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Your Ref:
Our Ref: gb_00374_Villa Farm

18 March 2013

Dear Steve

Planning application 13/00374/FUL Erection of one 11kW wind turbine with a hub height of 18.3m and a rotor diameter of 13m, Villa Farm, Cardington, Church Stretton, SY6 7HN

The AONB Partnership is in general supportive of the promotion and implementation of a policy of renewable energy, but balanced with the very high quality of the Shropshire Hills AONB landscape. It does therefore have concern in regard to the construction of the proposed turbine at Villa Farm, Cardington.

Policy 35 of the 2009-2014 Shropshire Hills AONB Management Plan states that the positioning of turbines should *"take account of factors including landscape character and visual amenity..."*. Guidelines with this Policy recommend that one or two turbines up to 12m to blade tip and within 100m of existing buildings are likely to be considered acceptable, while turbines in excess of 25m to vertical blade tip or closely grouped turbines are not likely to be acceptable within the AONB. Each application for wind turbine construction must however be assessed as an individual case, taking into account the particular aspects of the proposal and its location.

The revised position of the proposed turbine at Villa Farm does now conform to the above recommendations, being within 30m of the farm buildings and so incorporating it into the farm complex. The maximum planned height of 24.5m is a substantial structure in the context of this location but is within the maximum recommendation of 25m. Its proposed position at NGR 350334, 294657 is stepped down below the base footprint of the farm itself, reducing its height in relation to the farm buildings, though it will still be a prominent element within the landscape. To the north of the turbine site is a pole-carried power line which traverses the pasture field on a SW to NE alignment, lying at a distance of c35 metres from the proposed turbine site. Any possible constraints in regard to power lines should be taken into consideration at this planning stage. *(A guide for minimum desirable distance between occupied building is often calculated using fall over distance i.e. the height of the turbine to blade tip, plus 10% is a usual accepted safe operation distance)*. The proposal also includes the demolition of a substantial and redundant silage silo on the south side of the farm complex at NGR 350350, 294603. The AONB Partnership welcomes the removal of this intrusive structure.

The visual impact assessment and accompanying photomontages, which are presented as supporting documentation, do provide a useful level of analysis. They show that the site has been chosen to limit its visual impact locally. By moving the turbine site to the east, close to the farm complex, it is taken out of alignment with Cardington village. Views of the turbine from the village remain, particularly from the car park of the village hall, though in general the turbine site is masked by mature trees.

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The AONB Partnership does however continue to have concern in regard to more distant views of the turbine, as seen from Cardington Moor to the west. Villa Farm is clearly visible from the sign-posted Cardington walk, which approaches from the Caradoc range to the west. The existing silage silo is a prominent and intrusive element within this landscape vista and serves to demonstrate that any high structure will be highly visible.

The perspective from this receptor is above and looking down, so that the backdrop is that of the landscape itself. The white painted tip of the silo stands out clearly against this dark background, while its grey body is far less visible. Sample photographs of the proposed turbine appear to show it painted white, which would accentuate against the dark background. A darker grey colour for both mast and rotors would help to reduce its visual presence, and similarly a single pole mast rather than the proposed lattice structure may be less intrusive.

In summary there is a balance in any dynamic, working landscape between the advantages accrued from such developments as renewable energy infrastructure and the negative impact of such infrastructure upon the sensitive nature of the protected landscape of the AONB. In this case the balance is very fine and the need to minimise impact is considered of paramount importance. While the removal of one visually negative element, the silo, does not justify the construction of another, the gesture is welcomed. A further consideration of the painted colour of the structure has potential to further mitigate visual impact and it is recommended that this be considered within the proposal.

Yours sincerely

G Barratt
Landscape and Planning Officer
Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership.