

Name of Applicant Type of Certificate	Proposal	Map/Plan Policy	Plan Ref. Expiry Date
Mr. P. Hirons 'A'	Erection of two wind generators and creation of associated access track at E:391641 N:271551 - Land off Kidderminster Road, Woodcote Green, Bromsgrove	GB	09/1003-JT 29.04.2010

RECOMMENDATION: that permission be **GRANTED**.

Consultations

WH Consulted: 22.12.2009. Response received: 23.12.2009. No objection.

Further comment received 23.02.2010 in relation to request by objector for a condition relating to construction access as follows:

I do not consider that a condition is necessary in this instance as I do not believe that construction would be a sustained movement. The site is very close to the principal road network so access is good and there is only a short distance on country lanes to access the site. How the materials access the site should be handled at the construction planning stage (post planning decision) and we should be aware of section 59 of the Highways Act 1980 that allows for recovery of expenditure due to damage of a highway.

EA Consulted: 22.12.2009. Response received: 07.01.2010.
Does not wish to comment on the proposals.

EHO Consulted: 22.12.2009. Response received: 27.01.2010; further comments received: 28.01.2010.

No objection to the proposals subject to a condition restricting noise emissions from the turbines to a level no greater than $L_{A90,10min}$ of 35dBA, in accordance with ETSU-R-97 'Assessment and Rating of Noise from Wind Farms'.

Paragraph 25 of ETSU-R-97 states that if the noise is limited to this level, a condition alone should offer sufficient protection of amenity, and background surveys would be unnecessary. This simplified condition is advocated for such situations as single turbines, or wind farms with large separation distances from residential properties.

Engineers / Drainage Consulted: 22.12.2009. Response received: 10.01.2010.

No objection, subject to the imposition of a condition on the disposal of storm water.

Woodland Officer Consulted: 22.12.2009. No response received.

Climate Change Manager Consulted 28.01.2010. Response received: 02.02.2010.

Wholly supportive of the application. Notes the following:-

The renewable energy policy background, nationally, is very robust. The Climate Change Act (2008) places a legislative duty on the UK to reduce its CO₂ emissions by 80% from 1990 levels by 2050. In addition, its delivery plan, the 'Low Carbon Transition Plan' indicates development of renewable energy will be a key element of achieving this target. The Renewable Energy Strategy (2009) sets out how the UK will achieve 15% energy from renewables by 2020 under the EU Renewable Energy Directive - a seven-fold increase on 2008 levels. Any contribution made to this locally will be relevant and welcomed, based on diversifying the UK energy mix away from fossil fuel derived power and promoting security of supply.

As part of the Local Strategic Partnership, the Bromsgrove Community Strategy (2010 - 2013), under the Environment theme, has two priorities, both relating to climate change but one specifically relating to NI186 - reducing per capita CO₂ emissions in the area, of which this proposal would contribute - (specifically the *PRIORITY*: To increase energy efficiency and increase the proportion of energy generated from renewable sources).

In addition, the Council, along with the Worcestershire Local Strategic Partnership's Local Area Agreement, has an agreed target to reduce overall CO₂ emissions by 3% year on year. Any locally installed renewable energy system will contribute significantly to this aim.

Worcestershire County Council's Technical Working Paper on Renewable Energy (2009) indicates that wind power is one of the most appropriate renewable energy technologies for our County and is a proven technology: "Large areas of the County have average wind speeds sufficient for the generation of energy from wind turbines, with the greatest potential in Bromsgrove and Wychavon districts." Their associated Renewable Energy Capacity Study (2008) indicates that wind speeds are strong and consistent enough in the area of the planning application to provide viable wind energy generation.

In terms of the benefits of wind turbine derived power over other renewables include the low overall life cycle impact of manufacturing, maintaining and eventual disposal of the wind turbine components (which are almost entirely reusable or recyclable) so this type of renewable energy technology is particularly low in terms of environmental and resource impact.

The ongoing benefits of clean electricity generation from wind are very high and as such, in my opinion, over-ride any objection based on visual disruption. I also note Natural England's favourable response to the plans.

Natural
England

Consulted: 22.12.2009. Response received: 08.01.2010.

No objection to the proposed development. Landscape and visual impacts are limited as the area is not within a nationally or locally

designated landscape and views for those enjoying the countryside are primarily short distance from local public rights of way. The ecological appraisal does not consider the turbines to pose any risk to ecology. Recommends that the turbines are installed with Natural England's interim guidance on bats and onshore wind turbines.

Worcestershire
Wildlife Trust

Consulted: 22.12.2009. Response received verbally: 31.03.2010.

No objection to the proposals.

Dodford with
Grafton Parish
Council

Consulted: 22.12.2009. Response received: 26.01.2010.

Objects to the proposals. Comparable reference is made to the consented turbines at Brine Pits Farm, Wychbold, which are smaller and feel that the noise impact is less of a problem in that location, than it would be on the subject application, because of the relentless noise from the M5 motorway.

Whilst this Parish is in support of sustainable and renewable energy (e.g. the Parish support of the sustainable bio-mass boiler in the Village Hall), the application would still remain in the Green Belt and would have direct impact on neighbouring golf range and potential detrimental effect on the golf range.

Application site does not fall within a landscape protection area but it is close to it.

It is recognised that each application has to be judged on its merits. In the absence of specific local development policy with Bromsgrove District with regards to wind turbines we would judge that there are no very special circumstances to justify approval of this development in this location.

Wychavon DC

Consulted: 22.12.2009. Response received: 23.12.2009.

The application site is in the Green Belt outside the boundary of Wychavon District Council. The application should be considered in line with PPG2 - Green Belts.

Any affected neighbouring residents within Wychavon District should be notified of this development also. [Officer's note: it is not this Council's policy to consult residential properties unless they immediately abut the application site, which is not the case in this instance.]

Wychavon has approved 3 similar wind turbines within Upton Warren Parish earlier this year. [N.B. these applications are referred to in the report below.]

Councillor Mrs.
J. A. Pearce
(Wychavon DC
ward councillor)

Consulted: 22.12.2009. Response received: 12.01.2010.

The existing turbines in Wychavon are considerably smaller at about 33 metres than the present proposal at 42 metres to the blade tips, and are not on rising ground, both factors which I would suggest would greatly

increase the impact of the proposed turbines on the openness of the Green Belt. Additionally, there are several residential and business properties well within a 500 metres radius of the proposal where amenity may well be affected by shadow flicker.

