

<b>Aeolus Power (Wind Energy) Ltd</b>	Install wind turbine (as augmented by GB information received 27/04/12 and 08/06/12).	12/0156 25.05.12
<b>“B”</b>	Land At Thriftwood Farm, Holyoakes Lane, Tardebigge	

**At the request of the Head of Planning and Regeneration, this application has been referred to Planning Committee rather than being determined under delegated powers.**

**RECOMMENDATION:** that permission is **GRANTED**

### Consultations

WH Response received 24.04.12:

Recommend deferral:

*“The applicant should provide additional information relating to the means of access to the site for delivery vehicles, this should include details of the size of the vehicles accessing the site, the number of trips to install the turbine and tracking details of the vehicles at sensitive road junctions and bends. Experience of other applications indicated that abnormal load vehicles are required to deposit the turbine shaft and blades and this has not been able to access the site suitably.*

*The applicant should provide an access statement covering the above to demonstrate that the site can be accessed without detrimental impact on the highway network.”*

Verbal advice received 03.07.12:

The proposal is acceptable subject to the approval of a suitable route to the site for delivery and construction vehicles. A condition to this effect should be imposed on any planning permission granted.

Bentley Pouncefoot PC Response received 16.05.12:

*“1. Renewable Energy Policy.*

*Bentley Pouncefoot Parish Council fully supports efforts to reduce carbon footprint and energy efficiency within the parish.*

*However, Council is aware that it has not formulated a policy on this matter and that it will address this over the next twelve months.*

## *2. Support & Objection.*

*The Parish Council has received a number of views on the application for the turbine at Thriftwood Farm several of which are specifically opposed to the development as well as a number in support.*

*The objections raise concerns on visual impact, possible noise nuisance, potential threat to wildlife and concerns about the health of those in the direct vicinity.*

*Concern has also been voiced among the respondents that, if granted, this could lead to applications for further turbines either close to the one in question or elsewhere within the parish.*

## *3. Conclusion.*

*Bentley Pauncefoot Parish Council feels that, at this stage, it has insufficient knowledge on the merits or otherwise of wind turbine technology to either actively support or oppose this specific application.*

*However, in the event of this application or any future application making this a multi unit site the PC would strongly oppose any such proposal.”*

Response received 15.05.12: No adverse comments

WRS  
(Community  
Protection)

Response received 13.04.12:

Climate Change  
Manager

*“The UK has a challenging EU target to meet in relation to the percentage of all power needed in the country to be sourced from renewable energy by 2015. The existing energy infrastructure is ageing and energy security is an increasing concern. Demand for electricity is also predicted to increase significantly in the future; making it even more challenging to supply clean power. Allowing the development of and investment in renewable technology is one way of countering these issues.*

*Consequently, it is my view that the Council should support this application, in order to increase the amount of renewable energy generated locally. Not everywhere has the required wind speed to make a turbine viable (for example, there is nowhere in Redditch, but several areas of*

*Bromsgrove do<sup>1</sup>), therefore where conditions are suitable, we should encourage this form of development. As well as supplying the grid, this will reduce the demand for grid-sourced power on site which will help us meet our targets for reducing greenhouse gas emissions arising from Bromsgrove as a whole, which consequently supports the delivery of our climate change strategy.*

*I have spoken to the applicant about this application a few times, and what appears to be exceptional in this case, is the high level of local support for this development (I understand you have an email with around 50 signatures in support from local residents). General awareness amongst the public about the energy issues I have mentioned, as well as the knock on direct impact on themselves as consumers in terms of ever increasing household bills; combined with concerns locally about doing what we can to reduce carbon emissions, appear to be manifesting itself in a positive attitude towards this wind turbine. The massive increase in solar panels installations over the past year in Bromsgrove will also have helped increase visibility of renewables and raise awareness locally, which is only a good thing.*

*A 50kW turbine, compared to some being installed inland as we speak, is relatively small and therefore has limited impact on the environment by comparison to the clear benefits of proceeding.*

*Although I acknowledge that the site is in the green belt, I suggest that the environmental benefits, as well as the social acceptance among neighbours, is supportive of considering this application to be 'sustainable development.'*

Response received 12.06.12:

WWT

No objection subject to a condition being attached to any planning permission granted covering the recommendations made in the ecological report

Response received 12.06.12:

WCC Ecologist

If the Council is minded to grant planning permission it is recommended that the key points at section 7 of the Phase 1 Ecological Assessment are considered for condition. If these conditions are implemented the proposal is supported.

Response received 15.05.12:

WCC

Conservation  
and Landscape

*"In general, I would support this application, subject to the comments below.*

- Officer
- *This turbine will be sited on agricultural, arable land, well screened by mature hedges and trees and some distance from residential properties and roads. Generally, only the tips of the blades will be seen from local properties and the visual impact will therefore be low.*
  - *The turbine will, however, be clearly visible from a short section of an adjacent Public Right of Way. However, it will be viewed as part of the farming 'clutter' that would normally be seen on a large arable farm. The adverse visual impact from this footpath is therefore not considered significant.*
  - *The farm is located to the south-west of Hewell Grange, a Grade II\* historic park and garden registered by English Heritage as being of national importance. Due to the relatively small size of the turbine and the intervening trees and topography, it is unlikely that there will be any visual impact on this park and garden. It is possible that there would be a view from the top of the Grade II water tower, but it is not considered significant.*
  - *I am told by the landowner (who I met on my site visit) that access will be via existing farm tracks, with a short additional section through the crop. I consider this acceptable.*

*Recommendation*

*I recommend that planning permission is granted.*

Conservation Officer  
Response received 31.05.12:  
No objection

English Heritage  
Response received 30.05.12:  
*"We do not consider that the development will have any adverse impact on any principal heritage assets in the surrounding area."*

Hereford and Worcester Gardens Trust  
Consulted 11.04.12 - no comments received to date.

