscape. However, the fact that the fen landscape is so flat with very few vertical landmarks does not appear to have been given much consideration when reaching the conclusion that the impact would be negligible.

Denny Abbey - It is disappointing that the applicant did not appear to enter the site in order to produce the main visual assessments. The photographic montages submitted appear to have been taken from the access road to the site, rather than at the heritage asset itself. From visiting the site, it did not appear that the turbines would not be fully visible from within the building group, therefore limiting any impact on the setting of the asset.

There are a number of other viewpoints identified by the applicant in the visual assessment that would appear to show the proposal having a much greater impact on the wider landscape setting of several heritage assets.

Viewpoint 3 - This viewpoint is situated along Twenty Pence Road and looks across the fens towards Stretham. From this viewpoint, the church tower of St James in Stretham and the chimney stack of the Old Engine frame each side of the view with the application site sitting in the middle of both. These two towers are the only vertical landmarks within the otherwise flat landscape and the introduction of two turbines measuring over 100m in height will fundamentally alter their relationship with the historic fen landscape as these will become the visually dominant feature in the landscape.

Application site - Views across the application site from the public footpath to the SE – from this point there are clear views across the site towards the Haddenham ridge. This feature is a key landscape feature within the fens and from this point the Grade II listed North Mill is clearly visible on top of the ridge. Again this is the only vertical landmark within the landscape and the introduction of the turbines will fundamentally alter this relationship between the ridge and the landscape.

Overall the impact on specific heritage assets is likely to be low, however the impact on those assets within their wider setting in the historic landscape will be significant. Particularly in relation to the two views identified above.

- 5.32 No direct response to the formal application has been received from **Cambridgeshire Archaeology**.

### Ecology

- 5.33 **Natural England**: Statutory nature conservation sites – **no objection**. Protected species - not assessed, Standing Advice should be applied.

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- 5.34 **Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust:** The application at Red Hill Farm is not high concern for wintering swans. There is **no objection** to this particular application on this basis.
- 5.35 **The Wildlife Trust:** The WT has not made any response to this application and it is not anticipated that it will be doing so. **No objection.**
- 5.36 **Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB):** The RSPB hasn't had the opportunity to review the information and will not be able to do so. Therefore it is unable to offer any comment on this application.
- 5.37 **ECDC Trees Officer:** There are **two main considerations** relating to trees – namely site access and views:
1. Regarding access there is the consideration of heavy machinery onto the site during the construction phase demonstrating avoidance of any damage to established trees.
  2. Regarding views there is the potential for planting and establishment of new trees, hedges and woodlands possibly a great distance from the site of the turbines in order to soften views in the wider landscape context.
- Due to the height of the development no planting scheme would sufficiently hide the development within the landscape if that was the desired result only a softening of view could be achieved.
- The application in its current form appears not to address these issues.

### Flooding and Drainage

- 5.38 **Environment Agency:** The site is located within Flood Zone 1 (low risk). The EA has **no objection** to the proposed development but a number of advisory comments are made.
- 5.39 **Haddenham Level Drainage Commissioners: No objection in principle but raise the following concerns:** The access route will need to cross the Catchwater Drain. Improvements to the existing culvert have been agreed with the applicant but these relate to its use for agricultural traffic. If this is the intended route for construction traffic the proposed improvements would not be suitable. Consent will be required for any works within nine metres of the drains. The turbine bases, hardstanding areas and access roads after construction will be liable for special levy instead of agricultural rates.

Additional representation: The applicant has requested approval for the proposed cross of the New Cut Drain. A consent form has been received but contains insufficient detail. Further information is required in respect of a detailed site plan confirming the exact position of the access road in relation to the drain and a revised drawing of the culvert. The revised ES still lacks sufficient detail. Until the Haddenham Level Drainage Commissioners receive and approve the detail as requested, consent to the proposed work cannot be given, even if the Council was minded to grant planning permission.

- 5.40 **Ely Group of Internal Drainage Boards:** The site is not within a Drainage Board district that is part of this group, therefore there are **no comments** to make.

Other Consultees

5.41 **ECDC Environmental Health:** Noise - The applicant has completed a simplified assessment under ETSU-R-97. This is considered appropriate and that a full ETSU assessment is not required. The report indicates that the 35dB(A) limit would be met at all nearby properties with the exception of Snoots Bridge with the 900kw turbines, at which the noise level is predicted to be 35.4dB(A). This 0.4 is considered a negligible breach and ECDC do not consider further assessment is required at this time, mainly due to the likelihood of the noise limit being **higher** if a full ETSU assessment is completed, as this advises limits to be set at 5dB(A) above the back ground noise, with a minimum noise limit of 35dB(A) during the day and 43dB(A) at night. Whilst it is acknowledged that the current guidance regarding ETSU does not specify the rounding of figures it is common practice for us to round a noise measurement to the nearest whole number and ECDC EH team do not consider it beneficial to request further reports at this time.

It is therefore considered a limit of 35dB(A), with measurements rounded to the nearest whole number is the most stringent limit likely to be able to be imposed at this location.

These predictions have been checked and agreed with an independent consultant who has the correct software to enable the predictions to be completed.

However, due to the predicted levels being so close to the proposed limits there is concern regarding the possibility of micro siting the turbines as if they are moved closer towards the properties where 35dB(A) is predicted there is the possibility these levels will be breached. It is therefore necessary to impose a condition to control this.

Conditions are recommended to protect residential amenity during the construction phase and a set of conditions in relation to operational noise are also recommended.

Shadow Flicker - The Redhill Farm Wind Turbines Shadow Flicker Assessment ref TEWL 587 dated September 2013 indicates that there may potentially be a minor impact on one property.

Shadow flicker is dependent on cloud cover, nearby planting/shadows, wind speed and wind direction (as this affects the orientation of the turbine). The above assessment has calculated that no residential properties within the assessment zone should be exposed to more than 6 hours of shadow flicker in a year. A bare landscape has been used in the calculation (i.e not taking into consideration buildings and vegetation that may cause shadow and prevent flicker).

The applicants have specified a condition could be used to request monitoring and a site specific assessment to allow mitigation to be proposed if there are any issues. There is agreement with this and it is advised that that investigations into the occurrence of shadow flicker should be undertaken should this be raised as an issue by residents during the operation of the wind farm. This means that should operational results differ to those calculated (for example more people affected/different times etc) the applicants would investigate this. It is expect the re-

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evaluation of mitigation would form part of this. Conditions are also recommended in relation to micro-siting and non-reflective blades.

- 5.42 **Public Health England: No specific comments** – general advice given.
- 5.43 **Campaign to Protect Rural England (Cambridgeshire & Peterborough): Objects** - raising the following concerns: Effect on landscape, Red Hill Farm is not the right location, the turbines are substantially taller than the West Tower of Ely Cathedral and thus prominent in the landscape, to Stretham residents they could well appear at a looming presence, travelling north on the A10 there will be some stretches when the turbines will be seen in conjunction with Ely Cathedral, turbines would introduce an urban feature into the Fenland landscape, landscape mentioned by Mereham Inspector. The concern regarding cumulative impact with withdrawn as the application for three turbines at Haddenham has been withdrawn.
- 5.44 **Stop Stretham Wind Farm Action Group (SSWFAG): Objects** – A summary report produced by SSWFAG outlining the main objections is attached at Appendix 2.
- 5.45 No responses received from: Cambridgeshire Local Access Forum, Ely Group of Internal Drainage Board, East Cambridgeshire Ramblers Association, ECDC Economic Development, Head of Strategic Planning and CCC Growth & Development.
- 5.46 **Neighbours** – 185 nearby addresses were notified by letter, site notices were posted at locations in the local area and a notice of the application and revisions made to the Environmental Statement appeared in the Cambridge Evening News. Responses were received from 168 individuals (at the time of writing). A summary of the responses received is attached at Appendix 3. A full copy of the responses are available on the Council's website.
- 6.0 The Planning Policy Context
- 6.1 East Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2015
- |          |  |
|----------|--|
| GROWTH 2 | Locational strategy                              |
| GROWTH 5 | Presumption in favour of sustainable development |
| EMP 7    | Tourist facilities and visitor attractions       |
| ENV 1    | Landscape and settlement character               |
| ENV 2    | Design   |
| ENV 6    | Renewable energy development                     |
| ENV 7    | Biodiversity and geology                         |
| ENV 8    | Flood risk                                       |
| ENV 9    | Pollution  |
| ENV 11   | Conservation Areas                               |
| ENV 12   | Listed Buildings                                 |
| ENV 14   | Sites of archaeological interest                 |
| COM 6    | Telecommunications                               |
| COM 7    | Transport impact                                 |
- 6.2 Supplementary Planning Documents

Renewable Energy Development (Commercial Scale) October 2014  
East Cambridgeshire District County Wildlife Sites (2010)  
Stretham Conservation Area SPD

6.3 National Planning Policy Framework 2012

- 7 Requiring good design
- 8 Promoting healthy communities
- 10 Meeting the challenge of climate change, flooding and coastal change
- 11 Conserving and enhancing the natural environment
- 12 Conserving and enhancing the historic environment

6.4 Planning Practice Guidance

Renewable and Low Carbon Energy

6.5 Ministerial Statement dated 18<sup>th</sup> June 2015

7.0 PLANNING COMMENTS

Policy and principle of renewable energy development

- 7.1 Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, states that applications must be determined in accordance with the Development Plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. In circumstances where there is a conflict with the provisions of a Development Plan, the decision maker has to determine whether there are any material considerations which would override the conflict, leading to a conclusion that the development should be approved.
- 7.2 In the case of renewable energy development, significant weight should be given to the benefits of the scheme in terms of the contribution to the national objective of promoting renewable energy technologies.
- 7.3 The adopted Development Plan comprises the East Cambridgeshire District Council Local Plan (2015) and the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Minerals and Waste Plan (2012). Policy ENV6 of the Local Plan relates specifically to renewable energy development. The other relevant topic-specific policies within the development plan, which have been highlighted in this report, inform the assessment of compliance to be undertaken in accordance with Policy ENV6.

*Policy ENV6: Renewable Energy Development*

*Proposals for renewable energy and associated infrastructure will be supported, unless their wider environmental, social and economic benefits would be outweighed by significant adverse effects that cannot be remediated and made acceptable in relation to:*

- *The local environment and visual landscape impact.*
- *Impact on the character and appearance of the streetscape/buildings.*

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- *Key views, in particular those of Ely Cathedral.*
- *Protected species.*
- *Residential amenity.*
- *Safeguarding areas for nearby airfields; and*
- *Heritage assets.*

*Renewable energy proposals which affect sites of international, national and local nature importance or other irreplaceable habitats will be determined against the relevant sections of Policy ENV 7.*

*The visual and amenity impacts of proposed structures will be assessed on their merits, both individually and cumulatively.*

*Provision should be made for the removal of facilities and reinstatement of the site, should they cease to operate*

- 7.4 The 'Renewable Energy Development (Commercial Scale)' supplementary planning document, adopted by the Council in October 2014, provides guidance on how planning applications for renewable energy proposals may be assessed and is a material planning consideration, *where it is consistent with national policy*. The following additional Supplementary Planning Documents are also relevant to the proposal: East Cambridgeshire District County Wildlife Sites (2010); Stretham Conservation Area (2009).
- 7.5 Proposals for development must also be considered in the context of the National Planning Policy Statements (NPPS), which were debated and approved by the House of Common in July 2011. These aim to ensure that planning decisions are transparent and are taken against a clear policy framework, by setting out national policy against which proposals for major energy projects will be determined. While the focus is for nationally significant projects, they are a material consideration for smaller energy projects being determined by local planning authorities.
- 7.6 National Policy Statement for Energy (EN-1) sets out national policy for energy infrastructure and describes the need for new national significant energy infrastructure projects. EN-3 (NPS for Renewable Energy Infrastructure) then provides the primary basis for decisions, providing guidance on various technologies and their potential for significant effects. It provides specific guidance regarding onshore wind in relation to various types of impacts including landscape, biodiversity, noise and vibration and the historic environment, including potential mitigation measures.
- 7.7 The NPPF sets out the Government's economic, environmental and social planning policies for England. Supporting the transition to a low carbon future in a changing climate is one of the core principles of planning identified in the NPPF. Indeed, paragraph 93 of the NPPF states that: *"Planning plays a key role in helping shape places to secure radical reductions in greenhouse gas emissions, minimising vulnerability and providing resilience to the impacts of climate change, and supporting the delivery of renewable and low carbon energy and associated infrastructure. This is central to the economic, social and environmental dimensions*



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*of sustainable development.” As such, the NPPF states that **local planning authorities, when determining applications for renewable energy development, should not require applicants to demonstrate the overall need for the development.***

- 7.8 Planning Practice Guidance (PPG), which has a specific section relating to renewable and low carbon energy, is also relevant to this application.
- 7.9 In the rest of this report, the key topics for consideration are set out and discussed, identifying where adverse effects are considered likely to arise. The final ‘planning balance’ is then discussed, identifying how the recommendation was reached.