If the Council is minded to grant permission, conditions should be attached similar to those imposed on Wychavon DC permission 07/00513 in June 2007. This permission was to the same applicant on an immediately adjoining site, and the conditions restricted hours of operation for construction, and access to and from the site only via Kidderminster Road as Berry Lane southwards and lanes off it (New House Lane, Timberhonger, and Swan Lane and Coley Pits Lane to the A38) are totally unsuitable for heavy construction and maintenance traffic.

[Officer's note: this application related to the retention of a mixed use agricultural and depot operation, including a base for a drilling, cabling and trenching contractor. The effects of such a use would be significantly different to the proposed use, and are therefore considered to be of only limited relevance to the application proposals. In the absence of any objection from County Highways, conditions controlling hours of operation and access arrangements are not considered to be necessary.]

Several further emails have been received from Councillor Pearce reiterating concerns over the suitability of lanes to the south of the site for heavy construction access and the request for a condition controlling construction access. The Worcestershire Highways's response to this request is given above. Officer's views are further set out in the 'Highways' section below.

The Joint Radio Company Ltd. Consulted: 22.12.2009. Response received: 23.12.2009.

JRC analyses proposals for wind farms on behalf of the UK fuel and power industries. This is to assess their potential to interfere with radio systems operated by utility companies in support of their regulatory operational requirements. JRC does not foresee any potential problems based on known interference scenarios and the data provided. However, if any details of the wind farm change, particularly the disposition or scale of any turbine(s), it will be necessary to re-evaluate the proposal.

National Grid - Transco Consulted: 22.12.2009. No response received.

NATS (Civil Aviation Authority) Consulted: 22.12.2009. Response received: 05.02.2010.

NATS is responsible for the safe and expeditious movement in the en-route phase of flight for aircraft operating in controlled airspace in the UK. It has no safeguarding objection to the proposals.

Publicity Site Notice posted 08.01.2010; expired 29.01.2010. (NB. The notice was reported as removed / damaged in week commencing 25.01.2010.

Another notice was posted 29.01.2010 with an extended consultation deadline of 05.02.2010.)

Press Notice (Bromsgrove Standard): published 01.04.2010; expires 15.04.2010.

No notification letters were originally sent, as the identified application site does not immediately abut property in third party ownership. A further consultation has been carried out in response to members' request for additional neighbour notifications to be carried out.

Objections were originally received from 10 nearby properties. The following points are raised:

- The proposal would be a blot on the landscape and an eyesore to all neighbours. Views from houses would be adversely affected.
- When one turbine is erected it will be likely that more will get planning approval compounding the nuisance.
- Noise generated will develop into a constant and never relenting nuisance. There is evidence that suggests wind turbines emit high levels of low frequency noise from the mechanical gearing systems but more importantly the majority of the noise is from the wind going through the rotating blades.
- There are several papers that have been written that give evidence that the wind turbines produce noise pollution and can have a detrimental effect on the well being of humans that live within a 1.5km proximity. These papers are as follows: Wind Turbines: Noise and Health by Dr. A. Harry; Noise Radiation from Wind Turbines Installed near Homes: Effects on Health by B. J. Frey, M. A. and P. J. Hadden BSc FRICS; and Wind Turbine Syndrome by Dr. N. Pierpont.
- Light flickering as a result of the rotation of the blades.
- This sort of installation should be designated to specially selected "wind farm" sites away from residences.
- They are far too tall.
- Total power provided by wind generation is 1/10th of 1% of all power produced in the UK. This will add nothing apart from nuisance.
- Distraction and a hazard for passing motorists.
- Danger to micro light and hot air balloon pilots who frequently use the route.
- RAF jets carry out low flying exercises across the route.
- There is no technical information that supports the application (e.g. how much electricity would be generated against the energy expended in importing and erecting the turbines.)
- There are no calculations on the viability of the project.
- Impacts on birds and wildlife. A full study should be undertaken. [Officer's note: the application is accompanied by an Ecological Appraisal.]
- The planning application does not state the amount of MW installed capacity the wind turbines will have.

- The position of the wind turbines can infringe on the human rights local residents, since they will affect people's homes and privacy rights.
- Surely wind turbines are better sited in open countryside / costal areas, where there are no residential dwellings and so therefore cannot have an adverse impact on the health of nearby residents.
- In principle support from two objectors for the proposals for environmentally friendly energy.
- Officers' attention is drawn to the requirements of PPS22 on Renewable Energy and, in particular, the need to assess renewable energy projects against specific criteria set out in development plans. It is suggested that, if the Council has not yet produced such criteria, the application should be put on hold. [Officer's note: The recommendation to planning committee is made in light of the requirements of PPS22. The Worcestershire County Structure Plan has a specific criteria-based policy on wind turbines (EN.2) and landscape assessment criteria are set out in Structure Plan policies CTC.1 and CTC.2, and Local Plan policy C4. The proposals have been assessed against these criteria, as is set out in the report.]
- The turbines are to be placed in close proximity to an area of outstanding natural beauty at Woodcote Green where the Chaddesley Woods are a designated National Nature Reserve forming part of the Worcestershire Wildlife Trust. [Officer's note: the site is not near to any designated Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). As is noted below, the area to the north of Kidderminster Road is a designated Landscape Protection Area.]
- The area is already blighted by the erection of a network of electricity pylons that crisscross the landscape in all directions - the erection of large wind turbines would add insult to injury with the landscape and will further blight this area of outstanding natural beauty.
- There will be alternative areas to place wind turbines where the landscape is not so sensitive to the erection of such large electronic structures. Therefore placing them next to an environmentally important national nature reserve should be seen as unacceptable. Alternative sites should therefore be sought.
- In addition the Chaddesley Woods are a significant nature conservation area, where key research programmed by Birmingham University into the habitat and ornithological wildlife has been ongoing for several years - the wind turbines will be of harm and represent an unwelcome intrusion into an area that is sensitive for breeding and habitat purposes.
- Those in close proximity to the turbines have not been notified.
- The proposals would be a considerable eyesore in this Green Belt location and may have a detrimental effect on property values.
- Whether the proposals will work as a green energy generator is open to doubt.
- The application should be deferred to allow time for local residents to consider, discuss and prepare a detailed response to the proposals.