Drainage Engineer  
Comments received 23.05.12: No objection

PROW  
Consulted 11.04.12 - no comments received to date

Ramblers  
Response received 26.05.12:

*“The location of the site of the wind turbine is within a fine stretch of open unspoilt countryside. To the north the land rises gently to a lane where a number of isolated dwellings are located and to the B4184 from both of which the site is visible. To the south and west the land falls away gradually and good panoramic views are obtained across the Severn Vale to the hills of west Worcestershire including the Malverns, Suckleys and Abberley. It is evident to us that the site will be visible over extensive distances and in our view will detract from the visual value of the countryside to an extent that we consider its benefits for the environment will be outweighed.*

*There are four public footpaths in the fields around the site including a section of the Monarchs Way. The latter is a popular long distance path of over 600 miles in length. It commemorating the route of Charles II from the Battle of Worcester as he escaped to France. This path passes to the east of the site on a north to south orientation and the wind turbine will be visible over a considerable length of the path. Views of the turbine are also to be had from the other footpaths in the locality. We consider that this development will be harmful to the enjoyment of quiet recreation in the countryside and this is especially important as this attractive countryside lies immediately to the south of one of the major conurbations in the country, the West Midlands.*

*We also note that the site lies within the West Midland Green Belt where development is strongly restrained to protect the openness of the countryside and to prevent urban sprawl. Because this site is so open and the proposal will be seen over considerable distances, its impact on openness is out of proportion to its actual size. It is therefore considered to be an unsuitable structure in this part of the Green Belt.*

*For the above reasons we object to this application and hope that the District Council will refuse permission.”*

NATS (Civil  
Aviation  
Authority)

Comments received 03.05.12: No objection

The Joint Radio  
Company Ltd

Response received 08.05.12:

*“In the case of this proposed wind energy development, JRC does not foresee any potential problems based on known interference scenarios and the data you have provided.”*

Transco  
(National Grid)

Consulted 11.04.12 - no comments received to date.

Forestry  
Commission

Response received 12.04.12:

No woodland is affected and consequently no adverse comments are made.

CPRE

Comments received 16.05.12:

“We object to this application.

The site is at a height of about 140m O.D. The ridge along which A448 runs is only 145m O.D. high at Tack Farm near the Foxlydiate junction, rising to 160m near Hewell Grange and further to the northwest. A 31.5m tower will thus rise to about 170m, with the blades rising to c.180m. The turbine will thus project significantly above the skyline of the ridge. This means that the turbine will have a major impact on the landscape for many miles around.

We would support the Highways comments about access to the site for construction traffic down which will inevitably be some narrow lanes for the last mile of the journey.

We are also concerned about the turbine being a distraction to drivers on the fast A448.”

Friends of the  
Earth

Comments received 15.06.12:

*“Human induced Climate Change is happening and is something that we as a society will not only have to adapt to BUT something we will have to mitigate against. We in the UK, as one of the largest and oldest economies on the planet, will have to show leadership in those actions. Obviously we will have to become far more efficient in the electricity that we use, designing and marketing much more energy efficient products than we do at present.*

*We will still need to generate electricity, and as such we must generate it much closer to where it is consumed and in as environmentally benign manner as possible. The generation of electricity from wind is one of those technologies.*

*We must also balance the need for lower carbon electricity with aspects of noise, visual intrusion, wildlife and national security. These are immediate and practical concerns which may be overtaken by technology. However these issues are*

*secondary to the future of the human species and our ability to survive on this Planet.....*

*....Wind is not perfect BUT it is one of the solutions that we have and it is deployable NOW and is proven to deliver....*

*....While we support the generation of electricity from wind resources we believe that it would be appropriate to allay the concerns of local residents. It is also essential that local residents are as informed as much as possible as to the realities of living close to wind turbines, indeed in other instance developers have organised visits to other turbines to meet people who are living with wind technology in their locality.*

*It is essential that the local community is involved with these projects to ensure that they are appropriate for the local area, of the correct scale, under appropriate ownership and control.*

*If this planning application were to be refused Redditch Friends of the Earth would also like Bromsgrove District Council and local objectors to this proposal to indicate where, within the district, they think would be suitable for a Wind technology and at what scale??*

*If, for some reason, no such site exists what measures will the district put in place for Bromsgrove District to become far more efficient and reduce its energy demands and in turn reduce its climate change emissions and show leadership in how we can move forward with respect to our climate responsibilities?"*

Publicity

2 neighbour notification letters sent 23.04.12 (for the information of Members the neighbour notification procedure in this instance was based on all properties within a 400 metre radius of the application site and the adjoining occupiers to the site access).

Site notice posted 20.04.12

Press notice published 20.04.12

Eleven objections received in response to the Council's own statutory publicity procedure. Concerns raised over harm to the Green Belt, ecological impacts, noise impacts, landscape harm, the visual impact from residential properties and health issues. Concerns are also raised over the proposal setting a precedent for further turbines at the site and in the wider area. Furthermore views are

expressed over the proposal representing an inefficient technology.