### New Ministerial Guidance

- 7.10 A Written Ministerial Statement was made by the Secretary of State (SOS) for Communities and Local Government (Greg Clark) on the 18<sup>th</sup> June 2015. This set out new considerations to be applied to proposed wind energy development.
- 7.11 The Statement confirms that from the 18<sup>th</sup> June, *“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.”*
- 7.12 The Statement sets out transitional provisions for applications which have already been submitted, which would apply to this application. It states that *“where a valid planning application for a wind energy development has already been submitted to a local planning authority and the development plan does not identify suitable sites, the following transitional provision applies. In such instances, local planning authorities can find the proposal acceptable if, following consultation, they are satisfied it has addressed the planning impacts identified by affected local communities and therefore has their backing.”*
- 7.13 The online Planning Practice Guidance has been updated to reflect this Statement, reiterating the ‘tests’ set out in by the Minister in paragraph 33 of the ‘Renewable and low carbon energy’ section. It also confirms that *“whether the proposal has the backing of the affected local community is a planning judgement for the local planning authority.”*
- 7.14 This matter, of whether the proposal has the backing of the community, as defined by the Ministerial Statement, is a material consideration, which should be given significant weight in the planning balance.

### 8.0 LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL IMPACT

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- 8.1 Due to the nature of wind turbine development, impacts on the landscape character and views are an important consideration, which is acknowledged in NPS EN-3. Both NPS EN-3 and the NPPF require that any adverse visual effects be balanced against the benefits of the development and this is reflected in the Local Plan.
- 8.2 There is no published guidance establishing a threshold beyond which visual impacts should be deemed unacceptable, and it is for the decision maker in each case to determine how much weight landscape and visual effects should attract in the planning balance.
- 8.3 Policy ENV6 states that renewable energy development will be supported unless their wider environmental, social and economic benefits would be outweighed by significant adverse effects that cannot be remediated and made acceptable in relation to: (amongst other things) the local environment and visual impact; impact on the character and appearance of the streetscape/buildings; key views, in particular those of Ely Cathedral; and, residential amenity. The policy confirms that the visual and amenity impacts will be assessed on their own merits, both individually and cumulatively. The need to respect the capacity of the distinctive character areas defined in the Cambridgeshire Landscape Guidelines is also stressed.
- 8.4 Policies ENV1 and ENV2 do not relate specifically to renewable energy development, but stress the desire to protect important views into and out of settlements, space between settlements and their wider landscape setting, visually sensitive natural and man-made skylines, hillsides and geological features and views of key landmark buildings. This reflects the Government's objectives in terms of protection of the countryside and landscapes more generally, set out in paragraph 109 of the NPPF, which states that the planning system "*should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by...protecting and enhancing valued landscape*". The need to recognise "*the intrinsic beauty of the countryside*" is also enshrined as a core planning principle in paragraph 17 of the NPPF.
- 8.5 PPG specifically relates to cumulative effects of wind turbine development in relation to landscape impacts and visual impacts. The former is concerned with the effects of a proposed development on the fabric, character and quality of the landscape and the degree to which a proposed renewable energy development will become a significant or defining characteristic of the landscape. The latter, the degree to which the development will become a feature in particular views (or sequence of views), and the impact this has upon the people experiencing those views.
- 8.6 Section 6 of the ES (July 2015) is an overview of the approach taken by the applicant to the consideration of the landscape and visual impact of the proposal and contains the full text of the Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA), which is also presented as Appendix E to the ES (July 2015). Appendix F of the ES (July 2015) contains the Photomontage Views referred to within the ES and Appendix G contains the Zone of Theoretical Visibility Plans.
- 8.7 The study area for the LVIA has been defined as the locality within approximately 15km of the site. At the request of the Council a study area of 25km has been

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adopted to consider the cumulative impacts of the proposal. Fieldwork undertaken on behalf of the applicant suggests that the main zone of visual influence will fall within 2-4km of the site. In agreement with the Council, 17 viewpoints have been selected.

- 8.8 Within the LVIA there is reference to dialogue between the applicant and the Council, prior to the submission of this application, in which the Council was said to have confirmed that the development was not significant enough to require a full Environmental Impact Assessment and that an ES would be adequate. The applicant's interpretation of the EIA regulations is incorrect as the development is considered to be a Schedule 2 project in respect of the EIA regulations and on this basis an ES is required in order to fully assess the environmental impacts of the proposal.
- 8.9 The study area is located in the *Fens* regional character area, as defined within the Countryside Agency *Countryside Character Assessment* of England (1999). This is a broad assessment of the landscapes across the UK and within these character areas it is normally accepted that there are identifiable landscape sub-types, often defined by differences in geology, topography, land use and vegetation.
- 8.10 The LVIA points out that towards the southern extent of the fens there are several notable ridges including the *Isle of Ely*. Reference is also made to the ridge to the north and north-west of the study area on which the villages of Wilburton and Haddenham site. In the wider landscape to the south and south-west of the study area, low-lying fens merge with the *Bedfordshire and Cambridgeshire Claylands*.
- 8.11 The Fens are characterised by their flat, open landscape with extensive vistas, big skies and typically large-scale field pattern generally dominated by intensive arable agricultural land use. The drainage hierarchy is influential in defining the landscape – with the regular geometry of large fields defined by ditches, which drain to larger channels.

### Landscape Impacts

- 8.12 In assessing the sensitivity of the landscape the LVIA states that the scale and open character of the fens landscape will help to 'absorb' the turbines and their scale will quickly diminish within a relatively short distance. The fenland setting is also stated within the LVIA to have a high capacity to accommodate wind turbines.
- 8.13 It is acknowledged in the LVIA that in clear weather conditions views of the cathedral are often possible in open sections of the fens. However, views of the cathedral in the vicinity of the application site are limited and the turbines are not considered to intrude on any well regarded views. The LVIA also states that the turbines will be sited outside the perceived setting of the villages of Stretham and Wilburton and that the access roads will partly follow existing tracks with new sections being unobtrusive. Associated ground infrastructure is described as being relatively small and discrete. The landscape setting is subsequently described as have a medium to low sensitivity to the type of development proposed.
- 8.14 It is agreed that the application site is located within a fenland landscape, characterised by large scale fields, with large skies, drains and watercourses and

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distant views. This landscape is distinct from the Haddenham to Sutton village fen islands which lie less than 2km to the north and north-west of the application site. This landscape is elevated above the wider landscape with ridges forming a backdrop to the lower landscape. The relationship between these two character areas plays an important part in how the wider landscape is viewed and the importance placed on it.

- 8.15 The application site is located within a wider area on which planning consent for a new settlement to be known as Mereham was refused in 2006. The landscape impacts of that proposal were widely debated at a public inquiry with the Planning Inspector's report describing the landscape, including the fenland area and ridges to the north, as having *"a slightly mystical character than can change with weather conditions. The belts of trees as the land rises slightly...and the higher trees in linear order approaching the ridge add an almost Arcadian hint to the landscape character"*. In light of the views of this Planning Inspector and the importance placed on the effects of that proposal on the landscape, it is considered by officers that the landscape setting should be described as having a medium to high sensitivity to the type of development proposed rather than the lower sensitivity suggested by the applicant in the LVIA.
- 8.16 In terms of the magnitude of change, the LVIA states that *"the development will not impinge on the immediate settings of villages"* and that *"it will be located away from sensitive corridors – such as the River Ouse; and, it will not introduce notable secondary features such as power lines to the locality"*. Based on this criteria the LVIA states that the proposed turbines are *"anticipated to leave the landscape mainly unchanged but with some perceptible additions"*. This is considered by the LVIA to represent a 'low magnitude' of change. When considered alongside the LVIA's conclusion that the landscape has a medium to low sensitivity to change, the significance of the effects on the local landscape resource is anticipated to be 'slight'.
- 8.17 With the exception of small areas of woodland there are very few intervening features in the landscape immediately surrounding the turbines. The landscape opens out beyond the small copse of trees to the south-east of the site of the turbines, with the backdrop of the ridges to the north and north-west. It is therefore considered that the introduction of two wind turbines of the size and scale proposed together with the associated infrastructure, including the access road, turning/crane pads and substations, would have a significant urbanising effect on the rural fen landscape. This in turn would represent a medium to high magnitude of change and based on this assessment, officers are of the view that the significance of the effects of the development on the landscape would be higher than suggested in the LVIA.
- 8.18 The adverse impacts arising from the construction of the turbines would be contrary to policies ENV1, ENV2 and ENV6 of the Local Plan, as well as the desire to protect valued landscape outlined in the NPPF. The interplay between the ridges and the lower lying, flat landscape, which is currently devoid of man-made features, and would be subject to significant change. This is key to the assessment of the landscape impacts of this proposal. The magnitude of change to the landscape and the fact that this would be contrary to policy means that it should weigh significantly against the development.

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### Visual Impacts

- 8.19 The LVIA approaches the assessment of the magnitude and significance of visual effects by applying a set of criteria based on: the extent of the views of the development coupled with the proportion of the development that will be visible; the distance of the viewer of the viewpoint from the development; and whether the viewer/viewpoint is fixed or transient. A hierarchy of sensitivity to views from residential locations down to public roads and paths, views from working areas and occasionally visited land is given.
- 8.20 The magnitude of change in views from a short section of the public footpath to the south-east of the site of the turbines is expressed to be medium-high as the turbines will be within 200 metres of the footpath for a section of about 1km. The turbines are described as being dominant in views with some mitigation from existing hedge and tree cover. Ramblers are considered to pass along this section of footpath relatively quickly with the turbines being seen as a 'key characteristic' of the landscape in views from further away. The applicant states that the footpath is not well used, although the LVIA suggests that improvements to the route may make it more attractive. The turbines are described as a "*notable new feature...that will not block or intrude upon an existing view of particular significance*". The significance of the effects on users of the footpath is described as moderate due to the transient nature of potential receptors.
- 8.21 The LVIA identifies the magnitude of change for other potential visual receptors within 1km of the study site to be 'medium – a noticeable change'. Identified receptors include a number of residential dwellings, including cottages on the A10, Elford Farm, Snoots Bridge, Redhill Farm and Mitchells Farm, as well as motorists on a section of the A10. Occupants of residential dwellings are considered by the LVIA to be 'static receptors', who could be sensitive to visual change, but fieldwork suggests that buildings and vegetation will generally screen potential views of the turbines. The significance of effects is therefore described as moderate-slight.
- 8.22 Visual receptors within 1-2.5km of the turbines are identified in the LVIA as visitors to the Ouse River corridor, visitors to the Twentypence marina and residents in scattered settlements in all directions and those on the southern edge of Stretham and Wilburton. At this distance these receptors are considered to have a medium-low magnitude of change on views, with significance expected to be slight.
- 8.23 In longer range views, the LVIA considers that there will be a low magnitude of change with the significance of effects being slight or neutral.
- 8.24 A number of adverse effects on visual amenity have been identified within the LVIA. However, officers consider that the significance of these effects has been 'downplayed' by the LVIA. The view from the footpath, as the landscape opens out beyond the copse of trees, is one of an undeveloped fenland vista framed by the ridges to the north. The insertion of two turbines of the scale proposed, would fundamentally alter this view and the experience of it. The associated infrastructure, including the hardsurfacing of the existing access and the creation of the new section of access, will erode the soft, natural character of the area, introducing a number of hard, unforgiving features. Visual receptors using the public footpath running north to south across Redhill Farm will not necessarily move

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'relatively quickly' through the landscape. Their experience will therefore be one of travelling through a landscape dominated by turbines rather than one which allows them to appreciate the special relationship between the island ridges and lowland fens.