2 letters were received from the proprietor of the adjacent Woodcote Golf Driving Range:

- The nearest generator would be approximately 130 metres from the driving range buildings and 15 metres from the boundary with the driving range. [Officer's note: the owner of the site later agreed verbally during a site inspection that the former distance is an underestimate, and the distance is actually approximately 170 metres.]
- The proprietor and his wife spend a significant amount of time at the premises, and are therefore concerned about noise levels.
- The bays in the driving range face southward looking towards the generators, which could be a distraction and result in sun shadow flicker.
- No objection in principle, but the location is unacceptable when there is a larger field to the north and an additional field to the south.
- The business would be blighted and would possibly not be viable due to loss of trade. The business is the owner's main livelihood and losing it would be a significant financial burden.

A further letter from the proprietor of Woodcote Golf Driving Range has since been received. It comments that when a customer is on the range about to drive a ball from the mat, they need to have concentration using both eye and hand co-ordination along the driving line to the south - the constant rotation of the turbine blades 150 metres to the south west in conjunction with the sun shade flicker would be a complete distraction when about to hit the ball. Noise levels being so close are also of great concern and probably injurious to health. The proposals may lead to the demise of the golf range business.

2 letters of support have been received from nearby properties making the following comments:

- The UK is faced with a significant energy crisis in the next ten years and it will take extraordinary efforts to provide sufficient electrical capacity to meet our national needs. It is essential that the decline in supplies of coal and oil be offset by new energy sources and that, to the largest degree possible, those new energy sources be renewable resources.
- It is not unusual in situations like this for everyone to agree but then to individually state - "not in my backyard". If we are to rise to the challenge of increasing UK energy production the NIMBY response is unacceptable.
- The turbines will not be of any detriment to, or an eyesore in, the local landscape which already has electricity pylons located in the vicinity.

Since additional consultation was carried out, at the time of writing, 4 further objections have been received from individual local residents. The comments made may be summarised as follows:

- Papers prepared by eminent people indicate that it is not safe to reside within 1.5 km of a wind turbine (these are the papers

referenced above). This clearly must be taken seriously by Bromsgrove District Council and be understood by all who might suffer - not just those living within 350 metres. Has everyone within 1.5 km been told of the risks and if not, why not?

- There must be more suitable sites for wind turbines in the District outside of Green Belt land. The Worcester County Council's Technical Working Paper & Renewable Energy (2009), referred to by the Climate Change Officer, indicates that large areas of the County have average wind speeds sufficient for the generation of energy from wind turbines, so other non-Green Belt site should be considered.
- The proposed surplus energy benefits are likely to be significantly exaggerated. Therefore, the very special circumstances identified do not exist. Copies of articles from the Daily Telegraph have been submitted in support of this argument.
- Approving the application in advance of an Overall Climate Change Plan is inappropriate and possibly negligent. The Council must consider all the serious implications for its local residents and established where best it can meet its Renewable Energy targets with the least number of turbines, damage to the landscape and risk to people's health. It would be negligent to do otherwise and leaves Bromsgrove District Council and its Officers open to complaints and claims for damages. It would also set an extremely dangerous precedent which could prove disastrous as other applications follow, as they will when the lucrative subsidies become clear to financially struggling farmers and landowners.
- Given the serious implications the Overall Climate Change Plan for Bromsgrove District Council must come first and it must be widely published, with all local residents informed and consulted. Then future applications can be fast tracked and approved according to the agreed plan.
- Concern over indiscriminate placing of turbines across the countryside, as odd turbines are an eyesore. The countryside needs to be protected and not scarred with random turbines.
- Light flicker directly into home. A survey on this matter is requested.
- The turbines will seriously impair outlook from residential properties.

A letter has been received containing the names of 36 residents of Berry Lane, Kidderminster Road, Woodcote Green and Woodcote Lane. This letter has been copied to Members of the Planning Committee. The letter requests that the applicant should be refused to avoid setting a dangerous precedent, until such time as the Council has considered its overall Renewable Energy Strategy, it has been broadly published and its implications have been discussed with interested members of the public. It also states the application should be refused as:

- The site is Green Belt land - officers concede that the development is inappropriate development in the Green Belt, would have a material impact on the openness of the Green Belt, and would be harmful to the Green Belt.

- Residents supporting the objection mostly live to the north of Kidderminster Road, designated a Landscape Protection Area - there will be considerable visual landscape damage from some properties and for walkers enjoying the hills adjacent to Chaddesley Woods.
- There is evidence to suggest that wind turbines produce noise pollution and can have a detrimental effect on the well being of humans that live within a 1.5 km proximity. Press reports have indicated that one in six wind farms prompt noise complaints.
- The site is only 350 metres away from residential properties, posing potential health hazards.
- Given worries over health it is outrageous that consultation has only been extended to 500 metres. Surely it is negligent of Bromsgrove District Council not to extend to 1.5 km as a minimum and advise residents of the serious effects of property blight and potential harm to health.
- The applicant has demonstrated absolutely no very special circumstances. [Officer's note: the very special circumstances put forward by the applicant are set out in the 'Environmental benefits' section below.]
- The land is unsuitable for wind generation.
- The driving force for approval of the application should not be a lucrative subsidy scheme set up by the Government for individual applications.
- The residents will enlist the support of the new prospective Conservative MP for Bromsgrove, inform the media on these important issues and risks, and obtain outline legal advice. If necessary, in due course, the residents may refer the matter to the Secretary of State to seek his / her views on whether 'very special circumstances' exist in this case to allow 'inappropriate development on allocated Green Belt land'.

The site and its surroundings

The application site lies at the edge of Bromsgrove District, approximately 400 metres south of Kidderminster Road near to Woodcote Green. The site is a similar distance east of Berry Lane, from which it is accessed, which runs in a southerly direction from Kidderminster Road. The site is in agricultural use and is located within the designated Green Belt. The land on the holding which the proposal relates to is relatively flat in all directions, rising gently to the north.

It is surrounded by open countryside with sporadic agricultural and residential buildings. Immediately to the north of the site lies the Woodcote Green Golf Driving Range. A National Grid pylon power line runs approximately 350 metres to the south west of the site.

Proposal

The application seeks planning permission for two wind generator turbines each having a height of 30 metres to the top of the pole. The turbines would have three rotor blades,

with a radius adding a further height of 12 metres, giving a total height of 42 metres when the rotation of the blade is at its fullest extent. The pole would have a diameter of approximately 2.5 metres at the base, tapering to 1.5 metres at the top. The turbines would be programmed to run when the wind speed is greater than 3 metres per second (m/s). According to the applicant, Government information indicates that the average wind speed at the site is 5.5 m/s.

