

## **Section 7 – Summary and Conclusions**

It is considered that the current Baydon Meadow Community Wind Turbine proposal requires an entirely new approach in respect of reaching a planning decision relative to the 2002 application for a similar scheme, for three main reasons:

### **A new, community-based proposal**

The current Baydon Meadow project is materially different to that previously proposed by virtue of its significant potential community benefits. The previous project would have been owned by a multi-national utility company and no community benefits were proposed. Conversely, the current proposal would allow community ownership of up to 100%. It is intended that the associated investment opportunities (and potential profits) would be specifically prioritised to the benefit of those living closest to the proposal. The community element of the current proposal is further enhanced by the specific proposals for establishing community funds to be spent in communities in the vicinity of the project, worth some £50,000 during the anticipated 25 year life of the project.

### **A new, more refined assessment of the landscape and visual effects**

It is apparent that the appeal decision relating to previous Baydon Meadow proposal was marginal, evidenced by the Inspector's attempts to ameliorate the specific visual effects that he felt weighed against that earlier proposal. New information provided in the Supplementary Volume, produced to address justifiable criticisms of certain elements of the previous landscape and visual assessment, calls in to question some of the comments made in the appeal decision. Thus, it is apparent that at least some of the visual effects felt to accrue from the proposal in previous planning decisions can now be disregarded.

### **A new planning policy context**

The planning policy context in which the current application should be considered is materially different to that which existed at the time of determining the previous planning application. Indeed, the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 ensures that the decision relating to the current application is considered under an entirely different planning regime, with the Regional Spatial Strategy forming part of the development plan.

Changes of material consequence to national, regional and local planning policies have been identified in the Supplementary Volume. The changes are broadly consistent and place far greater weight on the need for renewable energy (to contribute to binding UK targets on greenhouse gas emission reductions) while clearer locational guidance has emerged together with a greater emphasis on small scale, community-based renewable energy

projects, of which the current proposal is an example. These policy changes are reinforced with wider policy evolution at a national level (eg. DTI "Renewables Statement of Need", Stern Review) and European level (legally binding targets for greater renewable energy generation), which also provide a more supportive policy setting for the Baydon Meadow scheme. A more specific assessment against current policy is provided below.

### Local Development Framework

The West Berkshire Local Plan, 1991-2006, has apparently time-expired while the emerging West Berkshire Planning Strategy represents a key element of the future development plan under the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act (2004) regime. The latter document's "Development Management Policy 8 - Renewable Energy" comments "The wider benefits of renewable energy developments including their potential to contribute to national, regional and sub-regional targets for renewable energy generation and carbon dioxide savings are material considerations which will be given significant weight in determining planning applications." and "Within the North Wessex Downs AONB proposals will be expected to be of an appropriate scale and not compromise the objectives of designation."

With reference to the contribution of the Baydon Meadow proposal to renewable energy targets, it is apparent that it would make a valuable contribution to national, regional and sub-regional targets where significant progress is needed if the 2010 targets are to be met. In a national context, in 2006 provisional figures show that renewable energy projects supplied 4.08% of the UK's electricity requirements<sup>1</sup>, requiring significant additional progress in order to meet the 10% target by 2010.

In respect of regional and sub-regional targets, it is apparent that at the end of 2006, the South East of England had installed 343.95MW<sup>2</sup> of renewable electricity generation plant against a 2010 target outlined in RPG9 and the Regional Spatial Strategy (the South East Plan) of 620MW. Thus, in order to meet the regional target, the average installation rate required is over 5.7MW per month between December 2006 and December 2010, inclusive. Turning to the relevant sub-regional target, for Thames Valley and Surrey, 71.32MW<sup>2</sup> of renewable electricity generating plant had been installed by the end of 2006 relative to a 2010 target specified in RPG9 and the South East Plan of 140MW. In other words, to meet the Thames Valley and Surrey sub-regional renewable energy target for 2010, an average exceeding 1.4MW should be commissioned each and every month up to December 2010.

With respect to the comment in Development Management Policy 8 relating to the North Wessex Downs AONB, advice published since the last planning application from both the adopted RPG9 and the South East Plan comments "...wind and other renewable energy development should not be precluded in AONBs and the new national parks as there will be locations where small scale construction e.g. a wind development of between one and four turbines

not generating more than 5MW, can be accommodated where conflict with statutory landscape protection purposes set out in PPS7 can be avoided or minimised through careful siting and design, including reducing the cumulative impact of a number of individual schemes.". In this respect, the Baydon Meadow proposal is demonstrably of an "appropriate scale". As a single wind turbine proposal with a capacity of 1.3MW, the proposal is 75% and 74% below the upper thresholds identified, respectively.

Considering the other elements of Management Development Policy 8 and with respect to the findings of the refined landscape and visual assessment and taking account of the existing wind energy projects in English AONBs it is considered that the proposal would not "compromise the objectives of the designation". It is also important to acknowledge that the Baydon Meadow scheme would not have any significant cumulative effects with other wind energy projects operating, consented or in the public domain.

### Regional Spatial Strategy

The Regional Spatial Strategy comprises adopted RPG9 for the South East and the emerging South East Plan. Neither document has formed part of the development plan against which the Baydon Meadow project has been assessed against in the past. Equally, both are highly consistent in respect of their policies on renewable energy (see section 3.1). Policies INF6, INF7 and INF8 in RPG9 and EN3, EN4 and EN5 in the draft South East Plan identify the following policy imperatives:

- a need to meet regional and sub-regional targets (outlined above);
- encouragement to "small scale community based schemes", particularly in AONBs and National Parks; and
- a preference for new renewable energy developments located outside urban areas to be located in "major transport areas".

In respect of the adopted and emerging regional planning guidance relating to renewable energy, it is certainly the case that the Baydon Meadow proposal demonstrates a high degree of conformity.

### Summary and conclusion

It is clear that the decision to dismiss the Baydon Meadow appeal in December 2004 was marginal with nothing found to be *fundamentally* unacceptable about the proposal. This is apparent from, among others, the following comment in the appeal decision: "...it thus seems to me that this location...is one that is capable of absorbing a single wind turbine of the height proposed."

It is also apparent that, in respect of the current planning application, a materially different project is now planned, with a proposal for significant community participation. This, allied to the new and significantly different

planning policy environment, the refined landscape and visual assessment and the growing need for renewable energy as a means of combating the growing impacts of climate change, provides a requirement for an entirely new analysis of the application. In respect of the latter point, the weight attached to the need for renewable energy is amply shown in an example where a proposal was refused permission for not adequately considering regional renewable energy:

*"A proposal for 31 sheltered apartments, manager's accommodation and communal facilities has been rejected [on Appeal, #100043602] in a Surrey town because it failed to provide energy from renewable sources...The inspector noted that RPG9 aspired to generating 16 per cent of the region's electricity needs from renewable sources by 2026..."<sup>3</sup>.*

***For the foregoing reasons and in the light of the material considerations identified, it is considered that the Baydon Meadow Community Wind Turbine proposal is in compliance with the development plan and should thus be granted planning permission.***

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### ***References and notes***

<sup>1</sup> Department of Trade and Industry, "Energy Trends", March 2007, table 5.1.

<sup>2</sup> See [www.see-stats.org](http://www.see-stats.org).

<sup>3</sup> "Planning", 1<sup>st</sup> September 2006, page 19.