- 8.25 Whilst the extent to which the turbines will be seen from the closest residential dwellings (a number of which are approximately 550-900m from the closest turbine) will be affected by the presence of buildings and vegetation, they will not be completely screened and the significance of effects is considered to be greater than 'moderate-slight'. The significance of effects on motorists and other users of the B1049 Twenty Pence Road is also considered to be underestimated, as is the view that beyond 2.5-3km the turbines will cause a 'barely perceptible change to the landscape setting'.
- 8.26 The adverse effects noted for a number of views and receptors would be contrary to policies ENV1, ENV2 and ENV6 of the Local Plan as well as the desire to protect the countryside outlined in the NPPF. The significance of the effects and the impact on the visual receptors is considered to weigh significantly against the development.

### 9.0 CULTURAL HERITAGE

- 9.1 Cultural heritage encompasses a wide range of features, both visible and buried, including archaeological remains, Scheduled Ancient Monuments, Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas.
- 9.2 Section 66 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Area) Act 1990 requires the decision maker to have special regard to the desirability of preserving or enhancing a listed building or its setting or any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses. Section 72 of the same Act requires the decision maker to have special regard to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of a conservation area.
- 9.3 Policy ENV11 of the Local Plan seeks to ensure that development proposals preserve or enhance the character or appearance of conservation areas and policy ENV12 aims to prevent detrimental impacts on the visual, architectural or historic setting of listed buildings. Additionally, policy ENV12 specifically deals with development proposals affecting sites of known or potential archaeological interest. These Development Plan policies reflect the aim to protect heritage assets as defined by the NPPF (paragraph 17).
- 9.4 Section 7 of the ES (July 2015) addresses the effects of the proposal on the historic environment. The majority of the text of Section 7 focuses on archaeology and details the archaeological evaluation carried out prior to the submission of the application. The conclusions set out in the ES (July 2015) are that the shallow depth of soils encountered within the site suggests that the landscape was of limited use for arable farming, at least until modern drainage and agricultural practise were introduced. The impact on archaeological features is also considered by the ES (July 2015) to be negligible. An email from Cambridgeshire Archaeology, attached to the ES (July 2015), states that the evaluation work was monitored and that there will be no archaeological impediment to the development of wind turbines in these locations on archaeological grounds. Cambridgeshire Archaeology has been

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consulted a number of times on this application and no formal response has been received. The pre-application response provided to the applicant is noted and accepted by officers.

9.5 The ES and LVIA identify a number of heritage assets in the locality of the study site:

- Stretham Old Engine – a Grade II\* Listed Building and a scheduled monument, approximately 2.2km to the east.
- Denny Abbey – a former monastery and a Grade I Listed Building. The Barn to the north of the Abbey is Grade II listed and the whole site is a scheduled monument, approximately 4.5km south of the study site.
- Ely Cathedral – Grade I Listed and scheduled ancient monument, approximately 8km north-east of the study site.
- The Burystead – Grade II\* Listed, approximately 2.1km north of the study site.
- Stretham Village Cross – Grade II\* Listed, approximately 2.3km north-east of the study site.

9.6 Photomontage views have been prepared for views from Stretham Engine, Denny Abbey and Ely Cathedral and the local village conservation areas have been reviewed. Conclusions reached early on in the LVIA are that the *“majority of the areas and properties within them [conservation areas] will not be intervisible with the proposed development due to topographic variety. Notably there is not anticipated to be any intervisibility with the proposed development and the grounds of the churches – St James, Stretham and adjacent rectory (both Grade II\* Listed); St Peters, Wilburton and rectory (Grade I and Grade II\* respectively) and Holy Trinity, Haddenham (Grade I).”* This is a view generally accepted by officers as the built form within all of the conservation areas is tight to the roads and views out of the conservation areas are very limited. The proposed turbines would not therefore affect the setting of Stretham Village Cross or Church, which is located at the centre of the village and its conservation area.

9.7 Historic England (known as English Heritage at the time comments were made) raised concerns regarding the quality of the visual impact assessment made in respect of views from the West Tower of Ely Cathedral. The applicant has responded by producing a new photomontage within the LVIA, in improved weather conditions. Historic England has been asked to comment on the revised LVIA but at the time of writing no further comments have been received.

9.8 Ely Cathedral is located approximately 8km to the north-east of the site of the turbines. The LVIA considers that the turbines will have a ‘negligible level of visual change’ to the general outlook of the heritage asset. However, Historic England takes the view that *“the turbines would appear as discordant and distracting elements on the skyline when viewed from the [West] Tower, and their construction within its setting would result in harm to the significance of the Cathedral”*. The LVIA points out that only guided visitors would be subject to this view, however, it is widely recognised that any harm caused to the setting of a heritage asset by development should not be diminished where there are restrictions on the public’s ability to access the viewpoint. The LVIA does not explicitly address the fact that there are very few vertical landmarks within the landscape as it is seen from Ely

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Cathedral. It is therefore considered by officers that the statement that the sensitivity of receptors would be low and the significance of effects to views would be considered neutral, is ill informed. Historic England questions whether the less than substantial harm to the significance of the Cathedral could be justified by the public benefits that might accrue from the development but leaves this judgement to the LPA.

- 9.9 The LVIA considers that the turbine blades will be visible above the existing tree and hedge line when viewed from the road frontage of Stretham Old Engine. The building and adjacent listed cottage form part of the fen landscape, historically as well as visually, providing a link to the industrial heritage of the area. The turbines themselves could be regarded as another example of an industrial feature in the landscape, however, the fact that only the blades are likely to be visible means that they will appear incongruous and distracting. It is considered that, at this distance, the harm caused by the turbines to the setting of the asset would be less than substantial.
- 9.10 Similar conclusions are reached by Historic England in relation to the effects of the proposal on Denny Abbey Farmland Museum. The LVIA indicates that the blade tips would also be visible along approaches to Denny Abbey and Historic England takes the view that the presence of the turbines on the horizon, especially when moving would result in harm to the remote and rural setting of the Abbey and the significance of the designated complex.
- 9.11 The impact of the turbines on the wider landscape setting of several heritage assets is also a matter of concern to officers. Views to the east and north-east of Twentypence Road take in the site of the turbines with the village of Stretham and the surrounding area beyond. From the viewpoint used in the LVIA (viewpoint 3), the church tower of St James in Stretham and the chimney at Stretham Old Engine sit to either side of the application site. These two towers are the only vertical landmarks within the otherwise flat landscape and the introduction of the turbines, at a height of 102m, will fundamentally alter their relationship with the historic fen landscape. The turbines will become the visually dominant feature, resulting in harm to the wider setting of St James Church and Stretham Old Engine and their historical significance to the area.
- 9.12 Views across the application site from the PRow running from north to south through Red Hill Farm take in the Sutton to Haddenham Ridge. The ridge is a key landscape feature adjoining the fenland landscape character. The Grade II listed North Mill is clearly visible towards the top of the ridge and the introduction of the turbines will significantly alter the relationship between the Mill, its position on the ridge and the fenland below. The historical significance of the Mill will be diminished by the presence of the turbines in the foreground and resulting in harm to the setting of the heritage asset in its wider context.
- 9.13 Whilst the impacts of the proposal on the immediate setting of the individual assets are considered to result in less than substantial harm, impacts of the proposal on the setting of a number of heritage assets in the wider landscape is considered to result in substantial harm. Taken together with the duty on the decision maker to have special regard to the desirability of preserving or enhancing a listed building or its setting or any features of special architectural or historic interest which it



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possesses, means that such harm should attract significant weight against a proposal.

### 10.0 RESIDENTIAL AMENITY

10.1 Policy ENV6 of the Local Plan highlights residential amenity as a key consideration when assessing proposals for renewable energy development. Policy ENV2 also states that all development proposals are expected to ensure that there is no significantly detrimental effect on the residential amenity of nearby occupiers. The Renewable Energy SPD also stresses the need to consider the effects of renewable energy schemes on residential amenity.

10.2 Any adverse effects in terms of residential amenity and associated conflict with Development Plan policy must therefore be weighed against the benefits of the renewable energy scheme in the planning balance.

10.3 Residential amenity impacts from wind farms can be broken down into three main categories: noise, shadow flicker and the overall impact the presence of the turbines would have on living conditions at a property.

#### Noise

10.4 Assessing the noise impacts of wind turbines is identified in PPG as a key consideration. Paragraph 123 of the NPPF explicitly states that planning decisions should aim to *“avoid noise from giving rise to significant adverse impacts on health and quality of life as a result of new development”*. The NPPF also states that decisions should *“mitigate and reduce to a minimum other adverse impacts on health and quality of life arising from noise from new development, including through the use of conditions”*.

10.5 Policy ENV9 of the Local Plan reflects national policy and seeks to protect against the adverse effects of noise, stating that proposals will be refused where there are unacceptable impacts arising from development on the natural environment, general amenity and the tranquillity of the wider area from noise. The Renewable Energy SPD also outlines the need to consider the impacts on amenity from increased noise levels.

10.6 When assessing and rating noise from wind energy developments, PPG states that ‘The assessment and rating of noise from wind farms’ (ETSU-R-97) should be used by local planning authorities, along with the good practice guide prepared by the Institute of Acoustics and the Department for Energy and Climate Change, which is endorsed as a supplement to ETSU-R-97. NPS EN-3 also provides support for the use of this guidance. The Renewable Energy SPD stresses that assessments for wind farm proposals should be consistent with the methodology outline in ETSU-R-97.

10.7 The applicant has submitted a simplified ETSU-R-97 Noise Assessment in respect of the construction of two 500kW turbines carried out by Huntingdonshire District Council, which is summarised in Section 8 of the ES (July 2015) and attached at Appendix H. Appendix H also includes a Sound Power Level Specification – 500kW, prepared by EWT (the turbine supplier) together with a Sound Power

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Warranty Levels Specification 500kW and 900kW. A further noise assessment carried out by WSP Parsons Brinckerhoff is also summarised in the ES (July 2015) and attached at Appendix H. This assessment looks at construction noise, operational noise and amplitude modulation and has been carried out in respect of the 900kW turbines.

- 10.8 The assessment carried out by Huntingdonshire District Council predicted noise levels at a number of residential dwellings, with the study area extending as far south as the Lazy Otter Meadows complex and as far north as Red Hill Farm and Mitchells Farm. The report states that information on receptors was sourced from mapping and from the applicant and that no site visits were undertaken. Based on a 10m/s wind speed the noise level from two 500kW turbines is predicted to comply with the simplified ETSU test at all properties.
- 10.9 The WSP assessment was carried out in respect of two 900kW turbines reaches the same conclusion as the assessment carried out by Huntingdonshire District Council in respect of operational noise. WSP also concludes that during the construction phased of the development, predicted noise levels indicate compliance with British Standard BS 5228:2009 Code of Practice for noise and vibration control on construction and open sites. It is noted within the assessment that noise from vehicles access and leaving the site could result in noise levels of approximately 58db at 60 Cambridge Road for short periods.
- 10.10 A technical review of the noise assessments by TNEI Services was commissioned to ensure that the information submitted was robust and of a sufficient standard to allow the local planning authority to fully assess the impacts of noise. Limitations were identified by TNEI in relation to the construction noise assessment due to the fact that the assessment was non-specific and based upon activities at unspecified locations without an indicative work program. It was also noted that decommissioning was not considered. However, TNEI consider that, notwithstanding the limitations identified, construction noise can generally be controlled through the use of planning conditions.
- 10.11 TNEI also concluded that the two operational noise assessments were undertaken in accordance with appropriate methodology and taking account of good practice guidance. TNEI states that the assessment relating to the EWT 500kw turbines demonstrates compliance with the simplified ETSU criteria, while the assessment for the 900kW model indicated a marginal fail, which the applicant presents as compliant.
- 10.12 The Council's Environmental Health Officer has reviewed the noise assessments together with the TNEI report and is satisfied that the use of a simplified assessment under ETSU-R-97 is appropriate and that a full ETSU assessment is not required. The simplified assessment method recognises that where the noise from a turbine can comply with a limit of 35dB at wind speeds of up to 10m/s (measured at 10m height) then that alone offers sufficient protection of amenity and that background noise surveys are not necessary.
- 10.13 The Environmental Health Officer notes that the assessments indicate that a 35dB(A) limit would be met at all nearby properties with the exception of Snoots Bridge with the 900kW turbines, at which the noise level is predicted to be

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35.4dB(A). This 0.4 is considered a negligible breach and that a further assessment is not considered at this time. This is due to the likelihood of the noise limit being higher if a full ETSU assessment is completed as this advises limits to be set at 5dB(A) above the back ground noise, with a minimum noise limit of 35.4dB(A) during the day and 43dB(A) at night. It is acknowledged that the current guidance regarding ETSU does not specify the rounding of figures it is common practice for us to round a noise measurement to the nearest whole number. It is therefore considered that a limit of 35dB(A), with measurements rounded to the nearest whole number is the most stringent limit likely to be able to be imposed at this location.

- 10.14 Concerns have however been raised by the Environmental Health Officer that predicted noise levels are close to the accepted limits and that micro siting the turbines could lead to them being moved closer to properties where 35dB(A) is predicted and where there is a possibility of noise levels being breached. Micro siting should therefore be controlled by condition. The Environmental Health Officer is also satisfied that management of the construction phase is important and that the use of a Construction Environmental Management Plan (CEMP) will address and limit effects from noise, dust and lighting. The submission of a CEMP by the applicant can be controlled by condition. A number of further conditions are also recommended by the Environmental Health Officer in relation to operational noise are also recommended and are attached to this report as Appendix 4.
- 10.15 The WSP assessment briefly discusses amplitude modulation (AM), or blade swish, and states that the methodologies currently endorsed by the Government provide no method of assessment or control noting that the Institute of Acoustics (IOA) Good Practice Guidance (GPG) states that current practice is not to assign a planning condition to deal with AM. TNEI endorse this stance and consider that little or no weight should be given to anecdotal assessments of the likelihood or otherwise of AM being exhibited. Recent appeal decisions, including those determined by the Secretary of State, also demonstrate this approach.
- 10.16 On the basis of the assessments carried out on behalf of the applicant, the TNEI review of these assessments and the information supplied by the Environmental Health Officer, it is considered that the refusal of the application on the ground of unacceptable noise impacts would not be justified as it would not be possible to substantiate, with evidence, a reason for refusal.

### Shadow Flicker

- 10.17 The PPG discusses the phenomenon of shadow flicker, stating that *“under certain combinations of geographical position and time of day, the sun may pass behind the rotors of a wind turbine and cast a shadow over neighbouring properties. When the blades rotate, the shadow flicks on and off; the impact is known as ‘shadow flicker’”*.
- 10.18 The PPG goes on to state that only properties within 130 degrees either side of north of each turbine will be affected at UK latitudes, and NPS EN-3 states that an assessment is needed for those properties falling within a distance equal to 10 rotor diameters of the turbines. For this proposal, this equates to a maximum distance of 540 metres.

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- 10.19 Section 9 of the ES (July 2015) presents an assessment of the possible effects caused by turbine shadow flicker on nearby dwellings and refers to a Shadow Flicker Assessment together with Addendum attached to the ES (July 2015) as Appendix I. The full assessment, carried out in September 2013, was not based upon the current location of the wind turbines. The data can however be used to inform the assessment of the effects of shadow flicker from the current proposal and the Addendum deals with this.
- 10.20 The original assessment identified 8 locations which may have experienced some shadow flicker, five of which are residential dwellings (one being the applicant's residence). This was based on an area within 810 metres of a turbine that can potentially receive shadows from a turbine and a 540 metre assessment zone. Snoots Bridge and Redhill Farmhouse were assessed as being within the 540 metre assessment zone. Snoots Bridge's position to the south of the turbine meant that no shadow flicker was predicted for this receptor and there was a potential for Redhill Farmhouse (the applicant's residence) to incur 5.6 hours of shadow flicker a year of mean duration 13 minutes. The Assessment considered that this was well below the level at which mitigation would be required.
- 10.21 Numbers 58 and 60 Cambridge Road (565 metres from the nearest turbine based on the previous turbine positions) and Elford Farm (630 metres from the nearest turbine based on the previous turbine positions) were considered at risk of being exposed to weak shadow flicker of low significance, with intervening vegetation possibly reducing the effect.
- 10.22 The Addendum to the Shadow Flicker Assessment was prepared following the applicant's instructions to the consultant that turbine 1 would be moved 134 metres to the southwest and turbine 2 132 metres to the north (the current position of both turbines). It was therefore concluded that there are no potential receptors within the 540 metre assessment zone and two receptor dwellings, beyond the assessment zone and within 540 to 810 metres of the proposed turbines, may be exposed to weak shadow flicker of low significance and that intervening vegetation may reduce the effect.
- 10.23 It should be noted that Snoots Bridge and numbers 58 and 60 Cambridge Road remain on the edge of the 540 metre assessment zone with Elford Farm just beyond. It is however accepted that there are no other residential receptors within the assessment zone. It is also noted that the Shadow Flicker Assessment and Addendum state that if required, mitigation measures can be put into place and secured by condition.
- 10.24 PPG advises that modern wind turbines can be controlled so as to avoid shadow flicker when it has the potential to occur. Individual turbines can be controlled to avoid shadow flicker and where the possibility of shadow flicker exists, mitigation can be secured through the use of conditions. The Environmental Health Officer has reviewed the information contained within the ES (July 2015) in relation to shadow flicker and agrees that further investigations into the occurrence of shadow flicker can be undertaken should this issue be raised by any residents if planning permission were to be granted and the turbines became operational.

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### Living conditions

- 10.25 There is no protection as such for private views from residential properties in planning. However, it has been recognised that there are cases *“when turbines are present in such number, size and proximity that they represent an unpleasantly overwhelming and unavoidable presence in main views from a house or garden”* and that the result would be that *“the property concerned would become to be regarded as an unattractive and thus unsatisfactory (but not necessarily uninhabitable) place in which to live”*.
- 10.26 The above comments, made by Inspector David Lavender, have formed the basis of a useful rule of thumb, which has come to be known as the ‘Lavender Test’. This ‘test’ has been applied in a number of cases and has been endorsed by the Secretary of State in recovered appeals. There is no formal guidance as to how this test should be applied and the impact of any particular wind farm development assessed. However, appeal decisions have identified considerations including: proximity of turbines; the level of screening; the orientation; and, the spread of turbines.
- 10.27 The ES (July 2015) does not specifically address the impact of the turbines on living conditions at the closest residential properties, however, there are some references to a number of dwellings within the LVIA.
- 10.28 Numbers 58 and 60 Cambridge Road are the closest residential dwellings and are located on the northern end of the lay-by from which access to the site is obtained. The proposed turbines would be located approximately 530-730m north-east of these dwellings. The dwellings themselves are well enclosed by vegetation, limiting views of the turbines at ground floor level. There is one window at first floor level in the side elevation of No. 60, which faces south-west. The turbines will be visible in oblique views from this window, however, its orientation is such that the turbines would not dominate the view from this window and they would not have an overwhelming or oppressive effect on occupiers of the dwelling.
- 10.29 Snoots Bridge is located approximately 550m south east of the closest turbine. This property is enclosed by dense vegetation and having viewed the area from the rear it is likely that the presence of this dense vegetation will adequately screen occupants from direct views of the turbines. Elford Farm is located to the east of Snoots Bridge, on the opposite side of the A10. The dwelling itself sits slightly below the level of the road with a number of windows facing directly west at ground and first floor level. Direct views of the turbines are again likely to be obscured by intervening vegetation, however, the blade tips may be visible in the skyline above in oblique views. They would not however be at such close proximity to appear overwhelming or oppressive.
- 10.30 A number of letters of objection have been received from residents at the Lazy Otter Meadows complex. The complex is made up of a number of residential ‘park home’ style lodges alongside lodges available to rent as short term holiday accommodation. The northern tip of the site is approximately 880m south-east of the closest turbine, with the site itself on lower lying land alongside the River Great Ouse. The complex is well screened from the A10 by virtue of the fact that it is on lower lying ground and the vegetation on the northern boundary. The complex will

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therefore be partially screened from the turbines with only the blades visible in the distance from certain areas of the complex, most likely as residents and visitors move around the immediate area. Again, it is considered that at this distance and taking into account the intervening features, that the turbines would not appear overwhelming or oppressive and that the complex would become an unattractive and unsatisfactory place to live.

- 10.31 The most direct views of the turbines will be from Red Hill Farm and Mitchells Farm. Red Hill Farm is situated to north of the site of the turbines and is occupied by the applicant. Given the applicants interest in the application process and the financial rewards likely to be received should the development go ahead, it is accepted that less weight should be given to the impact of the proposal on the applicant's dwelling.
- 10.32 Mitchells Farm is located approximately 820m to the north-west of the closet turbine with the second turbine approximately 200 to the south-east. The rear elevation of Mitchells Farm faces directly south, with open views over the application site and across the A10 beyond that. The turbines will become the dominant features in what is an open landscape, devoid of man-made features until the eye reaches the A10. The distracting quality of the moving blades is also likely to affect the occupiers of Mitchells Farm, however, as the turbines will be located approximately 820-1120m from the dwelling it is considered that they would not have an overwhelming and oppressive effect such that it would make the dwelling an unattractive and unsatisfactory place to live in line with the 'Lavender Test'.
- 10.33 Two cottages, described in the LVIA as Red Hill Cottages are located approximately 1200m to the north east of the closest turbines. These dwellings are partially screened by vegetation and at this distance, oblique views of the turbine blades are unlikely to have an overwhelming or oppressive effect.
- 10.34 Approximately 100m to the north of Red Hill Cottages is Cosy Kennels and Cattery. The dwelling associated with the business is well screened by a long section of tall conifer trees on the south-western boundary. The site extends back from the dwelling with several sections of tall trees screening the kennels and cattery. However, there are also areas of open space used for the exercising of dogs, which are not screened and which will allow clear views of the turbines. The owners of the business have expressed concerns over the potential impact of the moving blades and noise generated on the animals boarding with them, and also that new customers may be deterred from using the facility due to the fear that the turbines may have an adverse impact on their pets. No substantive evidence has been presented to suggest that the wind turbines are likely to have an adverse impact on the health and wellbeing of the animals and it is the perception of the turbines on customers, new and old, that appears to be the primary issue. It is accepted that the owners of the business rely on a continual stream of new customers and their concerns are understood. It is therefore considered that this issue should weigh against the proposal, however, such weight should be limited in the absence of any substantive evidence that the business is likely to suffer.

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### Health

- 10.35 Many of the letters of representation received cite potential adverse impacts on the health and wellbeing of local residents from the proposed turbines. Various references have been made to both published data and reports and anecdotal evidence as to the adverse effects experienced by residents elsewhere in the country from wind turbine development. This issue has been raised in a number of appeal and Secretary of State 'called-in' decisions where it has been stated that there is no substantiated evidence that harm would arise to health of people living in the locality and that little or no weight should be given to this in the planning balance.
- 11.0 RECREATIONAL AMENITY AND TOURISM
- 11.1 The impacts of the proposed development on tourism are discussed in Section 15 of the ES. The ES contains reference to the Public Right of Way (PRoW) that runs north to south through Red Hill Farm and the fact that the access to the site shares a stretch of this PRoW. Some works to upgrade this stretch of the PRoW will be required in order to accommodate the construction, maintenance and decommissioning of the turbines.
- 11.2 The Definitive Map Officer at Cambridgeshire County Council has been consulted on the application and is satisfied that the turbines will be located at a greater distance than their fall over height from the PRoW. The ES (July 2015) states that the footpath will remain open during construction and a separately fenced off route close to the footpath can be created during the construction phase to allow the public to pass by safely. On this basis the Definitive Map Officer has no objection to the proposal. He has however highlighted the fact that the applicant will need to obtain the consent of the PRoW team prior to any works to the surface of the PRoW being carried out and that the granting of planning permission does not entitle a developer to obstruct a PRoW.
- 11.3 The ES (July 2015) also points out that there are further public footpaths approximately 1km to the south of the site, close to Sock Drain. There are also two boat marinas within 2km of the site and Stretham Old Engine and Denny Abbey are the closest and most notable tourist attractions to the application site. It is considered that the construction and operational phases of the proposal would not directly affect the ability of local residents and visitors to use these facilities and the impacts of the proposal on the landscape have been discussed earlier in this report. The ES (July 2015) goes so far as citing a report carried out to assess the economic impact of wind farms on Scottish tourism, which indicated that some tourists are positively attracted to wind turbines.
- 11.4 The issue of recreational amenity and tourism has been cited in a number of planning appeal and 'called-in decisions' with the predominant views of Inspectors being that the ability of residents and visitors to use PRoW and tourist attractions is not directly affected by the presence of turbines. The matter is largely one of personal choice, which is unlikely to carry significant weight in the planning balance.

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### 12.0 AVIATION

- 12.1 PPG for renewable and low carbon development contains a provision that states *“wind turbines may have an adverse effect on air traffic movement and safety. Firstly they may represent a risk of collision with low flying aircraft, and secondly, they may interfere with the proper operation of radar by limiting the capacity to handle air traffic, and aircraft instrument landing systems”*. However, it also acknowledges that risks can often be mitigated through appropriate siting and consultation with affected bodies. Local planning authorities are also advised to consult with the Ministry of Defence (MOD) if a proposed turbine is 11 metres to blade tip or taller, and/or has a rotor diameter of 2 metres or more.
- 12.2 The Renewable Energy Development SPD reflects the guidance contained within the PPG and states that Cambridge City Airport should be consulted in respect of wind farms proposed within a 30km radius of the airport.
- 12.3 The ES (July 2015) does not address the issue of aviation in detail. Section 19 of the ES details the various parties that were consulted by the applicant on the proposal and contains reference to responses from the Ministry of Defence, National Air Traffic Services (NATS), Cambridge Airport and Mitchells Aerodrome.

#### MOD and Cambridge Airport

- 12.4 The ES (July 2015) states that the MOD initially objected to the proposal, on behalf of Cambridge Airport, and that the Airport has now reached agreement with the applicant over radar, which would mean the MOD objection was unnecessary. The MOD has been reconsulted on the July 2015 version of the ES and an updated response to that received in October 2014 has been received. The MOD confirms that its objection was based on the fact that the proposed turbines would be in radar line of sight to the Air Traffic Control (ATC) radar at Cambridge Airport and that if the applicant was able to overcome the radar issue that all turbines should be fitted with appropriate aviation lighting.
- 12.5 The MOD now confirms that it is aware that the applicant has been in discussions with Cambridge Airport to address issues of interference with its Primary Surveillance Radar. Potential mitigation solutions have been discussed to the point where Cambridge Airport accepts that appropriately worded conditions provide a satisfactory basis for resolving the objection. The proposed wording of these conditions was attached to the MOD’s latest response and is attached to this report as Appendix 5. The conditions also contain a reference to aviation lighting. A consultation response has been received directly from Cambridge Airport setting out the same conditions attached to the MOD response. The use of such conditions has been endorsed by a number of Planning Inspectors and the Secretary of State in the consideration of wind farm appeals.
- 12.6 It should be noted however, that the installation of lighting on the turbines for aviation purposes would need to be assessed in terms of its environmental impacts. Therefore, should the local planning authority be minded to approve the application, any condition relating to lighting should stipulate that infrared lighting will be used.



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### National Air Traffic Services (NATS)

- 12.7 The ES (July 2015) states that the applicant has undertaken the NATS online desktop survey, presented at Appendix L of the ES (July 2015) (referred to as Appendix K in the ES (July 2015)), and concludes that there appears to be no affect from the turbines on their systems. The consultation response received from NATS states that the proposed development has been examined from a technical safeguarding aspect and it does not conflict with its safeguarding criteria. Accordingly, NATS has no safeguarding objection to the proposal.

### Civil Aviation Authority

- 12.8 The CAA responded to the first version of the ES by stating that there is currently a high demand for CAA comment on wind turbine applications which exceeds the capacity of the available resource to respond to requests within the timescales required by Local Planning Authorities. Reference is also made to the need for planning authorities to consult NATS and the MOD and general advice on the consideration of applications is given. The CAA has submitted a further response to the revised ES (July 2015), stating that it has no further comments at this time.

### Mitchells Farm Airfield

- 12.9 In earlier versions of the ES the applicant states that the owner of Mitchells farm Airfield has been consulted. This was disputed by the owner, however, there has been some limited dialogue between the applicant and his agents and the owner of the airfield since that time. The ES (July 2015) now states that the applicant is proposing planning conditions, presented at Appendix L of the ES (July 2015), to ensure safe use of the aerodrome. These conditions are stated as currently being finalised with the Council and the owner of the aerodrome. A copy of the conditions are attached to this report at Appendix 6.
- 12.10 The Non-Technical Summary to the ES (July 2015) states *“The owner of the aerodrome [Mitchells Farm Airfield] has agreed a set of planning conditions with the applicant to ensure no harm to pilots using the aerodrome”*. There is therefore an inconsistency between the ES and its Non-Technical Summary.
- 12.11 Mitchells Farm Airfield is located approximately 725m to the north-west of the closest turbine. The airfield is in private ownership and comprises a grassed take off and landing strip, which is available for use 365 days a year. The owner has confirmed to the Council that the airstrip has been in occasional private use since 1985 for single engine and microlight aircraft. In addition to the owner’s use, there are a number of visiting aircraft and safety helicopter flights each year including a safety flight by search and rescue.
- 12.12 CAP 764 – CAA Policy and Guidelines on Wind Turbines states that *“it should be anticipated that any wind turbine development might have an impact upon civil aerodrome related operations within 3km of a non-radar equipped unlicensed aerodrome with a runway of less than 800m”*.
- 12.13 Mitchells Farm Airfield and the proposed wind turbines both fall into this category, which takes into account not just the specific line of takeoff trajectory and approach

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for landing, but also all obstructions within a 3km radius. This is due to the fact that aircraft are more likely to be concentrated at low level in the vicinity of an airfield, than when flying en-route between destinations.

- 12.14 The CAA guidance states that it considers that if the *“Aerodrome Manager (or equivalent) advises that the aerodrome’s established amenity would be affected by a development, their advice can generally be considered as expert testimony”*. The owner of Mitchells farm Airfield and another principle pilot have submitted a representation to the Council stating that air turbulence is likely to be a danger to light aircraft when taking off and landing in certain wind conditions. They also state that it cannot be known in advance when these conditions will occur and the only safe option would be to have automatic feathering of the turbines in these wind conditions during daylight hours. This is on the basis that the airfield may be used for diversion of aircraft having an inflight problem and air ambulance and police helicopters.
- 12.15 In addition, at present circuits are flown to the east of the airfield to avoid flying over the nearby village of Wilburton. An alternative landing pattern, which minimises flight noise and descending above inhabited areas would therefore be required if the turbines were to be erected.
- 12.16 The expert testimony received from the owner and operators of the airfield is corroborated by representations received from the General Aviation Awareness Council (GAAC) and the British Microlight Aircraft Association with air turbulence and flight safety as well as local nuisance being the primary issues.
- 12.17 As stated above, the applicant has presented a set of planning conditions within the ES (July 2015) designed to address the issue of air turbulence. These centre around the closest turbine being shut down when wind conditions dictate. The conditions are however reliant upon the owner and operators of the airfield giving advance notice that flying is likely to take place. The owner and operators have stated that they do not consider the proposed conditions to be workable. A further response received from the GAAC points out that the requirement to give 28 days notice to stop the turbine is inappropriate as accurate weather forecasts are rarely available more than five days in advance. In addition, the applicant has suggested a condition that states that should all flying operations cease for more than three months all of the conditions shall cease to apply. The GAAC also point out that there may easily be period of 12 weeks in the winter when due to ground conditions and weather, flying operations are not possible, yet the airfield should still be regarded as active.
- 12.18 It is unknown whether the required change to landing patterns would lead to an unacceptable level of noise and disturbance, and subsequently an unacceptable loss of amenity to local residents.
- 12.19 No evidence has been presented to the Council to indicate that the statement made in the Non-Technical Summary in relation to the airfield is correct. Based on CAA guidance that aerodrome operators are the ‘experts’ in relation to matters concerning their operations. It is considered that the application fails to demonstrate that it can be made acceptable in relation to Mitchells Farm Airfield, as required by policy ENV6 of the Local Plan. Due to the seriousness of any possible

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adverse effect on light aircraft and public safety, this conflict with the Development Plan should be given significant weight in the planning balance.

### 13.0 ECOLOGY AND ORNITHOLOGY

13.1 Policy ENV6 of the Local Plan requires adverse effects that cannot be remediated and made acceptable in relation to protected species to be weighed against the wider environmental, social and economic benefits of the development. Policy ENV7, which specifically deals with biodiversity and geology, requires development proposals to protect biodiversity and the geological value of land and buildings, provide appropriate mitigation or compensatory measures and maximise opportunities for the creation, restoration, enhancement and connection of natural habitats. A core principle of the NPPF is to conserve and enhance the natural environment and proposals which result in 'significant harm' should be refused where that harm cannot be mitigated or compensated for. NPS EN-1 also requires 'significant harm' to be avoided, but stresses the impacts that climate change itself will have on biodiversity, thus highlighting the need to weigh up any adverse effects against the wider benefits of renewable energy development.

13.2 Section 11 of the ES (July 2015) deals with ecology. Following the NPA review of the ES, a Phase I Habitat survey of the application site and a 25 metre buffer area of land around the application boundary was carried out by Applied Ecology Ltd and is presented in a letter format as part of Appendix D. The application site and buffer zone is described as being dominated by intensive arable land and an existing farm track of negligible biodiversity and nature conservation value.

13.3 An Ecology Appraisal of potential wind turbine locations was carried out in June 2013, with four locations appraised to help inform the siting of the turbines. An Addendum to this report was prepared in September 2013 following a request from Natural England that proposals on statutory nature conservation sites should be assessed. The Addendum also provides details of a review of Cambridge & Peterborough Environmental Records Centre bird data. Both of these reports were prepared prior to the decision taken by the applicant to site the turbines in the locations now under consideration. A further Addendum dated March 2014 was prepared in respect of the final positioning of the turbines.