An additional 13 representations have been also been received via Bentley Paucefoot Parish Council.

8 objections were received for the reasons set out above. It should however be noted that 7 of these are duplicates of those directly received by the District Council.

5 representations were received supporting the proposal or giving no objection. Given reasons for support include the view that the turbine represents forward thinking and it will soon become an accepted part of the landscape which, like electricity pylons, we are all used to seeing

Members should also note that the applicant has carried out a pre-application community consultation exercise. This has gained 54 signatures of support for the proposed turbine from local residents. Reasons for support include the 'green' benefits of the proposal, the lack of any neighbours within 500 metres of the site thus no noise issues, and the benefits to the farm.

### The site and its surroundings

The application site relates to an agricultural field located between Holyoakes Lane and Sheltwood Lane in Tardebigge. The field forms part of Thriftwood Farm; an established mixed arable and livestock farm. The site is void of any development and is currently used for arable farming purposes. There is a small copse of trees located approximately 80 metres to the east/south east of the site and two small ponds located 80 and 160 metres away from the site respectively. The main farm complex including the farmhouse is located some 500 metres to the east of the site. An informal track exists to the east of the site which provides access from the farm complex for farm vehicles. The site is set some distance away from residential development with the nearest properties (Churchwood Cottage, Sheltwood Lane) being approximately 500 metres to the south-west. There is a dispersed pattern of residential development in the wider area with a number of small clusters of dwellings (typically 1-6 units) located along the surrounding roads. Otherwise the area is predominately rural and agricultural in character.

The site is located in the West Midlands Green Belt as defined within the Bromsgrove District Local Plan 2004 (BDLP). The site is located approximately 850 metres to the south west of Hewell Grange walled garden; a Grade II\* Registered Park and Garden and the same distance away from the Hewell Grange Conservation Area. There is a public right of way located approximately 80 metres to the north of the site and one located approximately 160 metres to the east of the site.

## The proposed development

The application seeks planning permission for 1 no. Endurance E-3120 wind turbine. The turbine would be 24.6 metres to hub height. It will have three blades with each blade being 9.6 metres in length. This would amount to an overall height of 34.2 metres above ground level. It is understood that the turbine is required as part of the farm's business plan which incorporates a commitment to the sustainable use of resources. A key part of this is the reduction of the carbon footprint of the business. Surplus energy from the turbine will feed into the National Grid. On average the manufacturer specifies that the turbine will produce between 100,000 and 250,000 kilowatt hours (kWh) per year in appropriate winds. This is broadly equivalent to the annual consumption of 45-50 houses. The average wind speed at the site is 6 metres per second (m/s) at a height of 25 metres above ground level (Source: Department of Energy and Climate Change Wind Speed Database). The Worcestershire Renewable Energy Study (Worcestershire County Council, 2008) indicates that an annual average wind speed of 6 m/s at 45 metres above ground level is required for a project to be regarded as economically viable. The application site would achieve this wind speed at a lower height above ground level thus it can be considered as a viable site for harnessing wind energy. The application also proposes a number of ancillary works including the construction of a 200m long access track connecting the turbine with the existing track at the farm, and trenching for underground power lines connecting the turbine with the farm and the national grid (the point of connection is within the main farm complex).

## Relevant Policies

WMSS	QE1, EN1
WCSP	SD.2, CTC.1, CTC.2, CTC.19, CTC.20, D.38, D.39, EN.2, T.1
BDLP	DS2, DS13, C4, S35A, S48, ES14A
Draft CS2	CP3, CP22, CP16, CP17, CP19
Others	NPPF, Planning for Renewable Energy: A Companion Guide to PPS22

## Relevant Planning History

P11/0023 – Pre application advice request – general policy advice provided; identified issues for consideration include the Green Belt, the landscape, ecology and noise – response sent 23/03/11

## Policy matters

Members will be aware that the Development Plan for the Bromsgrove District consists of the saved policies within the BDLP and the WCSP. Members will also be aware that the NPPF is now a significant material consideration in planning decisions. Due weight will be given to the relevant Development Plan policies according to their degree of consistency with the framework set out in

the NPPF (the closer the Policies in the Plan to the policies in the Framework, the greater the weight that may be given).

The BDLP does not contain any specific policies on wind turbines. Broad policy on sustainable development is set out at Policy DS13 which essentially provides that development proposals should seek to conserve energy resources in the interest of sustainable development.

The WCSP provides specific policy on wind turbines at Policy EN.2. This states that proposals for the development of individual wind turbines or small clusters will be allowed, provided that they:

- (i) do not cause unacceptable harm to the surrounding environment, in particular sensitive landscapes;
- (ii) do not cause unacceptable harm to nature conservation interests;
- (iii) do not result in excessive noise pollution; and
- (iv) are acceptable in relation to other policies in the Structure Plan.

National policy provisions for meeting the challenge of climate change are provided at Part 10 of the NPPF. Paragraph 97 of the NPPF states that:

*“To help 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.”*

Paragraph 98 specifically relates to new development stating that:

*“When determining planning applications, local planning authorities should:*

- *not require applicants for energy development to demonstrate the overall need for renewable or low carbon energy and also recognise that even small-scale projects provide a valuable contribution to cutting greenhouse gas emissions; and*
- *approve the application if its impacts are (or can be made) acceptable.”*

The site's location in the Green Belt requires consideration as to whether the proposed turbine would represent an appropriate form of development in the Green Belt having regard to Policy DS2 of the Bromsgrove District Local Plan (BDLP) 2004 and the Green Belt provisions within the National Planning Policy Framework 2012 (NPPF). If the proposal is considered to represent an inappropriate form of development in the Green Belt, then it is first necessary

to consider the harm caused to the Green Belt, and then consider if the case presents any very special circumstances that would outweigh the identified harm.

It is also necessary to consider the visual effect of the proposal and its impact on the character of the landscape. Policy CTC.1 of the Worcestershire County Structure Plan 2001 (WCSP) and Policy C4 of the BDLP set out policy considerations for assessing the landscape impact of development proposals. It should however be noted that the site does not fall within any recognised landscape designation and it is not located within a BDLP defined Landscape Protection Area. National policy advice in relation to the landscape and the natural environment at Part 11 of the NPPF will also be considered.

Further environmental considerations include the proposal's ecological impact having regard to Part 11 of the NPPF, the proposal's relationship with heritage assets in the vicinity having regard to policies CTC.19 and CTC.20 of the WCSP, policies S35A and S48 of the BDLP and the advice at Part 12 of the NPPF, and the noise impact of the proposal on residential amenity having regard to Policy ES14A of the BDLP and Part 11 of the NPPF.

It is considered that the Development Plan policies set out above are consistent with the NPPF and I am therefore minded to afford them their full weight in the assessment of this development proposal.

Having regard to the relevant planning policy framework the issues of this case are as follows:

1. The principle of the development in this Green Belt location;
2. Landscape Impact
3. Ecology
4. Heritage issues
5. Noise and residential amenity impacts

Each issue will be discussed under a separate heading below. I am also mindful of the views of consultees and other interested third parties. These broadly fall within the set of issues set out above however where new material considerations exist separate consideration will be provided in this report.

## Appraisal

### 1. *The principle of the development in this Green Belt location*

Policy DS2 of the BDLP provides that permission for development in the Green Belt will not be given for new buildings subject to certain exceptions. In strict terms a wind turbine does not constitute a building but, nonetheless, renewable energy development does not fall within the list of exceptions set out at Policy DS2 thus, having regard to the BDLP, the proposal is considered to represent an inappropriate form of development in the Green Belt.

Specific advice on renewable energy projects is provided at paragraph 91 of the NPPF which states that:

*“When located in the Green Belt, elements of many renewable energy projects will comprise inappropriate development. In such cases developers will need to demonstrate very special circumstances if projects are to proceed. Such very special circumstances may include the wider environmental benefits associated with increased production of energy from renewable sources.”*

In this instance it is considered that development of a wind turbine may constitute an engineering operation. The NPPF advises that engineering operations are not inappropriate in the Green Belt provided they preserve the openness of the Green Belt and do not conflict with the purposes of including land within it. In this instance the proposed wind turbine would be a substantive structure albeit that its mast would have a slim profile and a small footprint. Nonetheless it is inevitable that the proposal would reduce the openness of the Green Belt. It is also considered that the proposal may conflict with the purposes of including land within the Green Belt, namely to assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment. Thus, on this basis and having regard to the NPPF it can be concluded that the proposal would represent an inappropriate form of development in the Green Belt.

Inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in very special circumstances. Substantial weight should be given to any harm to the Green Belt. ‘Very special circumstances’ will not exist unless the potential harm to the Green Belt by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm, is clearly outweighed by other considerations.

When considering harm to the openness of the Green Belt it should be noted that the mast of the turbine would have very slim profile with a diameter of 1.5 metres at its base reducing to just 70 centimetres where it meets the hub. Furthermore each of its three blades would only be around a metre wide. On this basis it is not considered that the proposal would significantly detract from any sense of space within the landscape and it is considered that the proposal would only be of relatively limited harm to the openness of the Green Belt. Furthermore Members should note the comparable height of the turbine to existing landscape features such as telegraph poles, large trees and areas of woodland. It is not considered that the proposal would have a significant effect on openness when viewed within this context.

With regard to the impact of the proposal on the rural character of the Green Belt, it should be noted that wind turbines are clearly suited to rural locations (due to the need to harness wind energy away from buildings and other obstructions) and they are not typically a feature of the urban landscape. In fact traditional windmills were for a long time a feature of this country’s rural landscape and it could be argued that wind turbines represent the next generation of windmills. Indeed in some rural areas of this country and in vast

areas of other European countries wind turbines have become a common feature of the rural scene. Members will note the views of the Conservation and Landscape Officer in relation to the visual impact of the proposal. On the above basis it is not considered that the proposal would be incongruous with the visual amenity and rural character of the Green Belt.

Members should also note that the proposed turbine is relatively small in comparison to commercial wind farm turbines which average a height of 120 metres. This proposal should therefore be viewed as a small scale development when attributing weight to any harm to the Green Belt.

Considering the benefits of the proposal regard should be paid to the fact that the proposal will produce between 100,000 and 250,000 kilowatt hours (kWh) per year. This is broadly equivalent to the annual consumption of 45-50 houses. It is understood that this would cater for the majority of Thriftwood Farm's energy needs in addition to supplying the National Grid. It is estimated that the proposal would result in a saving of approximately 40 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> per year.

Members should be aware that the UK has signed up to an EU target of achieving 20% of its total energy use from renewable means by 2020. An intermediate UK target of 15.4% has been set for 2015/16 at an estimated increase of 1% a year from 2010. To achieve this target the UK will need an exponential increase in renewable electricity generation (Worcestershire Renewable Energy Study, WCC 2008).