The turbines would be located approximately 350 metres away from residential properties to the west of Berry Lane (the nearest to the site), 400 metres away from Little Durrance Farm and 500 metres to developments at Dodds Corner on Kidderminster Road. As is noted above, the buildings associated with the golf driving range are approximately 170 metres away.

According to the applicant's statement, the wind generators would provide sufficient energy to power the farm and deliver surplus energy to the National Grid. The farm is currently powered by a geothermal pump so only a small amount from the turbines will be used by the house with the greater part being surplus. The applicant has stated that the annual output for the turbines will be 525,600 kWh/y.

According to the Technical Annex to the Companion Guide to PPS22, a typical three blade turbine with of a similar size to those proposed would have an installed capacity of 100 kW, and would be capable of generating approximately 260,000 kWh per year, or enough electricity to supply 64 homes (based on the average UK household consumption of 4100 kWh/y). This would give a total figure of 520,000 kWh/y (or 128 homes), which broadly confirms the applicant's figure above. The Council's Climate Change Manager advises that average household consumption of electricity is around 3,300 kWh/y, which would mean that the proposal would generate enough power to serve approximately 157 homes.

Previous planning committee and new information

The application was brought before the 1st March Planning Committee, at which it was deferred in order that:

- a) further publicity could be given to the application by way of a press notice in a suitable local newspaper and an extraordinary neighbour notification process to encompass identifiable neighbouring occupiers within a 500 metre radius of the proposed wind generator masts; [NB. This has since been carried out, up to a distance of 600 metres at the case officer's discretion, to ensure that each property in the nearest groups of houses was encompassed. Subsequent responses are set out in the consultation section above.]
- b) a request be made of the applicant to provide clarification of siting and scale issues, to include suitable photographic montage perspective illustrations, together with clarification of issues concerning noise levels arising from the development; and
- c) a request be made of the applicant to investigate alternative sites for the proposed wind generator masts.

The applicant has confirmed in writing that no changes will be made to the scheme and that the application should therefore be determined as submitted, and that no photo-montage is to be prepared. However, the applicant has submitted further information in support of the application set out in the following paragraphs.

Planning Policy Statement: March 2010 Planning for a Low Carbon Future in a Changing Climate

- Since the 1st March Planning Committee a Draft Planning Policy Statement on Planning for a Low Carbon Future in a Changing Climate has been published.
- Its objectives are to ensure that Councils plan for renewable energy. It states all planning strategies, and the decisions taken in support of them, must reflect the Government's ambition to help business and communities build a low carbon future and prepare for the impacts of climate change.
- Policy LCF 14.1 seeks to ensure local planning authorities development management does not prevent, delay or inhibit proposals for renewable and low carbon energy, and associated infrastructure, which could be permitted having regard to the objectives and policies in this PPS.
- Policy LCF14.2 states that in determining planning applications for the development of renewable or low carbon energy, and associated infrastructure, local planning authorities should:
 - i) expect applicants to have taken appropriate steps to mitigate any adverse impacts through careful consideration of location, scale, design and other measures, including through ensuring all reasonable steps have been taken, and will be taken, to minimise noise impacts;
 - ii) give significant weight to the wider environmental, social and economic benefits of renewable or low-carbon energy projects whatever their scale, recognising that small-scale projects provide a valuable contribution to cutting greenhouse gas emissions, and not reject planning applications simply because the level of output, or number of buildings supplied, is small;
- Targets to be met nationally and locally are viewed as minimal.
- The applicant has had regard to the issues in Policy LCF 14.2i and the proposal would make a tangible contribution to renewable energy generation.

In the opinion of officers, as this document is only in draft form at present, only limited importance may be attached to it. Nevertheless, it is considered that the document adds some further weight to the officer's recommendation. In particular, Members should note that Draft Policy LCF14 states that local planning authorities (1) should not unnecessarily prevent, delay or inhibit renewable projects which could be permitted; (2) should give significant weight to wider environmental, social and economic benefits; (3) expect applicants to have taken appropriate steps to mitigate any adverse impacts and demonstrate very special circumstances (such as wider environmental benefits) in the Green Belt. An application should not be refused simply because it falls outside the broad area for renewable energy development identified in Regional Strategies or renewable energy targets have been reached. Also, applicants should not be required to demonstrate the overall need for proposals.

Ecology

- An amended version of the Ecological Appraisal has been submitted setting out further information on the national nature reserve and SSSI along with consideration of the impact of the proposal on these areas. These are noted in the main report below. This concludes there will be no adverse impact.

Noise at the Driving Range

- Under the terms of PPS22 the driving range is not 'noise sensitive' development as it is not an outdoor activity where a quiet environment is highly desirable.
- An update from the acoustic consultant who prepared the Noise Assessment has been received, which considers the noise impact of the proposal on the golf driving range, concluding that the level of noise would be well below the lowest level of noise at which people might be annoyed as set out in the World Health Organisation Guidelines for Community Noise (1999). This is set out in further detail below.

Visual Impact on the Driving Range

- The blades of the generators will be viewed at an acute angle for the majority of the time because the driving range lies north of the site and the prevailing wind direction is from the south west.
- The acute angle of view would mean any potential for disturbance as sighted by the driving range operator is misconceived.

Economic Impact on the Driving Range

- This a private facility visited by golf enthusiasts. It has no public benefit and is of appeal only to people with a specific interest in golf. It offers a recreational activity available in a number of locations around the District and is not unique or offering a facility of more than local interest. Any perceived harm to the operation of the driving range would be outweighed by the acknowledged benefits in terms of renewable energy generation.

Alternative Locations

- Certain criteria make this location highly suitable for the proposal when considered against other locations and constraints in the District. The generators can only be located where natural resources allow; i.e. where the wind blows, where a connection to the National Grid can be provided and where there is a willing landowner.
- This location is outside of the more sensitive areas of the District which are designated as Landscape Protection Areas, nature reserves and SSSIs. It is outside of any conservation areas, away from listed buildings or scheduled ancient monuments. The whole District is within the Green Belt so no alternatives outside Green Belt are available.
- The quality and value of the landscape in this location is limited.

The Balance

- The benefits of the proposal outweigh the harm to the amenity of residents, the landscape impact, and the visual and economic impact on the recreational activity at the driving range. The economic and environmental benefits outweigh the environmental impacts.

Relevant Planning History

No planning history relates to the site. The adjacent Woodcote Golf Driving Range was allowed at appeal under reference B/2003/1139 and amended by permission B/2005/1083.