13.4 The Cam Washes Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) is located approximately 4km to the east of the site and the Ouse Washes Ramsar SSSI, Special Protection Area (SPA) and Special Area of Conservation (SAC) is located approximately 9km to the west of the site. The River Great Ouse County Wildlife Site (CWS) lies to the south of the site, approximately 900 metres away at its closest point alongside the Lazy Otter Marina.

#### Non-avian ecology

13.5 The Phase I Habitat Surveys describes the application site and 25m buffer zone. Various habitats such as dense scrub and semi-improved neutral grassland were identified in the buffer zone. A dry ditch borders the access track where it runs through the arable field and where the access is shared with the public footpath it runs alongside a wet ditch for a length of approximately 175m. Where the access joins the lay-by on the A10 is bordered by a broad hedgerow of dense scrub,

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hawthorn and bramble with a grass border south of the gate. The Survey concludes that the site and buffer zone is of negligible biodiversity and nature conservation value.

- 13.6 The Phase I Habitat Survey was identified as being required by the NPA review in order for the ES to robustly demonstrate the baseline habitats within the development boundary. Section 11 of the ES (July 2015) repeats the content of the Survey, however, no attempt has been made to assess the likely impacts of the proposal on the various habitats identified. There is no correlation between the works required to upgrade the access track and the construction of the turbines and associated crane/turning pads and substations with the habitats affected, whatever value has been placed on them by Applied Ecology Ltd.
- 13.7 Natural England has commented on the ES submitted at the outset of the application and on the revised July 2015 version. Its comments are made on its assessment of the effects of the proposal on statutory nature conservation sites. It advises that the proposal is unlikely to affect any statutorily protected sites or landscapes and on this basis it has no objection to the application.
- 13.8 Notwithstanding Natural England's response, it is considered that the ES (July 2015) fails to fully assess the effects of the proposal on the habitats forming part of and immediately adjacent to the site. The applicant is therefore unable to demonstrate that the proposal will protect the biodiversity and geological value of the land, however low, and that the development would not lead to the unacceptable loss of environmental features such as trees, hedgerows, woodland and wetland. The applicant has also failed to fully consider whether there are any opportunities for the creation, restoration, enhancement and connection of natural habitats. The proposal is therefore contrary to Local Plan policy ENV7 in this regard.
- 13.9 The Phase I Habitat survey also states that no evidence of protected animal species was seen within the development site boundary. It is noted within the survey that the construction access will cross the wet ditch identified via an existing bridge structure that would be replaced with a stronger structure in the same location. The survey also states that impacts on aquatic species that may inhabit the ditch, e.g. watervole are not anticipated.
- 13.10 Section 11.12 of the ES (July 2015) again repeats the content of the Phase I Habitat Survey in relation to animal species. Natural England's Standing Advice in relation to watervoles (a protected species) states that survey work should be carried out on suitable habitats – e.g. where there is diggable earth or silt-shored banks for burrowing, wide swathes of soft vegetation growing from the banks and slow-flowing and relatively deep water courses. Similarly, sites should be surveyed for the presence of otters (also protected) where a development will affect a water body or habitats near a water body directly or through environmental impacts.
- 13.11 No evidence has been submitted to justify the lack of species' surveys and no details of the improved access over the wet ditch have been supplied. On this basis the Council is unable to fully assess the impact of the proposal on these protected species and the proposal is therefore contrary to Local Plan policies ENV6 and ENV7 in this regard.

Ornithology

- 13.12 Section 12 of the ES (July 2015) provides details of a review of the Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Environmental Records Centre bird data for a 2km radius of land centred on the arable field in which the two turbines will be located. This repeats the information set out in the Ecology Addendums of September 2013 and March 2014. The ES (July 2015) states that this information was collected on the advice of Natural England, which went onto to say that, depending on what was revealed by this data, completion of some winter bird survey work to fully inform the assessment may be needed.
- 13.13 Six wetland bird species are mentioned in the reasons for notification of the Cam Washes SSSI. None of these were in the data supplied for the search area around the turbines, indicating that the area is not well used by the Cam Washes qualifying species. Thirteen bird species are mentioned as qualifying features of the Ouse Washes SPA designation, three of which (hen harrier, ruff and black-tailed godwit) have been recorded in the search area, albeit in low numbers and on an infrequent basis. A significant number of wading birds (golden plover and lapwing) have been recorded in the search area, suggesting that the application site and its surroundings may support large winter numbers of these species. The risk of bird collisions with the turbines was considered significant enough to warrant further winter survey work.
- 13.14 The Ecology Addendum dated March 2014 was therefore produced to include the results of a winter bird assessment completed over the period 19 November 2013 to February 2014. The site was surveyed from a vantage point, east of the site of the turbines, on four occasions, at different times of the day. No target bird species were seen overflying the site or within 500 metres of either turbine. On occasions different bird species were identified and an overall conclusion was reached that the air space and land within and close to the proposed wind turbines is not currently used by SPA species or other bird species with high levels of legal protection. On this basis the ES (July 2015) concludes that no mitigation is required.
- 13.15 The SSWFAG have raised concerns over the quantity and quality of the bird survey work within the ES (July 2015). Information SSWFAG has obtained from the British Trust for Ornithology appears to contradict the information within the ES (July 2015) obtained from the Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Environmental Records Centre and the Group has concerns that the level of survey work does not meet recommended guidelines.
- 13.16 In response to the comments made in the NPA review of the ES (Jan 2015), that the bird survey work and winter bird assessment was not conducted in accordance with Natural England's guidance note 069, the ES (July 2015) has been updated. The ES (July 2015) now makes reference to the Scottish National Heritage best practice guidance for the assessment of onshore wind farms (SNH 2014) and states that the work was carried out in accordance with this guidance, a fact which is disputed by the SSWAFG. The ES (July 2015) reaches the conclusion that this is a small-scale wind energy project, sufficient distance from any designated or protected site so as not to warrant any further survey work.

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- 13.17 An initial consultation response received on behalf of the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust (WWT) made reference to a consultation response made in respect of the application for three wind turbines at Berry Fen, approximately 6.5km from the Red Hill Farm application site. The Berry Fen consultation response highlighted the importance of assessing and mitigating for potential cumulative effects of wind farm development on the Bewick Swans feeding habitat. A subsequent response received on behalf of the WWT stated that *“the planning application at Red Hill Farm is not high enough concern for wintering swans”* and that there is *“no objection to this particular application on this basis”*.
- 13.18 The RSPB has also been consulted on the application on a number of occasions over the past year. Unfortunately a response has only recently been received in which it was stated that the RSPB has not had the opportunity to review the information, will not be able to do so and therefore is unable to offer any comment on the application.
- 13.19 Sections 12 and 13 of the ES (July 2015) set out in full the reports prepared by Applied Ecology Ltd with no consideration of collision risk or cumulative assessment. The level of survey work is below that recommended by Natural England and the SNH guidance refers to the survey of farmland birds on an intensive arable habitat as not generally being required, not that the survey of arable land is not generally required. On this basis the Council has insufficient information on which to assess the effects of the proposal on ornithology and consider any potential mitigation measures. The proposal therefore fails to comply with Policy ENV7 of the Local Plan in this regard.

### Bats

- 13.20 Section 11.13 relates to bats and sets out the survey work carried out and reported in the Applied Ecology Ltd reports. The information contained within the body of the ES (July 2015) is confusing and somewhat misleading as it relates to an assessment carried out in relation to four different turbine locations. Locations T3 and T4 are within the same arable field as the turbines that are the subject of this application, but not on the exact site of the proposed turbines.
- 13.21 The locations referred to in the survey as T1 and T2, to the north of buildings and farm complex at Red Hill Farm, recorded moderate levels of bat activity, which was put down to the fact that the buildings, along with a fishing lake and duck flight pond near to the cattle sheds, were attracting bats. The survey states that low levels of bat activity were recorded and that the large and relatively exposed arable field constitutes a habitat of low value to bats. Although it is also stated that there is a risk that *Nyctalus* bats could be adversely impacted. The report summary goes on to acknowledge that the proposed turbines have been relocated within the same arable field and that the changes to the two locations make no significant difference to bat turbine strike risk and they are now further from the nearest bat friendly habitat feature.
- 13.22 The ES (July 2015) considers that the risk to the bat population is considered to be minor and that, in mitigation, particular attention has been paid to ensuring that the turbines are positioned an appropriate distance from potential foraging habitats and roost sites. It also states that it is recommended that the turbines remain isolated

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and that no additional hedge or tree planting should be implemented that would connect the site with existing hedgerows on other parts of the farm.

- 13.23 Natural England Technical Information Note 051 (TIN051) states that risk to bats can be minimised by locating turbines so their blade tips are at least 50 metres from the highest part of hedges, tree lines or woodland in the vicinity as bat activity beyond this declines significantly. It is considered that the applicant has taken this into account in the siting of the turbines. Although the SSWFAG state that the blade tips are within 30 metres of boundary ditches, it is considered that on balance the affect of the proposal on bats has been adequately addressed.
- 13.24 However, as stated above, the proposal comes into conflict with polices ENV6 and ENV7 where the applicant has failed to fully assess the effects of the development on non-avian ecology and ornithology. The proposal is therefore also contrary to the NPPF where it seeks to protect and conserve the natural environment. A number of areas of weakness have been identified in the ES (July 2015) in relation to the survey work undertaken and concerns are raised by the Council in relation to the potential impact on otters and watervoles, both of which are protected species. The lack of detail in these areas must therefore carry moderate weight against the proposal given that the consideration of the impact of a proposal of this nature on ecology and protected species must take place prior to permission being granted.
- 14.0 TRAFFIC AND TRANSPORTATION
- 14.1 Policy COM7 of the Local Plan states that all development proposals should ensure that safe and convenient access to the highway network can be achieved and that the level/type of traffic likely to be generated can be accommodated without detriment to the local highway network and the amenity, character and appearance of the locality. The Renewable Energy SPD acknowledges that wind turbine development can have a significant impact on the local network of roads and stresses the need to demonstrate that an appropriate site access can be achieved.
- 14.2 NPS EN-3 recognises that public perception of the construction phase of onshore wind turbine development will derive mainly from the effects of traffic movements. Abnormal loads need to be safely transported, with minimum disruption to other road users. Developers should also demonstrate that any environmental effects can be acceptably mitigated against.
- 14.3 Section 16 of the ES (July 2015) deals with the impact of the turbine development on traffic, transport and highways. This section contains some discussion centred around public footpaths, which has been dealt with separately in this report.
- 14.4 An Access Study, prepared by the turbine supplier, has been submitted and is attached to the ES (July 2015) at Appendix C. In addition, two technical specification documents entitled 'Transport, storage and crane guidelines' and 'UK Access Guidelines, addendum to Transport, storage and crane guidelines' are attached at Appendix C. Drawing No. MP01 also forms part of Appendix C, detailing the site layout and access arrangements.
- 14.5 The site is to be accessed via an existing farm track, which is access via a lay-by on the A10. Drawing No. MP 01 states that the following works will be required:

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- Lay-by site access – Hedge cut back to widen access to 4 metres with ‘type 1’ surface. New gate installed.
  - Temporary construction area (approx. 20x25m) to east of track. Sufficient space to allow an HGV to turn. Will be returned to meadow after construction.
  - Approximately 1920m of existing 3m wide track widened to 4m and improved with ‘type 1’ stone.
  - New angled bridge/culvert construction
  - Approximately 140m of existing 2m wide farm track widened to 4m with ‘type 1’ surface.
  - 550m of new 4m ‘type 1’ farm access track at side of field.
- 14.6 Drawing No. MP 01 also provides a detailed site layout tracking a vehicle approximately 27m in length leaving the A10, entering the lay-by and then entering the site access.
- 14.7 The indicative road construction detail shown on Drawing No. MP01 states:  
*“Roads and compound areas would be box cut – with topsoil spread on adjacent arable land. A geogrid membrane would be layed (eg Tensar triax geogrid TX160 or similar, followed by 300-450mm of compacted Type 1 road stone (subject to final checks by civil engineer”.*
- 14.8 Section 16 of the ES (July 2015) states that the applicant consulted with Cambridgeshire County Council Highways and that the authority has no objection to the proposal. During the course of the application the Development Management Engineer entered into dialogue with the applicant’s agent regarding the access arrangements. In response to his request that the track be widened to 6 metres for the first 30m to allow two vehicles to pass, the applicant’s agent has stated that an agreement will be put in place with the turbine supplier stating that only one delivery vehicle will be allowed onto the site at any time. This proposal is presented at Section 16.20 of the ES (July 2015) as mitigation.
- 14.9 No further response has been received from the Local Highways Authority other than the consultation response dated October 2014 in which objections were raised due to insufficient detail being supplied in respect of the access. The Council has however been copied into subsequent emails between the Highways Development Management Engineer and the applicant’s agent in which it is stated that the proposed access arrangements are now acceptable to the Highways Authority.
- 14.10 The Access Study contains a map headed ‘EWT investigated routes’ on which a route along the M11, A14 trunk Road and A10 is shown. There is no commentary to this figure and it is assumed that this is the route identified for construction traffic. No alternatives have been considered.
- 14.11 The NPA review of the ES (Jan 2015) acknowledges that Cambridgeshire County Council have not objected to the scheme, however it considered that the ES (Jan 2015) did not adequately address the transport impacts of the scheme. In response, the ES was updated to include the EWT Investigated routes map, a statement that information supplied by EWT has been used to help determine the



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delivery vehicles, number of loads and proposed route. Diagrams of the turbine delivery vehicles have also been included.

- 14.12 The ES (July 2015) now concludes that *“in terms of impacts on road users, the roads considered for this report – A10 and M11 – are both high capacity road links designed to support the movement of large numbers of vehicles therefore it is considered that the proposed traffic increases will be largely indiscernible from the daily fluctuation of traffic flow.”*
- 14.13 In terms of significance, the ES (July 2015) states *“it is considered that the temporary period of construction/decommissioning would have a temporary minor affect, whilst the operation period would have negligible effect”*.
- 14.14 It is the view of the Council that the traffic and transport implications of the scheme have not been fully investigated by the applicant and that the ES (July 2015) remains inadequate. A detailed analysis of the local roads has not been presented and no attempt to assess the significance of effects on receptors has been made in relation to noise and vibration, driver severance and delay, vulnerable road users and road safety, hazardous and dangerous loads and dust and dirt. No information has been presented to inform the conclusion that the construction/decommissioning phase would have a temporary minor effect.
- 14.15 At present no agreement has been reached between the applicant and the Internal Drainage Board (IDB) regarding the works required to the existing crossing over the New Cut Drain that will be required. In a letter dated 24 June 2015 sent to the applicant by the IDB it is stated that the improvements proposed by the applicant directly to the UDB were not acceptable. In a letter dated 24 August 2015 sent by the IDB to the Council, it is made clear that a detailed site plan, confirming the exact position of the access road in relation to the drain and a revised drawing of the culvert were required from the applicant. The IDB's concerns were also summarised and in general relate to a lack of information in respect of the access and culvert/bridge. It is also stated until the IDB receive and approve the details requested that consent to the works will not be given, regardless of the outcome of the planning application.
- 14.16 The NPA Review states that the ES should, in order to help assess the impacts of the development, contain schematics of the final track construction, turbine foundation and the crossing of the New Cut Drain. The volume of spoil to be dealt with from the construction phase should also be identified. The ES (July 2015) does not address these concerns and makes no attempt to assess the impact of the works required to the access from the lay-by, the works to the existing track and creation of the new length of track alongside the turbines on the amenity, character and appearance of the locality.
- 14.17 Whilst it is noted that the Definitive Map Officer has raised no objection to the proposal on the basis that the PRoW will remain open at all times during both the construction and operational phases, it is unclear how this will be achieved whilst works to upgrade the access track where it is shared with the PRoW are carried out, with mention only being made in the ES (July 2015) that a separately fenced off route will be provided.

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- 14.18 It is the view of the Council that the applicant has failed to adequately address the traffic and transportation impacts of the development. The applicant has failed to demonstrate that safe and convenient access to the local highway network can be achieved and the effects of the proposal on road users. The applicant has also failed to demonstrate that the site is capable of accommodating the level and type of traffic generated without detriment to the local highway network and the amenity, character or appearance of the locality and that existing rights of way will be protected. The proposal is therefore contrary to policy COM7 of the Local Plan and the NPPF and as such, this matter should weigh significantly against the proposal.
- 15.0 FLOOD RISK, HYDROLOGY AND POLLUTION
- 15.1 Policy ENV8 of the Local Plan requires that development should contribute towards an overall flood risk reduction and that new development should normally be located in Flood Zone 1. Development which intensifies the risk of flooding, increases the risk of flooding elsewhere, would have a detrimental impact on flood defences, where the risk of flooding would cause an unacceptable risk to safety or cannot achieve a safe access during times of flooding will not be permitted.
- 15.2 The application site is located within Flood Zone 1. Section 14 of the ES (July 2015) deals with the impacts of the turbines on hydrology, hydrogeology and geology. It also considers the impact on the water environment in addition to drainage and flood risk.
- 15.3 With reference to existing conditions, the ES (July 2015) states *“As all the fields are drained and a modern ditch system surrounds them, flooding is not an issue and the field in question is not in a flood plan”*. Details of an investigation by EPS Ltd into soil conditions on site is presented in Section 14 of the ES (July 2015) with the full report attached as Appendix K. Four boreholes were dug with the soil tested and groundwater measured. The soil examined is described as being of a generally high chemical quality, which would be suitable for use within a residential garden.
- 15.4 An assessment of the risk to surface and ground water is presented as a ‘miniscule’ and ‘no greater than that posed by the everyday workings of the farm’. Flood risk is stated as being restricted to a small increase in surface run-off associated with the turbines and related infrastructure. This is stated not to be significant or to increase the potential flood risk. Mitigation measures are described as being the use of best practice during construction/decommission, regular leak testing and, upon decommission, all below cables to be removed. Reliance is placed on the landowner’s ‘experience’ in the construction industry and only attempting construction work when conditions are suitable.
- 15.5 The NPA Review of the ES (Jan 2015) highlighted the fact that no formal impact assessment regarding soils was evident and that clarification regarding the impact of increased sediment discharge into local water courses be sought. It was highlighted that the applicant intends to spread spoil on adjacent fields, however no volume of spoil was evident and no assessment as to whether there are environmental implications for the spreading of spoil, or that appropriate mitigation measures are put in place to prevent significant impacts. Despite the site being located in Flood Zone 1, the NPA Review considered that detailed baseline

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information and a formal impact assessment outlining sensitivity of receptors, magnitude of change and overall significance of effects should be requested.

- 15.6 A revised Hydrology, Hydrogeology and Geology section of the ES has been submitted, however the additional information is limited to details of soil testing and a judgement that the soil is similar to that found in residential gardens. There is also no justification for the statement that there is a 'miniscule risk' of pollution to surface and ground water during construction/decommissioning. Neither is there evidence to support the statement that there may be a small increase in surface run-off and, if so, how this will be addressed. It is noted however that the Environment Agency has not objected to the proposal on the basis that it is located within Flood Zone 1.
- 15.7 Policy ENV9 of the Local Plan requires all development proposals to minimise, and where possible, reduce all emissions and other forms of pollution, including light and noise pollution, and to ensure no deterioration in air and water quality.
- 15.8 Section 10 of the ES (July 2015) deals with air quality and states that for the purposes of the assessment carried out, significant effects on air quality are categorised as those which would result in a fundamental or material change to air quality. The ES (July 2015) considers that the only two factors to potentially affect air quality during construction would be the movement of vehicles on site creating exhaust emissions and certain construction activities which could, in particular weather conditions, create dust. The ES (July 2015) considers these affects as negligible on the basis that the construction process is short term. The turbines themselves are considered to have a positive affect on air quality as they are an alternative to fossil fuels. Mitigation is limited to the servicing of machine and dampening techniques to prevent dust.
- 15.9 It is considered that the ES (July 2015) has failed to adequately address the affects of the proposal on the natural environment, general amenity and the tranquillity of the wider area in terms of noise and light pollution, particularly during the construction and decommissioning phases. In addition, the potential for pollution to air quality and surface and ground water quality have not been addressed in sufficient detail. The lack of adequate assessment of these affects means that any mitigation measures proposed cannot be fully relied upon, and therefore conditions may not mitigate any potential harm. The proposal is therefore considered to be contrary to Policies ENV8 and ENV9 of the Local Plan.
- 16.0 TELECOMMUNICATIONS
- 16.1 Paragraph 44 of the NPF requires local authorities to consider the possibility new buildings and other structures interfering with broadcast and telecommunications services. PPG also states that wind turbines can potentially affect electromagnetic transmissions (e.g. radio, television and phone signals). The Renewable Energy SPD highlights the need for applicants to demonstrate they have fully considered any interference and suggest suitable mitigation measures.
- 16.2 The ES (July 2015) does not contain a specific section on the affects of the proposal on telecommunications. There is however reference to consultation exercises carried out by the applicant with various bodies.

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- 16.3 OFCOM is stated at Section 19.12 of the ES (July 2015) not to have commented on the application. The BBC were contacted using previous turbine locations and commented that '0 houses would be affected'. Since that time the BBC has announced that its feedback service is currently unavailable and no further feedback can be obtained on the revised turbine positions. Anglian Water has stated that there will be no affect to their networks. 19.20 sets out that guidance on weather radar from EUMETNET states that there is no need for consultation if the development is over 20km away (nearest stations are Chenies near Amersham and Old Buckenham in Norfolk).
- 16.4 A report prepared by Joint Radio Company Ltd, as the radio spectrum manager for the UK gas and electricity industry, (presented Appendix L) investigates the potential impact of proposed wind farm developments on utility radio services. An addendum to the report relates to the final position of the turbines as submitted for this planning application. No substantive commentary to the report is provided within the ES (July 2015), however, it appears that the current siting of the turbine should not result in any objection from National Grid Gas Networks.
- 16.5 The issue of interference with electro-magnetic transmissions has been addressed on a number of occasions by Planning Inspectors in the context of appeals against the refusal of planning permission for wind turbine development. It appears to be generally accepted that where further investigation is required, this may be secured by condition, as can any mitigation measures. There is no evidence before the Council to suggest that this application should be treated any differently.
- 17.0 BENEFITS OF THE DEVELOPMENT
- 17.1 Assessing the benefits of a proposed wind turbine development in planning terms is not always straightforward. PPG states that, for wind turbines, *"the mean wind speed at hub height (along with the statistical distribution of predicted wind speeds about this mean and the wind turbines used) will determine the energy captured at a site. The simplest way of expressing the energy capture at a site is by use of the 'capacity factor'"*.
- 17.2 The NPPF recognises the benefits of all renewable energy development stating at paragraph 97 that *"to help and increase the use and supply of renewable and low carbon energy, local planning authorities should recognise the responsibility on all communities to contribute to energy generation from renewable or low carbon sources"*.
- 17.3 The ES (July 2015) does not contain reference to the likely installed capacity of the proposed turbines, which is of some concern to a number of members of the public that have submitted representations and the SSWFAG. However, paragraph 98 of the NPPF goes on to state that *"when determining planning applications local planning authorities should not require applicants to demonstrate the overall need for renewable or low carbon energy and recognise that even small-scale projects provide a valuable contribution to cutting greenhouse gas emissions"*.
- 17.4 NPS EN-1 also states that *"it may not be possible at the time of the application...for all aspects of the proposal to have been settled in precise detail"*. The ES (July

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2015) sets out at Section 2.30 the fact that the proposed turbine is available as a 500kW or a 900kW and the information attached at Appendix A, supplied by EWT, contains graphical information linking power to and yield to windspeed. Without any detailed information on windspeed it is therefore difficult to calculate the likely capacity, as well as taking into account the variation between the 500kW and 900kW turbines.