Members will note the support given to this proposal by the Climate Change Manager (CCM) for Bromsgrove District Council. The CCM encourages Members to support the application in order to increase the amount of renewable energy generated locally thus contributing to the achievement of the EU target. Moreover Members should be mindful of the requirement within the NPPF for local planning authorities to recognise the responsibility on all communities to contribute to energy generation from renewable or low carbon sources.

The identified CO<sub>2</sub> savings attributed to the proposal would clearly help to counter climate change, a matter to which the NPPF gives particular priority acknowledging that small-scale projects provide a valuable contribution to cutting greenhouse gas emissions.

Taking the above matters into consideration it is clear that there are significant benefits of the proposal and clear policy support for renewable energy developments. The NPPF identifies the wider environmental benefits associated with increased production of energy from renewable sources as being capable of representing a very special circumstance, and numerous appeal decisions in relation to small scale wind turbines show that this argument is commonly accepted by Inspectors as such.

In particular Members are referred to a recent appeal decision (April 2012) whereby a 30 metre wind turbine was allowed in the West Yorkshire Green

Belt (PINS ref: APP/A4710/A/11/2166509). Here the Council refused planning permission as it was considered that the proposal would harm the visual amenity and openness of the Green Belt. However the Inspector considered that the loss of openness would be very limited and the structure would be dwarfed by electricity pylons and other clutter. Moreover the inspector saw the opportunity to generate 181,000 kilowatt-hours of green electricity a year as a significant benefit, while savings in carbon emissions would help counter climate change. Since the NPPF prioritises these issues, he concluded that the benefits outweighed Green Belt harm.

Other decisions of relevance include an appeal against South Staffordshire Council's refusal of planning permission for two 80 metre high wind turbines in the West Midlands Green Belt (PINS ref: APP/C3430/A/10/2132289). Here the Planning Committee refused planning permission contrary to their officer's recommendation for approval as they considered the proposal to harm the openness and visual amenity of the Green Belt, and they did not accept the proposal's contribution towards meeting national and regional renewable energy generation targets as representing a very special circumstance. However the Inspector found that the proposal's contribution to meeting targets for renewable energy generation, and the consequential effect in tackling the challenge of climate change, represents a compelling argument in favour of the proposed wind turbines. The benefits of the scheme were considered to clearly outweigh the harm by virtue of inappropriate development, the limited harm to openness and any other harm so as to justify the proposed scheme on the basis of very special circumstances.

On a more local level Members attention is drawn to Wychavon Council's approval in 2008 of two 33 metre high wind turbines at a farm in Wychbold (Wychavon Council ref. W/08/02650/PN). Here Members of the Planning Committee accepted the 'green' benefits of the proposal as representing a very special circumstance outweighing the proposal's harm to the Green Belt.

Further matters for consideration include the fact that all of the rural areas within the Bromsgrove District are designated Green Belt. All local areas have a responsibility to contribute to energy generation from renewable or low carbon sources and it has been identified that wind energy is a viable technology in many parts of Bromsgrove (Worcestershire Renewable Energy Study, WCC 2008). Thus, if opportunities for wind energy are to be explored in the Bromsgrove District, the location of proposals in the Green Belt is unavoidable. The only alternative to Green Belt developments would be to resist wind energy proposals all together. Given the clear sustainability benefits of the proposal and the limited demonstrable harm to the Green Belt it is argued that this is not an option.

Taking the above matters into consideration, and having regard to the relevant policies of the Development Plan and the NPPF, the proposed turbine is found to present significant benefits that would outweigh any harm by reason of inappropriateness and any harm to the openness and rural character of the Green Belt.

Members will also note that an access track is proposed as part of this proposed development. This would represent an inappropriate form of development in the Green Belt that could have an urbanising effect on the Green Belt. Members should however note that the proposal represents a relatively short extension to the existing track at the site and it is considered that resulting harm would be little over and above the existing situation. In any event it is noted that the track is essential for the construction of the turbine and for its ongoing maintenance. It is considered that the essential auxiliary nature of the track would outweigh its relatively limited harm to the Green Belt. Moreover it is considered that informal tracks are to some extent a typical feature of a farm and it is not considered that the proposal would have any significant effect on rural character. It is noted that no definitive information is provided on the construction and surfacing of the track but such details can be adequately secured by condition. The LPA should ensure that materials of a more natural appearance are used to avoid any unnecessary harm to the Green Belt.

## 2. Landscape impact

Policy CTC.1 of the WCSP provides that in considering development proposals, the Local Planning Authority shall take every opportunity to safeguard, restore or enhance, as appropriate, the landscape character of the area in which they are proposed.

Policy C4 of the BDLP provides that development will not be permitted where it would have a materially detrimental effect on the landscape, in particular within Landscape Protection Areas

To establish the landscape character of the area Worcestershire County Council's Landscape Character Assessment database has been consulted. This indicates that the application site is within a Landscape Character Area (LCA) defined as Principal Timbered Farmlands. The Landscape Type Description for this LCA is:

*“A small to medium scale wooded, agricultural landscape characterised by filtered views through densely scattered hedgerow trees. This is a complex, in places intimate, landscape of irregularly shaped woodlands, winding lanes and frequent wayside dwellings and farmsteads. It is a landscape of great interest and exception, yet also one of balance.”*

It is considered that this description provides an accurate reflection of the landscape of the area in which the site is located. In particular it is noted that views into the site area from the surrounding network of narrow lanes are intermittent and in most cases only available through limited gaps in roadside hedges. It is also noted that the area is of a wooded character with significant individual trees and small areas of woodland being a defining feature of the area's landscape. Other features of the landscape noted from your officer's visit include its undulating topography and various man made additions including electricity pylons and buildings.

