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Your Ref: 11/00723
Our Ref: gb_190411_SC, Hillend turbine

19 April 2011

Dear Julie

Application no 11/00723 Wind turbine, Hillend, Mainstone, Bishop's Castle, SY9 5LX

The AONB Partnership is supportive of the promotion and implementation of a policy of renewable energy, based on a range of sustainability criteria which are described within the Shropshire Hills AONB Management Plan 2009-2014 (Renewable energy, pg 37, with specific reference to wind turbines contained within pages 39 to 41). However in this case the AONB Partnership objects to the planning application on the grounds of several key elements:

- size and negative visual presence within the local landscape,
- that the addition of this turbine within the Mainstone valley will add to existing planning consents to create a level of turbine clustering, thereby compromising the character of the area.
- that equine use of the nearby bridleway, 60m to the east, will be potentially negatively affected by the presence of the turbine blade motion.

This response has been informed by consultation with members of the AONB Partnership.

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 recommend that one or two turbines up to 12m to blade tip and within 100m of existing buildings are considered acceptable, while turbines in excess of 25m to vertical blade tip or closely grouped turbines are not likely to be acceptable within the constraint boundary of the AONB.

The proposed site of this turbine at NGR 327516,288503 at a height above Ordnance Datum of c. 340m does fulfill some of the acceptable criteria as stated within the above policy 35. It lies within 100m of the property (approximately 50m north of the farm house) and is within the maximum suggested height of 25m base of mast to vertical wing tip. However at 23.5m is close to the suggested maximum and would if built be the highest domestic wind turbine within the Shropshire Hills AONB.

The proposed site has been visited both at pre and post application stage and a full consultation of the AONB Partnership has been undertaken. The objections listed above and described more fully below are based upon information gathered in the course of this study.

Paragraph 212 of Planning Policy Statement 7 states that "the conservation of the natural beauty of the landscape in AONBs)...should be given great weight in regard to planning decisions and Section 25 of the CROW Act of 2000 requires regard to the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the area of the AONB.

Wind turbines by the nature of their positional requirements, for high ground locations to maximise wind energy, create problems within a landscape designated for its quality and visual amenity.

The supporting documentation, in particular the Visual Impact Assessment suggests that the proposed turbine site is visible from few distant receptors. However the extent of the envelope of visual influence is not well defined within this document, making the impact upon distant receptors difficult to accurately quantify, though a field visit does suggest limited impact. However as confirmed within the VIA the turbine will certainly create a level of intrusion more locally. The Mainstone valley has quality of remoteness and tranquillity which is valued by both the local community and by visitors to the area. This will be to some extent negatively impacted by the building of what would be a structure significantly alien to its setting.

The proposal for this turbine is the second such proposal within the Mainstone valley. Objections were made from a broad spectrum of stakeholders to this earlier turbine (10/00357 & 10/02265) which was granted planning permission at its third submission. This turbine has not yet been built but would be within 1000m of the currently proposed turbine. The addition of this second currently proposed turbine would create a level of clustering that by their association would impact significantly upon the landscape character of the valley. This is particularly so as both turbines are considerably larger than the more average domestic turbine both in physical and output, one having an output of 15kw the second 10kw, the average size of a domestic turbine being in the region of 5kw.

The close proximity of the proposed site to the bridleway that runs from SO275877 to SO275886 is also a cause of concern. The British Horse Society suggests a separation distance between a bridleway and wind turbine of a minimum of 200m to avoid the turbines frightening horses. The proposed site lies within approximately 60m of a well-used bridleway and has therefore a potential to create a hazard for riders created as a result of horses shying at the motion and noise of the turbine. The proximity of the turbine to the bridleway and footpaths joining the way will also have an impact on walkers using these routes.

In summary while the AONB Partnership supports the concept of renewable energies, a balance between the advantages accrued and the negative impact of such infrastructure upon the landscape of the AONB is considered of paramount importance. In such locations the AONB Partnership urges the consideration of other alternative technologies such as photovoltaic cell arrays where appropriate. Large agricultural buildings with shallow roof gradients can provide suitable sites for such arrays. While installation costs are on average higher than wind turbines they in general offer a greater level of efficiency in power generation with a smaller negative effect on the landscape in which they lie.

Please feel free to contact me at any time if you think that I can be of any further assistance.

Yours sincerely

G Barratt
Planning & Landscape Officer
On behalf of the AONB Partnership

Yours sincerely

Phil Holden
AONB Partnership Manager