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Your Ref:
Our Ref:

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Dear Martin

Re: Application no 1/07/20102 F – Installation of a 6kw domestic wind generator, The Old Barn, Blakemoor, Whittingslow, nr Church Stretton

Thank you for your consultation on the above. The proposal lies within the Shropshire Hills AONB and the response from the Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership is set out below.

1. Policy background

Paragraph 21 of Planning Policy Statement (PPS) 7 states that *the conservation of the natural beauty of the landscape (in AONBs) ... should be given great weight....in development control decisions in these areas.*

Section 85 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act (CROW) 2000 requires district councils to *have regard to the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the area of outstanding natural beauty.*

Policy E1 of the South Shropshire Local Plan states that *Development will not be permitted which would adversely affect the character or natural beauty of the Shropshire Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty'*

Policy QE1 of the Regional Spatial Strategy deals with conserving and enhancing the environment and states that that (with emphasis of particularly relevant sections added in bold);

- A. Environmental improvement is a key component of the Spatial Strategy in order to underpin the overall quality of life of all areas and support wider economic and social objectives.*
- B. Local authorities and other agencies in their plans, policies and proposals should:.....*
- i) **conserve and enhance those areas of the Region**, where exceptional qualities should be reinforced by sustainable use and management, **including the Peak National Park, the five Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty**, the European wildlife sites, and the World Heritage Site (see Environmental Assets Diagram);*

Policy EN1 from the Regional Spatial Strategy deals with energy generation and states that (with emphasis of particularly relevant sections added in bold);

Local authorities in their development plans should:

- i) **encourage proposals for the use of renewable energy resources**, including biomass, **onshore wind power**, active solar systems, small scale hydro-electricity schemes and energy*

from waste combustion and landfill gas, subject to an assessment of their impact using the criteria in iii) below.

*iii) identify the **environmental and other criteria** that will be applied to determining the acceptability of such proposals including:*

*a) **impact on the landscape, visual amenity and areas of ecological or historic importance;**...*

2. Impact on public access in the AONB

The purpose of AONB designation states that *Recreation is not an objective of designation but the demand for recreation should be met as far as is consistent with the conservation of natural beauty....*

A public footpath runs immediately adjacent to the site and is joined by another footpath at the point at which it is proposed to construct the wind generator. The northern path passes immediately adjacent to the turbine and the southern route continues alongside the site itself. The Design and Access Statement accompanying the application makes no mention of either right of way. It is difficult to see how this direct conflict between the proposed site of the turbine and existing public access can be reconciled.

The countryside around the site has an extensive network of public footpaths and it is possible to walk from the summit of Black Knoll at the southern end of the Long Mynd, past the application site (as above) then across the broad valley and up to the top of Wenlock Edge. Such a route would also connect the Jack Mytton Way (a long distance bridleway, cycle route and footpath) with the Marches Way (a long distance footpath connecting Chester and Cardiff). In addition to these public paths, the A49 runs 2km to the east of the site. This is the major north-south route in the county and carries an average of 1,000 vehicles per hour.

3. Impact on the visual amenity of the AONB

Visual amenity is a measure of the visual quality of an area as experienced by people. It is one among a range of considerations of a planning proposal in relation to the AONB and includes the effect on views within the AONB and to an extent, views into and out of the designated area. For the purposes of assessing the impact of a development proposal in the Shropshire Hills the following factors are taken into account:

- The visibility of the development - with the assumption that the more visible the proposal, the greater the adverse effect.
- The number of places from where the development is likely to be seen - with the assumption that the more view points there are, the greater the adverse impact
- The number of people (both visitors and residents) who are likely to be able to see the development - with the assumption that again, the higher the number the greater the adverse effect.

The visibility of the nearby telecommunications mast can be used to give some indication of the likely visibility of the proposed wind turbine. This mast is apparent in short to medium range views from the east and from medium to long range views from the west. Significantly, the mast is also visible from several points on the A49. The good footpath network in the area also offers a variety of viewpoints, including several from the Long Mynd.

The proposed wind generator will be 7m smaller than the existing mast, but its location at the highest point of this open ridge is still likely to make it a prominent feature on the skyline. In addition, whilst the telecommunications mast is static, the moving blades on a wind generator catch the eye more readily. This has the effect of increasing visibility.

The high visibility of the generator combined with the large number of viewpoints (footpaths and the A49 in particular) in the surrounding area and the high numbers of people able to access these means that the proposal will have a significant adverse effect on visual amenity.

4. Impact on the landscape character of the AONB

The character of the Shropshire Hills landscape - the sense of place and pattern of the landscape - is nationally valued.

The ridge is a locally prominent landscape feature in the AONB. Its character is defined by an open feel and extensive views – both towards and away from it. The siting of a 17.75m high wind turbine on ridge will introduce a man-made element into the landscape which will detract from this character. Although this is the case for almost all new development, this effect can be mitigated by visual linking to existing buildings wherever possible. In this instance, the wind generator will be visibly linked to the existing property of The Old Barn only at close proximity. The prominent position of the turbine at the highest point on the ridgeline means that at all other distances it will appear as an unrelated feature in open countryside. This will have an adverse effect on landscape character.

5. Summary and recommendation.

The height and positioning of this wind generator on the highest point of a locally prominent ridge in the AONB mean that this proposal will have a significant adverse effect on visual amenity and an adverse effect on landscape character. South Shropshire District Council is required by PPS 7 and Section 85 of the CROW Act (2000), to take such effects in account. Such effects are also contrary to policies in the Regional Spatial Strategy and the Local Plan. In addition, the potential conflict with at least one public footpath has not been addressed by the applicant. The Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership therefore recommends that this application be **refused**.

Yours sincerely

Joy Tetsill
Planning and Policy Officer