A visual assessment of the site carried out by your officer from the surrounding road network (Holyoakes Lane, High House Lane, Sheltwood Lane, Copyholt Lane) indicates that, due to the effect of topography and hedges/trees/woodland, public views of the turbine from the road will be largely limited to hedgerow gaps located within a certain orientation of the site. In particular it is evident that views of the turbine could be gained from field entrances along Holyoakes Lane to the east/north east and from High House Lane/Sheltwood Lane to the west/north west/south west. The most prominent of views of the turbine from the surrounding roads would perhaps be from the higher ground occupied by High House Lane to the north west of the site. The photomontage images submitted with the application provide a view from this vantage point (Photograph 4).

It is considered from this image that the turbine would have a relatively discreet, distant presence. Moreover, given the presence of woodland and pylons in the background and large trees in the foreground it is not considered that the turbine would be in any way obtrusive. In any event Members should be aware that this image represents a forced view from a field entrance. Such views would not be incidental across the wider area. Furthermore Members should note that this view is gained from higher ground and across a relatively open expanse of land. Views of the site from other orientations are even further distracted by pylons, intervening trees or wooded backdrops.

I note the applicant's view that the type of landscape in which the site is located; well wooded with tree and hedges, is robust enough to accommodate some small scale development. I also note the views of the County Council's Conservation and Landscape Officer (CLO) that the turbine would be well screened by mature hedges and trees and that the visual impact of the turbine would be low.

Reference is made by the CLO to the fact that the turbine would be clearly visible from a nearby Public Right of Way however in her view it would be viewed as part of the farming 'clutter' that would normally be seen on a large arable farm and its visual impact is not therefore significant. Concerns in relation to the visual impact of the proposal and the nearby Public Rights of Way are however expressed by the Ramblers Association who are of the view that the proposal will detract from the visual value of the countryside. It is argued by the Ramblers Association that the turbine would be visible across considerable distances and reference is made to views of the Malverns and other hills in west Worcestershire. Similar concerns are expressed by the Campaign to Preserve Rural England (CPRE) who are concerned that the turbine would have a major impact on the landscape for many miles around.

With regard to these comments it is noted by your officer that views of the Malverns can be gained from the public footpaths adjacent to the site, but the

turbine would only obstruct views momentarily given its slim profile. Moreover, it should be noted that such views are already heavily obstructed by the tall masts located at Wychbold and various other disruptions to the landscape such as electricity pylons. The effect of a single small scale wind turbine would be negligible. It is also disputed by your officer that the proposal would be seen over considerable distances. It is accepted that the turbine would be visible to a certain extent from vantage points located up to around 1000m away, but from such distances its visual effect would be faint and not in any way obtrusive. Again Members are referred to the photomontages submitted with the application which show the turbine in situ from public vantage points located between 500-600. These demonstrate the limited visual effect of the proposal from relatively short distances away. In any event, as noted earlier the proposed turbine is considered by your officer to represent an appropriate addition to the rural landscape and the fact that it is perceivable from certain public vantage points does not present me with any concerns.

On the above basis it is considered that the proposal would be well integrated with the landscape and the application would have no conflict with policies CTC.1 and EN.2 of the WCSP and Policy C4 of the BDLP.

### 3. Ecology

Part 11 of the NNPF advises that, when determining planning applications, local planning authorities should aim to conserve and enhance biodiversity. If significant harm resulting from a development cannot be avoided, adequately mitigated, or, as a last resort, compensated for, then planning permission should be refused.

The proposed turbine may potentially affect a number of protected species including bats and birds. The turbine has however been located having regard to Natural England advice in relation to bats and wind turbines within TIN051 which advises that a 50 m buffer should be maintained around any habitat feature (trees, hedges) into which no part of the turbine intrudes (the application proposal provides a 55 metre buffer). Furthermore, a Phase 1 Ecological Assessment has been submitted with the application which concludes that the proposal would not directly affect any roost or foraging or commuting link of bats and the impact would therefore be negligible. In relation to birds the survey concludes that the risk of collision impacts to bird populations as a result of the proposal would be low. There may be potential for a low number of ground or tree/shrub nesting birds to be adversely affected during the removal of arable crops and vegetation associated with the turbine installation, but this can easily be avoided by carrying out the works outside of the bird nesting season. This is a recommendation of the survey and it is recommended by your officer that this is imposed on the applicant by a condition attached to any planning permission granted.

Advice has been gained on the ecological implications of the proposal from Worcestershire Wildlife Trust and Worcestershire County Council's Ecologist and no objections are raised. Thus, on the above basis, the proposal is considered to conserve biodiversity and avoid any harm to protected species in accordance with Policy EN.2 of the WCSP and the advice within the NPPF.

#### 4. Heritage issues

Although the site is located some distance away from the Hewell Grange Conservation Area and walled garden, due to its height it is necessary to consider the effect of the turbine on the significance of these heritage assets.