Also of relevance are two recent planning permissions granted by the neighbouring Wychavon District Council for similar developments to the application proposals at Brine Pits Farm, Brine Pits Lane, Wychbold. This site is located approximately 3 miles to the south of the application site. The first (08/02650) allowed for two turbines with a poll height of 22 metres with rotor blades of 10.8 metres - i.e. a total height of 32.8 metres. This scheme has since been implemented. The second (09/02140) allowed a single turbine with poll height of 30 metres, blade height 13.5 metres - total height 43.5 metres. This permission has not to date been implemented.

Relevant Policies

WMSS	QE1, EN1, EN2, Draft Policy SR1c
WCSP	CTC.1, CTC.2, CTC.7, D.38, D.39, EN.2, SD.2
BDLP	C1, C4, C31, C32, DS1, DS2, DS13, ES1, ES6, S19
Others	PPS1, PPG2, PPS22, Planning for Renewable Energy: A Companion Guide to PPS22, ETSU-R-97 Assessment and Rating of Noise from Wind Farms, Draft Planning Policy Statement: Planning for a Low Carbon Future in a Changing Climate

Notes

It is considered that the main issues in determining the application are:

- the appropriateness of the development in the Green Belt;
- the extent to which the proposal would help to achieve wider environmental benefits, such as reducing harmful emissions to the atmosphere and increasing energy generation capacity from renewable sources;
- the impact on the landscape and visual amenity, and areas of ecological or historic significance;
- the impact on surrounding residents and properties, including noise issues; and
- the compatibility of the proposals with farm diversification policies.

Appropriateness in context of Green Belt policy

Policy D.39 of the County Structure Plan states that there will be a presumption against allowing inappropriate development in the Green Belt, reflecting the advice contained in national planning guidance PPG2: Green Belts. Inappropriate development is, by

definition, harmful to the Green Belt. Policy D.38 of the Structure Plan and policy DS2 of the Local Plan are in general accordance with PPG2 in resisting development in the Green Belt unless proposals fall within a defined list of appropriate development.

Para. 13 of PPS22: Renewable Energy states that:

"when located in the Green Belt, elements of many renewable energy projects will comprise inappropriate development, which may impact on the openness of the Green Belt. Careful consideration will therefore need to be given to the visual impact of projects, and developers will need to demonstrate very special circumstances that clearly outweigh any harm by reason of inappropriateness and any other harm if projects are to proceed. Such very special circumstances may include the wider environmental benefits associated with increased production of energy from renewable sources."

The applicant's statement argues that the proposal is appropriate development in the Green Belt as it complies with criteria (a) and (c) of Local Plan policy DS2, as these criteria allow developments respectively 'for the purposes of agriculture and forestry', and essential facilities in connection with 'other uses of land which preserve the openness of the Green Belt and which do not conflict with the purpose of including land in it', provided that developments are environmentally and ecologically acceptable.

The applicant contends that:

"the proposed wind generators are to serve the farm and associated buildings with power and as such can be considered to be for the purposes of agriculture as they are associated with the agricultural use. If it were not for the agricultural use the proposed wind generators would not be necessary and the application would not be submitted."

Whilst the fact that energy generated by the turbines would be used in connection with the applicant's farm to the south west is not in dispute, it is considered that energy generation has only a tenuous connection to traditional agricultural activities. The proposals cannot therefore be said to comply with criterion DS2(a).

Whether the proposal complies with DS2(c) involves a judgement on the part of the decision maker as to whether the development is for an essential facility for a purpose preserving the openness of the Green Belt, and whether or not it conflicts with the purposes of including land within the Green Belt. Paragraph 3.5 of PPG2 defines 'essential facilities' as only those genuinely required for such uses, giving the examples of small changing, spectator facilities or stables for outdoor sport.

Harm to the Green Belt

The two turbines would each have a height of 30 metres to the top of the pole. The rotor radius would add a further height of 12 metres, giving a total height of 42 metres when the rotation of the blade is at its fullest extent. This is significantly smaller than the type of equipment used by commercial wind farm operators which may have a height up to 120 metres. Nevertheless, the turbines would still be significantly taller than any structure in the immediate vicinity, and would be relatively bulky, with a diameter at the base of 2.5 metres. Officers therefore consider that on balance, the turbines would have a material impact on the openness of the Green Belt.

According to Paragraph 1.5 of PPG2, the purposes of including land in the Green Belt include checking the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas, preventing neighbouring towns from merging into one another, and assisting in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment. Although the proposals would not contribute significantly to urban sprawl or the merger of any settlements, it is considered that the turbines would add a modern feature to a rural landscape, and would therefore not 'safeguard the countryside from encroachment'. Furthermore, the proposals include the laying of hardstanding to access the turbines for maintenance purposes.

It is therefore considered on balance that the proposals cannot be said to completely preserve the openness of the Green Belt, and would not be wholly consistent with the aims of including land in the Green Belt. The proposals are therefore considered inappropriate development in the Green Belt. Such development is by definition harmful to the Green Belt, and may only be approved where very special circumstances can be demonstrated that outweigh any harm potentially caused as a result of the proposals.

Environmental benefits

The applicant contends that 'the wider environmental benefits associated with the increased production of energy from renewable sources' maybe considered very special circumstances to justify the approval of the application. Such an approach is consistent with PPS1 and PPS22, which specifically identifies this factor as a potential very special circumstance in determining Green Belt applications. The need to increase energy efficiency and to derive a greater proportion of the energy used from renewable, sustainable sources, and to reduce carbon emissions, is well enshrined in national policies.

PPS22 explains that the Government's approach, as set out in the energy White Paper 'Our Energy Future - creating a low carbon economy', is to cut carbon dioxide emissions by 60 per cent by 2050, including a target to generate 10 per cent of electricity from renewable sources by 2010, and 20 per cent by 2020. It also states that local planning authorities should support and 'specifically encourage' small scale renewable energy schemes.

Although the generator turbines proposed are relatively small (i.e. not the larger commercial type associated with wind farms) the applicant contends that the turbines will provide sufficient energy for the farm, with excess being fed back to the National Grid. According to PPS2 Companion Guide, the two turbines should be capable of providing energy equivalent to the needs of approximately 128 homes, or more depending on the calculation used. Although this figure is inevitably open to variations caused by differences in energy consumption, the location and efficiency of the equipment, local climate variations etc. this figure is considered to represent a significant - albeit modest - contribution to the District's efforts to meet the Government's renewable energy targets, the Worcestershire Local Strategic Partnership's Local Area Agreement's agreed target to reduce overall CO₂ emissions by 3% year on year, and the aim of increase in energy efficiency and the proportion of energy generated from renewable sources, which are identified as priorities in the Bromsgrove Community Strategy (2010 - 2013). All contributions to these aspirations should be considered cumulatively.