- 17.5 It is clear that Government policy and guidance emphasises that all renewable energy projects make a valuable contribution to energy generation and, notwithstanding the difficulties encountered in this case, the benefits of the provision of renewable energy from this scheme must attract significant weight in favour of the proposal.
- 17.6 Section 2.18 of the ES (July 2015) states that the applicant is prepared to set up a community fund, with 5% of net income per annum from the turbines going to this fund. A caveat is attached to this statement in which it is explained that the money will start to be paid once the capital payments are repaid and the turbines are 'in profit'. The applicant has not provided any further information in respect of this 'community fund' and it is not known when payments into the fund may be made as it is dependent on the scheme becoming profitable and once in profit, what a contribution of 5% of the net income is likely to equate to. In any event the offer of a community fund is not a material planning consideration and does not attract any weight in the planning balance.
- 17.7 Although the ES (July 2015) does not specifically deal with the issue, it has been widely acknowledged in appeal and 'called-in' decisions for similar proposals that there are economic benefits from the commissioning, construction and operation of the turbines to both the local and national economy.
- 17.8 A number of non-material issues have been raised by objectors. In particular, concerns have been raised that, should the development go ahead, it will result in the reduction of property and land prices. Such matters are not material planning considerations and do not carry any weight in the planning balance.
- 18.0 PLANNING BALANCE
- 18.1 The matter of assessing the benefits of a proposal against the harm caused is one for the decision maker and there are no set limits or thresholds, which must be met or passed in order for a decision to be made either in favour of or against a proposal. Where a proposal comes into conflict with the Development Plan and government policy, in the form of the NPPF, this must weigh significantly against the development when reaching a planning judgement.
- 18.2 As stated above, applicants are not required to justify the need for renewable energy, and the NPPF makes it clear that even small-scale projects provide a valuable contribution to cutting greenhouse gas emissions. It is acknowledged that there is some uncertainty as to whether the 500kW or 900kW turbines would be erected should planning permission be granted, and to some degree this is out of the applicant's control. Whilst it would have been helpful for further information to be provided in respect of the likely capacity of each turbine, it is accepted that the contribution to the renewable energy needs of the country that the turbines would

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make should weigh significantly in favour of the development. The small scale job creation associated with the construction phase of the development also carries some weight in favour of the development.

- 18.3 When considering the landscape and visual amenity impacts of the development, concerns are raised as to the robustness of the LVIA carried out on behalf of the applicant. There are serious reservations as to the accuracy of the Assessment's finding that the proposal would 'leave the landscape mainly unchanged but with some perceptible additions'. The LVIA fails to appreciate the special relationship between the fen landscape and the Sutton-Haddenham ridges beyond and the fact that the turbines will become the dominating feature of the landscape.
- 18.4 The information submitted with the application also 'downplays' the significance of the effects of the proposal on visual amenity. From the number of representations received relating to the visual effects of the proposal, it is clear that the landscape is highly valued to receptors. At present the public footpath to the south-east of the site of the proposed turbines opens out onto an unspoilt vista, devoid of man-made features. The construction of the turbines would fundamentally alter the character of the area, creating an industrial feel to the landscape when viewed in conjunction with the associated access track, crane/turning pads and substations, all of which are alien features in this rural setting.
- 18.5 These adverse effects bring the development into conflict with policies ENV1, ENV2 and ENV6 of the Local Plan as well as the desire to protect the countryside outlined in the NPPF. Taken cumulatively, the adverse impacts on the landscape character and visual amenity are considered to be such that they would carry significant weight against the proposal.
- 18.6 An assessment of the impact of the proposal on Cultural Heritage raises a number of issues in relation to adverse effects on both individual heritage assets and the wider setting of the assets in the landscape. There are at present very few vertical landmarks of this height within the landscape as it is seen from the West Tower of Ely Cathedral and the significance of the effects that the turbines would have could not be described as neutral. The presence of the turbines would also distract from the setting of Streham Old Engine and Denny Abbey Farmland Museum. Historic England take the view that the harm caused to these assets would be less than substantial, but question whether the harm can be justified by the public benefits of the development.
- 18.7 The church tower of St James' Church in Streham and the chimney at Streham Old Engine are the only vertical features in the landscape when viewed from Twentypence Road, to the west of the site. The insertion of the turbines into the landscape would fundamentally alter the relationship that these two heritage assets have with their wider setting in the historic fen landscape. Similarly, the setting of the Grade II listed North Mill in Haddenham will be adversely affected by the presence of the turbines in the foreground when viewed from the public footpath running parallel to the site. At present, the Mill occupies higher ground on the Haddenham ridge, which serves as a backdrop to the fen landscape below. Whilst the impacts of the proposal on the immediate setting of the individual assets are considered to result in less than substantial harm, impacts on the setting of these

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heritage assets in the wider landscape are considered to result in substantial harm that would not be outweighed by the public benefits of the proposal.

- 18.8 It is considered that these adverse effects on cultural heritage bring the development into conflict with policies ENV6, ENV12 and ENV14 of the Local Plan and paragraphs 17, 65 and 128 of the NPPF. Taken together with the duty imposed on local planning authorities by Sections 66 and 72 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Area) Act 1990, it is considered that these adverse effects weigh significantly against the proposal.
- 18.9 Adverse effects on residential amenity arising from shadow flicker and noise have been identified by the local community as a key concern. It is considered that, in accordance with national guidance, that these matters could be adequately dealt with by the use of appropriate planning conditions and therefore attract little weight in the planning balance.
- 18.10 The impacts of the proposal on living conditions at a number of dwellings have been considered within this report. The position and orientation of several of the dwellings, together with intervening vegetation is such that the turbines would not become overwhelming or oppressive so that the properties became unattractive and thus unsatisfactory places to live. The dwelling at Mitchells Farm is likely to have the most direct views towards the turbines. However, the dwelling itself will be located approximately 820m from the closest turbine and at this distance whilst the turbines will clearly be the dominating feature of the landscape when viewed from the rear of the dwelling, they would not appear so overwhelming or oppressive that the dwelling would become an unattractive or unsatisfactory place to live. The impact on living conditions would therefore attract some weight against the proposal, however, such weight would not be significant.
- 18.11 Concerns raised by the proprietors of Cosy Kennels and Cattery have been noted by officers. There is no substantive evidence available to suggest that the turbines would have an adverse effect on the health and wellbeing of the animals at the premises or that the presence of the turbines would deter new customers from using the facility. There is however, no evidence that the reverse would be the case and on this basis the matter must attract some weight, albeit slight, against the proposal.
- 18.12 In terms of recreational amenity and tourism, there are no factors that would weigh heavily against the proposal.
- 18.13 In terms of aviation safety, there has been dialogue between the MOD and Cambridge Airport in relation to the impact of the proposal on radar systems. This has reached the point whereby the MOD feels able to withdraw its objection to the proposal subject to the imposition of appropriate planning conditions. This approach has been followed by a number of Planning Inspectors in connection with appeal and 'called-in' decisions, the latter indicating that the use of such conditions has been endorsed by the Secretary of State.
- 18.14 Progress in respect of the compatibility of the proposal with Mitchells Farm airfield has been limited and to date the applicant and the owner/operators of the private airfield have failed to reach any form of agreement. At present the proposal is

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considered to come into conflict with policy ENV6, the Renewable Energy SPD and guidance within the NPPF and PPG in relation to aviation safety. On the basis that the owner/operators are the expert authority on the operation of the airfield and the seriousness of any possible adverse effects on light aircraft and public safety, this issue must weigh heavily against the proposal.

- 18.15 The assessment of the impacts of the proposal on non-avian ecology and ornithology falls short of the guidance provided by Natural England on such matters. In turn, the local planning authority is therefore unable to fully assess the effects of the proposal on protected species and thus ensure that appropriate mitigation is in place. On this basis the proposal comes into conflict with policies ENV6 and ENV7 of the Local Plan and the guidance on biodiversity within the NPPF. Taken cumulatively, these matters would therefore attract significant weight against the proposal.
- 18.16 The applicant has been able to address the concerns raised by the Local Highway Authority at the outset of the application and it is noted that the Definitive Map Officer has no objection to the proposal and its effect on the PRoW that runs alongside the access track. However, the Council is of the view that the traffic and transportation implications of the scheme have not been fully investigated by the applicant. In particular, there is no assessment of the significance of effects on receptors in relation to noise and vibration, driver severance and delay, vulnerable road users and road safety, hazardous and dangerous loads and dust and dirt. In addition, no agreement has been reached between the applicant and the IDB in relation to the crossing over the New Cut Drain. Cumulatively, these issues bring the proposal into conflict with policy COM7 of the Local Plan and paragraph 32 of the NPPF and such they should attract moderate weight against the proposal.
- 18.17 In terms of flood risk, hydrology and pollution, it is considered that the applicant has failed to fully assess the provision of surface water drainage measures and the effects of spreading of spoil during the construction phase. The potential for pollution to air quality and surface and ground water quality have not been addressed in sufficient details to ensure that the environmental benefits outweigh any adverse impacts in terms of pollution. The proposal therefore fails to meet the requirements of policies ENV8 and ENV9 of the Local Plan, which weighs against the proposal.
- 18.8 Since the application was submitted the Ministerial Statement dated 18 June 2015 has been published. This makes it clear, under the transitional provision set out in the Statement, that local planning authorities can find a proposal acceptable if, following consultation, they are satisfied that it has addressed the planning impacts identified by affected local communities and therefore has their backing.
- 18.9 A number of concerns have been raised by interested parties and local residents that the applicant failed to fully consult with the local community prior to the submission of the application. Notwithstanding this criticism, the local planning authority has also widely consulted on the proposal and as stated above, a number of planning issues remain outstanding. In some cases insufficient information has been submitted to allow a comprehensive assessment of the environmental impacts of the proposal and in others it is considered that the significance placed on effects identified by the applicant has been underestimated.



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- 18.10 The Ministerial Statement is clear in that it is the Government's view that local people should have the final say on wind farm applications. It is notable that a significant number of objections have been received from individuals during the course of the application and the SSWFAG has been actively campaigning against the proposal. Whilst letters of support have also been received, the overwhelming view of the local community is that the proposal should not be granted planning permission. At this time the Council is unaware of any challenge to the validity of the Ministerial Statement and on this basis it is considered that significant weight should be attached to its contents. The fact that the proposal does not have the backing of the local community, whose concerns in relation to the planning impacts of the proposal have not been fully addressed, weighs significantly against the proposal.
- 18.11 It is clear that there are a number of factors which weigh heavily against the proposal and, taking all material considerations into account, it is considered that the benefits of the proposal do not outweigh the adverse effects and that the proposal is not acceptable in this location. The full reasons for refusal are given at paragraph 1.1 of this report.
- 19.0 APPENDICES
1. Glossary
  2. SSWFAG – Planning Objection Summary Report
  3. Summary of public comments
  4. Environmental Health – Recommended operational noise conditions
  5. MOD/Cambridge Airport – Suggested mitigation/conditions
  6. Applicant's suggested conditions for Mitchells Farm Airfield

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<b><u>Background Documents</u></b>	<b><u>Location</u></b>	<b><u>Contact Officer(s)</u></b>
Case file and associated documents, comments and ES	Julie Barrow Room No. 011 The Grange Ely	Julie Barrow Planning Officer 01353 616307 julie.barrow@eastcambs.gov.uk

<http://pa.eastcambs.gov.uk/online-applications/>

East Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2015 <http://www.eastcambs.gov.uk/local-development-framework/east-cambridgeshire-local-plan>

Renewable Energy SPD <http://www.eastcambs.gov.uk/local-development-framework/supplementary-planning-documents>

NPPF and PPG <http://planningguidance.planningportal.gov.uk/>