Policy S35A of the BDLP requires new development in or adjacent to Conservation Areas to be sympathetic to the character of buildings. Policy S48 provides that planning permission will not be granted for development which would have an adverse effect on the character and setting of historic parks and gardens. National policy advice at paragraph 132 of the NPPF states that:

*“When considering the impact of a proposed development on the significance of a designated heritage asset, great weight should be given to the asset’s conservation. The more important the asset, the greater the weight should be. Significance can be harmed or lost through alteration or destruction of the heritage asset or development within its setting.”*

It is the effect of the proposal on the setting of the identified heritage assets that requires consideration.

To assist in establishing the turbine’s effect on setting regard has been paid to English Heritage Guidance within ‘Wind Energy and the Historic Environment’ (October 2005). This advises that matters relating to visual dominance, scale, intervisibility, vistas and sight lines, movement, sound or light effects and unaltered settings are of relevance when considering the effect of a wind turbine.

An assessment of the proposal has been made by the Council’s Conservation Officer (CO) having regard to the above document. It is noted by the CO that the application site, when viewed from the historic garden, would appear to be well screened by trees and hedges. It is also noted that a number of small electricity pylons are visible from the Garden, so the landscape to the south west cannot be described as completely unspoilt or unaltered. It is therefore not considered by the CO that the proposed wind turbine will have a negative impact on the setting of the Walled Garden and the Hewell Grange Conservation area.

English Heritage have been notified of the application having regard to Circular 01/01 (Arrangements for handling heritage applications - notification and directions by the Secretary of State) as it involves the erection of a structure of more than 20 metres in height and it may potentially affect the character and appearance of the Conservation Area. It is their view however that the development will not have any impact on any principal heritage assets.

Taking the above matters into consideration it is considered that the proposal would have no conflict with the relevant heritage related policies.

#### 5. Noise and residential amenity impacts

The proposed wind turbine will inevitably create a certain level of noise from the rotation of the blades.

Policy ES14A of the BDLP provides that proposals for potentially noisy developments must be located in areas where noise will not be such an important consideration.

Advice on noise and other pollutants at paragraph 123 of the NPPF states that:

*“Planning policies and 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;*
- *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.”*

To assist in establishing the noise impact of the proposal on the amenity of residential properties regard has been paid to ‘ETSU-R-97 – The Assessment and Rating of Noise from Wind Farms’ (produced by ETSU for the Department of Trade and Industry in 1996). This is the most widely accepted document for wind farm noise assessment and the industry standard used in noise surveys.

For locations with low background noise levels ETSU-R-97 recommends that noise levels at the nearest noise sensitive receptor (i.e. a dwelling) should be limited to the range of 35dB(A) to 40dB(A) during the daytime and 43dB(A) during the night time.

The manufacturer’s noise data submitted with the application indicates that, based on a wind speed of 5 m/s (average wind speed at the site is 6 m/s),

noise from the turbine won't be heard at a distance of 144 metres away. At a higher wind speed of 10 m/s the distance at which the turbine is inaudible is reduced to 135 metres away. This is due to the fact that the background wind noise level increases at higher wind speeds.

In this instance the nearest residential property is 500 metres away. Thus, having regard to this data it is considered that no noise from the turbine would be experienced at the nearest residential property. Members will also note that no adverse comments are made on the application by Worcestershire Regulatory Services.

Further to noise issues, wind turbines can also have an effect on residential amenity through shadow flicker. This is where, at certain times of day, the sun may pass behind the rotors of a wind turbine and cast a shadow over neighbouring properties. The companion guide to PPS22 (Planning for Renewable Energy: A Companion Guide to PPS22) states that:

*“Shadow flicker can be mitigated by siting wind turbines at sufficient distance from residences likely to be affected. Flicker effects have been proven to occur only within ten rotor diameters of a turbine. Therefore if the turbine has 80m diameter blades, the potential shadow flicker effect could be felt up to 800m from a turbine.”*

In this instance the diameter of the rotor blades is 19.2 metres thus at 192 metres away from the turbine no shadow flicker effects will be experienced.

On the above basis it is considered that the proposed turbine will have no adverse impacts on the health, quality of life or residential amenity of any of the surrounding properties. The proposal is therefore considered to be in accordance with Policy EN.2 of the WCSP, policies ES14 and ES14A of the BDLP and the relevant advice within the NPPF.

## 6. Other considerations

Consideration is required in relation to the logistics associated with transporting the turbine to the site. Members will note the initial views of the Highways Authority and the request for further information in relation to the size of the vehicles accessing the site, the number of trips to install the turbine and tracking details of the vehicles at sensitive junctions and bends.

It is understood from the applicant that the turbine would be delivered via 3 no. 40' articulated lorries. The crane used to construct the turbine would also be delivered on a 40' articulated lorry. The turbine would be erected over the course of two days. No information has been provided in relation to tracking details.

Further verbal advice has been received from the Highways Authority. It is understood that a suitable route to the site for construction vehicles can be identified. It is important to ensure that the identified route is followed so to avoid any unacceptable conflicts with other road users. It is recommended that a condition is placed on any planning permission granted requiring the pre-commencement approval of the LPA of detailed information relating to the route of construction vehicles. Subject to compliance with such a condition the Highways Authority raise no objection to the matter. Members will be updated with the full written views of the Highways Authority prior to their meeting.

Other highways matters of relevance include the concern raised by CPRE that the turbine would cause a distraction to drivers using the busy A448. It is however considered that that the turbine would be relatively inconspicuous from this vantage and these concerns are not shared by your officer or the Highways Authority. Moreover, drivers are faced with a number of varied and competing distractions during any normal journey. It is not considered that wind turbines are any different from other distractions a driver must face and should not be considered particularly hazardous.