It is therefore considered that the wider environmental benefits associated with the increased production of energy from renewable sources may be considered to be a 'very special circumstance' of significant weight in determining this application. This must be weighed against the harm to the Green Belt caused, and also other factors including impact on domestic properties, impact on the adjacent golf range, ecology, highways, and the Council's farm diversification policies.

Structure Plan policy EN.2 supports the provision of individual wind turbines or small clusters where they:

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

These matters are discussed in turn below.

Landscape impact

Para. 3.15 of PPG 2 states that the visual amenities of the Green Belt should not be injured by proposals for development within or conspicuous from the Green Belt which might be visually detrimental by reason of their siting, materials or design.

The site is not located in a designated Landscape Protection Area (LPA). However, the area to the north of Kidderminster Road, extending to the west of Dodford to the southern edge of Belbroughton is a designated LPA. Paragraph 15 of PPS22 states that local landscape designations should not be used in themselves to refuse planning permission for renewable energy developments, and that applications in such areas should be assessed against criteria based policies set out in local development documents.

Paragraph 20 acknowledges that, of all renewable technologies, wind turbines are likely to have the greatest visual and landscape effects. However, it advises that in assessing planning applications, local authorities should recognise that the impact of turbines on the landscape will vary according to the size and number of turbines and the type of landscape involved, and that these impacts may be temporary if conditions are attached to planning permissions which require the future decommissioning of turbines.

Structure Plan policy CTC.1 sets out criteria for the assessment of proposals relating to landscape. The implications of such development will be assessed having regard to the degree to which they would:

- be appropriate to, and integrate with, the landscape character of the area;
- safeguard or strengthen the features and patterns that contribute to the landscape character and local distinctiveness of the area with particular attention being paid to existing buildings, other manmade features and seminatural vegetation; and
- relate to the sensitivity of the particular landscape, and location, and to accommodate change.

Policy CTC.2 states that proposals should demonstrate that they will not have an adverse effect on skylines and hill features, including prominent views of such features. Where development will have a significant adverse impact they will not normally be allowed.

Local Plan policy C4 states that development will not be permitted where it would have a materially detrimental effect on the landscape, in particular within LPAs. When assessing the effect on the landscape, special attention will be given to:

- prominent slopes or major ridge lines;
- woodland and hedgerows including ancient areas;
- water features where these are an important component in the landscape.

The proposals would not be located on a prominent ridge line, or near to any important woodlands and hedgerows or water features. Although, by definition, the proposed turbines would be visible within the local landscape, wider visibility would be restricted by the topography of the site and surrounding vicinity, and local features such as hedgerows. As part of the application submission, the applicant has submitted a photographic assessment of the area which demonstrates that the location of the turbines comprises an area of relatively flat ground in a largely flat landscape with short views available rather than long views. Land is rising slightly to the north and south of the site which ensures views are contained. The photographs highlight the dominant feature on the landscape is the electricity pylons to the south west of the application site.

The turbines would not have a significant effect on the wider skyline of any hill features, including prominent views of such features. In general, the turbines would not be widely visible from the Landscape Protection Area, and would not significantly affect views into the LPA. Where they would be visible, at the southern extent of the LPA, they would be viewed against the backcloth of the pylons, which would have a height similar or greater to the proposed turbines.

A Photographic Assessment of longer distance views was submitted by the applicant prior to the 1st March Planning Committee meeting. This demonstrates that only limited long range views of the proposed turbines would be possible. The site would be visible against the backdrop of pylons from the south end of Woodcote Lane, and also views from the south. From higher ground near Monsieurs Hall Lane longer views are likely to be obtained, but the turbines would be shielded to some extent by the topography of land in the near ground. It is noted that the applicant has not submitted photomontage images of the proposed turbines and their effect on the landscape, as requested by Members.

In summary, although the turbines would inevitably have an impact on the landscape, it is not considered by officers that the overall open character of the Green Belt in this locality would be significantly compromised. Wind turbines are usually to be found in rural areas, because of the need to harness the wind away from buildings and other obstructions to the flow of wind, and in the future are likely to become a far more common scene. This particular locality has accommodated landscape change in the past in the form of the pylons, which are now well assimilated in the rural scene. In this sense, the turbines may be said to be appropriate in the landscape of the area.

Objectors raise the prospect that a landscape precedent for such development would be created in the area. Whilst it is acknowledged that a greater number of turbines would

have a concomitant impact on the landscape, applications for any future proposals would have to be assessed on their merits and the Council would have the ability to refuse them if the harm to Green Belt was too great, or was not outweighed by very special circumstances. This application should therefore be judged in isolation on the merits or otherwise of the proposals.

Ecology

The collection of wooded areas near to the site - including Chaddesley, Randan, Nutnells, Santery Hill and Pepper Woods are part of the designated Feckenham Forest / Chaddesley Woods Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs), with parts locally designated as Special Wildlife Sites (SWS). The southern extent of this wooded area is approximately 0.6 miles (1 km) north of the site. Chaddesley Wood (which is located within the boundaries of Wyre Forest DC) is approximately 1 mile (1.6 km) is a designated National Nature Reserve (NNR).

It is noted that both Natural England and Worcestershire Wildlife Trust have raised no objection to the application. The submitted Ecological Appraisal concludes that the proposal will have no effect on terrestrial species, and little if any effect on airborne mammals or birds. In particular, the survey indicates that the turbine blades would be sufficiently high above the ground to avoid the foraging behaviour of most bat species, whilst low enough to avoid high-flying species (e.g. Noctules). Furthermore, the blades would not be turning when there is little or no wind, the conditions for peak bat activity. It is therefore considered that the proposals raise no specific ecological issues.

The applicant's ecologist states that both SSSIs and the NNR are physically separated from the site by topography and intervening land use, including a main road and agricultural land under continuous cultivation, and that as such neither will be impacted by the proposals.

Impact on domestic properties

A number of objectors have raised concerns about the harm to residential amenity, in particular with regard to noise and 'shadow flicker'.

Noise

Paragraph 41 of the PPS22 Companion Guide states that well-specified and well-designed wind farms should be located so that increases in ambient noise levels around noise-sensitive developments are kept to acceptable levels with relation to existing background noise. It confirms that noise levels from turbines are generally low and, under most operating conditions, it is likely that turbine noise would be completely masked by wind-generated background noise.

Paragraph 25 of ETSU-R-97 'Assessment and Rating of Noise from Wind Farms' states that if noise from wind farms is limited to a level no greater than $L_{A90,10min}$ of 35dBA, a planning condition should offer sufficient protection of amenity, and background surveys would be unnecessary. This simplified condition is advocated for such situations as single turbines or wind farms with large separation distances from residential properties.

The applicant has submitted a Noise Assessment confirming that noise from the wind turbines is estimated to be no greater than 33_{L_{A90}} (35_{L_{Aeq}}). The Environmental Health officer advises that such an assumption is acceptable and realistic, and has recommended the use of a condition as per the recommendations of ETSU-R-97.

The PPS22 Companion Guide sets out a table of comparative sound levels, which is reproduced below for the reference of members:

Source / Activity	Indicative Noise Level dB(A)
Threshold of Pain	140
Jet aircraft at 250 metres	105
Pneumatic drill at 7 metres	95
Truck at 30 mph at 100 metres	65
Busy general office	60
Car at 40 mph at 100 metres	55
Wind farm at 350 metres	35 - 45
Quiet bedroom	20
Rural night-time background	20 - 40
Threshold of hearing	0

This information demonstrates that the noise experienced at the nearest residential properties as a result of the proposals would not be dissimilar to that experienced at typical rural night-time background levels, and would be significantly less than a car travelling at 40 mph heard from a distance of 100 metres. Although, in accordance with guidance, a full survey of background noise has not been carried out by the applicant, the officer's site inspection revealed that noise from the Kidderminster Road and / or the M5 motorway (located approximately 3 miles to the east) was discernable, though by no means obtrusive. The turbine noise would be further masked by this factor, as well as the windy conditions experienced at the times when the turbines are in use.

In these circumstances, it is concluded that the noise generated by the proposal would have no significant impact on the amenity of residential properties.

Shadow flicker

The PPS22 Companion Guide explains that, under certain combinations of geographical position and time of day, the sun may pass behind the rotors of a wind turbine and cast a shadow over neighbouring properties. When the blades rotate, the shadow flicks on and off - the effect is known as 'shadow flicker'. It only occurs inside buildings where the flicker appears through a narrow window opening. The seasonal duration of this effect can be calculated from the geometry of the machine and the latitude of the site. Although problems caused by shadow flicker are rare, for sites where existing development may be subject to this problem, applicants for planning permission for wind turbine installations should provide an analysis to quantify the effect. A single window in a single building is likely to be affected for a few minutes at certain times of the day during short periods of the year.

The likelihood of this occurring and the duration of such an effect depends upon:

- the direction of the residence relative to the turbine(s);

- the distance from the turbine(s);
- the turbine hub-height and rotor diameter;
- the time of year;
- the proportion of day-light hours in which the turbines operate;
- the frequency of bright sunshine and cloudless skies (particularly at low elevations above the horizon); and
- the prevailing wind direction.

Because the nearest residential properties are located approximately 350 metres away, and the tips of the rotor blades would have a maximum height of 42 metres, such an effect would only be possible when the sun is very low (i.e. early mornings and late afternoons / evenings) meaning that a long shadow is cast. Given this situation, the fact that the possibility of such an effect occurring is rare, and that the impact would only be experienced for very short periods if at all, it is not considered that such an effect is significant enough to warrant refusal of the application.

Impact on golf range

The owner of the adjoining golf range has expressed concerns about the effect on this business. The main concerns are noise, shadow flicker, distraction, and also the fact that the owner spends a significant amount of time at the property and consequently has amenities in the same way as a residential property. The range and its associated buildings are located approximately 170 metres due north of the eastern proposed turbine.

Appendix 3 of the Noise Assessment submitted with the application is a noise contour plan, which shows that the predicted noise levels at the property would be between 40 - 45 dB(A). This would be little different to the typical rural background levels, and significantly less than a car travelling at 40 mph heard from a distance of 100 metres. The noise emissions experienced at the driving range are therefore likely to be little different to the existing background levels, which are likely to be slightly higher than typical for a rural setting because the well-trafficked Kidderminster Road running approximately 220 metres to the north.

The update to the Noise Assessment submitted since the 1st March Planning Committee notes that the World Health Organisation Guidelines for Community Noise (1999) states:

"To protect the majority of people from being seriously annoyed during the daytime the outdoor sound level from steady, continuous noise should not exceed 55 L_{Aeq} . To protect the majority of people from being moderately annoyed during the daytime, the outdoor sound level from steady, continuous noise should not exceed 50 L_{Aeq} ."

This indicates that, even if the driving range is to be considered a noise sensitive use, it would not be affected even to the 'moderate annoyance' level set out above. It is therefore considered difficult to argue that the driving range would be demonstrably harmed as a result of noise pollution created by the proposed development.

At a distance of 170 metres, as is explained in the previous section of this report, in the event that shadow flicker occurs, it is only likely to be possible when the sun is at oblique angles to the turbines when the sun is low in the sky. As the sun would only be in such a

position in an easterly direction (in the morning) or westerly direction (in the evening) any flicker created would not affect the driving range, which is directly to the north.

It is acknowledged that the rotation of the blades of the turbine might present a distraction to golfers. There is no objective way to gauge such an intangible effect. However, the range is oriented in a south / south westerly direction, and therefore the majority of golf shots would not be played directly towards the turbine, and would therefore not be directly in the eye line of players. Whilst the western edge of the driving range would be closer to the turbines, the areas potentially affected could be reoriented to minimise the impact on golfers, and some degree of low level screening / baffling could be used if the turbines are considered to present a problem. It would also be technically feasible for the entire range to be re-orientated to face in a more easterly direction, or reversed so that shots are taken from the southern end of the site in a northerly direction. In summary, whilst officers sympathise with this concern, it is not considered sufficient to warrant refusal of the application.

Finally, the owner of the driving range implies that the effects on him, his wife and employees should be judged in broadly the same way as residential properties, owing to the amount of time spent on the site in working hours. It is considered that, although there must be an expectation that no member of the public suffers unduly as a result of a planning proposal, the conditions required for the quiet enjoyment of a residential property do not equally apply to an employment use. In any event, as is explained above, there is unlikely to be any significant impact on neighbour amenity. Although the golf range is located nearer to the application site than residential properties, the effects (in terms of noise and flicker) are unlikely to be significantly worse to the point that refusal of the application is required.