Members will note that the application has received both objection and support from local residents. Objections are raised due to concerns over the Green Belt, ecological impacts, noise impacts, landscape harm, the visual impact from residential properties and health issues. Concerns are also raised over the proposal setting a precedent for further turbines at the site and in the wider area. Furthermore views are expressed over the proposal representing an inefficient technology. The representations supporting the proposal do not provide any specific reasons.

Members should also note that the applicant has carried out a pre-application community consultation exercise. This has gained 54 signatures of support for the proposed turbine from local residents. Reasons for support include the 'green' benefits of the proposal, the lack of any neighbours within 500 metres of the site thus no noise issues, and the benefits to the farm. Although these representations have not been made as a result of the Council's own statutory publicity procedure, I am mindful of the encouragement given at paragraph 189 of the NPPF towards pre-application community engagement. These representations should therefore be given weight in the determination of the application.

With regard to the objections raised, it is considered that issues relating to the Green Belt, ecology, the landscape, noise, residential amenity and the viability of the proposal are sufficiently addressed above. I note the concerns in relation to this proposal setting a precedent for further turbines however Members are reminded that each case should be determined on its own merits. Granting planning permission for this proposal will not compromise the Council's ability to refuse any future applications for wind turbines at the

site or in the wider area which they consider to be unacceptable in planning terms.

I also note the concerns made in relation to the visual impact of the turbine from residential properties. Members are however referred to the assessment of the proposal's landscape impact set out earlier in this report. The nearest residential properties are located along the surrounding roads. It is demonstrated in this report that the turbine would not be obtrusively visible from the surrounding roads and it is not considered to have an adverse effect on the character of the landscape. The visual impact on the nearby residential properties is therefore considered to be negligible.

With regard to the proposal causing health issues, the application demonstrates that noise from the turbine will not be experienced at any of the nearest residential properties thus I would not have any concerns in relation to this matter.

### Conclusion

The proposal is found to represent an inappropriate form of development in the Green Belt that would harm the openness of the Green Belt. The level of harm is not however considered to be significant due to the small surface area and slim profile of the structure. It is considered that the clean energy that would be generated by the proposal and the resultant reduction in carbon dioxide emissions would represent significant benefits that would outweigh the identified harm to the Green Belt.

The visual impact of the proposal is considered to be relatively low and it is considered that the turbine would be well integrated within the landscape of the area.

The proposal is found to have no adverse heritage impacts, no adverse ecological impacts and no adverse effect on the amenity of surrounding residential occupiers.

The proposal is found to be in accordance with the relevant policies of the adopted Development Plan and the relevant provisions of the NPPF. There are no other material considerations that would warrant the refusal of planning permission. The proposed development is considered to represent a sustainable form of development and it is recommended that planning permission is granted.

**RECOMMENDATION:** that permission is **GRANTED**

### **Conditions:**

1. C001 (three year time limit for commencement of works).

2. C001A (development must be carried out in accordance with the approved plans. The turbine to be installed at the site shall be an Endurance E-3120 50kW model unless otherwise agreed in writing by the Local Planning Authority).
3. All electricity lines connecting to the turbine shall be laid under ground. A scaled plan indicating the route of trenching required for connecting the turbine to Thriftwood Farm and the National Grid shall be submitted to, and approved in writing by, the Local Planning Authority prior to the commencement of development. The development shall be carried out in accordance with the approved details.
4. The materials to be used for the approved access track shall be submitted to, any approved in writing by, the Local Planning Authority prior to the commencement of development. The development shall be carried out in accordance with the approved details.
5. Prior to the commencement of the development hereby approved a Traffic Management Plan shall be submitted to, any approved in writing by, the Local Planning Authority. The plan shall include details of the route to be used to access the site by delivery and construction vehicles. The delivery and construction of the turbine shall be carried out in accordance with the approved plan unless otherwise agreed in writing by the Local Planning Authority.
6. The development shall be carried out in accordance with the recommendations set out at Part 7 of the approved Phase 1 Ecological Assessment conducted by Landscape Science Consultancy Ltd and received by the Council on 08/06/12.
7. In the event of the permanent cessation of the use of the turbine, or it failing to produce electricity for a period of 12 months or more, the turbine (including its tower) and the associated access track approved by this permission shall be permanently removed and the site restored to its former condition not later than 6 months from the date of cessation in accordance with a scheme previously submitted to, and approved in writing by, the Local Planning Authority.

**Notes:**

This decision has been taken having regard to the policies within the West Midlands Spatial Strategy, the Worcestershire County Structure Plan (WCSP) June 2001, the Bromsgrove District Local Plan January 2004 (BDLP) and other material considerations as summarised below:

WMSS: QE1, EN1  
 WCSP: SD.2, CTC.1, CTC.2, CTC.19, CTC.20, D.38, D.39, EN.2, T.1  
 BDLP: DS2, DS13, C4, S35A, S48, ES14A  
 Draft CS2: CP3, CP22, CP16, CP17, CP19  
 Others: NPPF, Planning for Renewable Energy: A Companion Guide to PPS22

It is the Council's view that the proposed development complies with the provisions of the Development Plan and the National Planning Policy

Framework 2012 and that, on balance, there are no justifiable reasons to refuse planning permission.