The owner of the golf range has suggested that the turbines could be relocated to the larger field to the north or an additional field to the south. This has been put to the applicant, who has pointed out that locating the turbines in the north field would bring them closer to the residential properties at Dodds Corner and Little Durrance Farm, which may raise other issues in respect of noise. Officers agree that this solution would be less favourable than the present proposed location. In any event, this land falls within Wychavon DC and is beyond the scope of control of this Council. The southern field has been discounted by the applicant as the land slopes further downward and would therefore be a less efficient location for wind turbines.

Prior to the 1st March Planning Committee, the applicant expressed a willingness to relocate the easternmost turbine slightly southwest if it could be demonstrated that there would be significant benefits in terms of impact on the landscape and the neighbour at the driving range. However, the applicant has since indicated that the application should be considered in its current form.

Highways

The publicity for the application has raised the possibility that the turbines may present a hazard to drivers. However, the turbines would be located around 400 metres from any road and the County Highways officer has raised no objection to the scheme. Similarly, no objection has been raised in relation to access and traffic generation.

Several emails have been received from Wychavon DC ward Councillor Mrs. J. A. Pearce expressing concerns over the suitability of lanes to the south of the site for heavy construction access. These emails request that a condition is imposed to control access during the construction phase. A further opinion from the County Highways officer has therefore subsequently been sought with regard to the specific matter of construction access. The officer does not consider that a condition is necessary in this instance as the construction would not be undertaken over a sustained period. Also noted is the ability to recover expenditure due to damage to the highway under section 59 of the Highways Act 1980.

Members should note the contents of paragraph 71 of Circular 11/95: The Use of Conditions in Planning Permissions states that:

"Planning conditions are not an appropriate means of controlling the right of passage over public highways. Although negatively worded conditions which control such matters might sometimes be capable of being validly imposed on planning permissions, such conditions are likely to be very difficult to enforce effectively. It may be possible to encourage drivers to follow preferred routes by posting site notices to that effect, or by requiring them to use a particular entrance (or exit from the site). But where it is essential to prevent traffic from using particular routes, the correct mechanism for doing so is an Order under either Section 1 or Section 6 (as appropriate) of the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984."

Members should also be mindful that the status of all nearby roads as adopted public highway should ensure that accessibility to the site cannot lawfully be impeded or revoked.

In these circumstances, it is considered that the imposition of a condition to control construction access would not comply with the guidance set out in Circular 11/95, as it would be difficult to enforce and unnecessary given the relatively short period of time that over which any inconvenience would be caused. Officers are therefore of the view that, if Members are minded to grant permission, such a condition should not be imposed.

Farm diversification

Structure Plan policy CTC.7 states that any development on agricultural land should not prejudice the viability of farming operations on the remaining agricultural land. Local Plan policy C31 supports farm diversification schemes where proposals are of an appropriate scale, can be accommodated within a rural location without detriment to the environment and are consistent with Green Belt policy. Policy C32 sets out the criteria against which such applications will be judged, including impact on high quality agricultural land, landscape impact, cumulative effect with other activities, and the minimisation of visual impact. It is considered that the proposal is consistent with these policies in allowing an agricultural holding to further diversify its business activity.

Emerging policy on climate change and renewables

Several objectors and members have expressed the view that no wind turbines should be approved without some form of District-wide policy on the matter. As is noted in the report above, several development plan policies (RSS policies EN1 and EN2 and

Worcestershire Structure Plan policy EN.2), as well as government guidance in PPS22: Renewable Energy and the PPS1 Supplement on Climate Change, set out very clear policies for the consideration of applications for renewable energy projects. In particular, policy EN2 of the Structure Plan is a specific policy relating to turbines, setting out a criteria-based approach to their assessment.

Government guidance, as set out in PPS22 states that:

"planning policies that rule out or place constraints on the development of all, or specific types of, renewable energy technologies should not be included in local development documents without sufficient reasoned justification. The Government may intervene in the plan making process where it considers that the constraints being proposed by local authorities are too great or have been poorly justified."

Officers are therefore of the view that the criteria-based approach used in assessing the current application is fully consistent with national policy, and that to introduce areas of development restraint for renewable energy projects, especially outside of designated sensitive areas, would not be a reasonable and proportionate approach.

The Strategic Planning Manager has advised that there is presently no intention to adopt such a policy as it would not be consistent with national policy, which sets out a broadly positive approach to renewable energy technology. If such a policy included specific site locations and areas of restraint, it would have to take the form of a Development Plan Document to be prepared following the adoption of the Core Strategy. Therefore it is not feasible that such a document could be adopted in the short / medium term future.

In summary, officers are of the view that it would be unreasonable to resist applications for renewable energy technology pending the adoption of a policy which in any event the Council presently does not intend to adopt.

Alternative sites

Several nearby residents are concerned that the site is not appropriate for the proposed development and that other locations for wind turbines should be considered. Members are advised that there is no strict obligation on the part of the applicant to consider alternative sites - this application must be considered based on the merits or otherwise of the proposal.

It has been suggested that a non-Green Belt location could be found. However, the majority of the District (with the exception of Bromsgrove and some other settlements) is designated as Green Belt land. Assuming urban areas are discounted for reasons of residential amenity, officers consider it likely that Green Belt locations must be considered for such developments if the District intends to grant planning permission for wind generation technologies at all.

Efficiency of turbines

The claims made by wind energy operators have been questioned by local residents. A recent press report entitled 'weak wind farms generate just a fifth of full power' points to the fact that the majority of wind farms produce electricity at around 25 to 30 per cent of

their capacity, with the best achieving 50 per cent efficiency and the worst less than 15 per cent (the lowest given is 7.9 per cent). This report has been cited as evidence that the claims of the applicant with regard to surplus energy benefits are likely to be 'significantly exaggerated'.

As wind is not constant or continuous, the efficiency of any turbine is self-evidently unlikely to be near 100 per cent. The figure of 260,000 kWh per year per turbine given above is taken from the PPS22 Companion Guide and 'based on an average capacity factor of 0.3' (i.e. 30 per cent efficiency). Therefore, the assumptions made with regard to the potential environmental benefits of the proposals are considered to be as accurate as is possible, and therefore reasonable. Indeed, the press report itself confirms that the majority of wind farms operate with an efficiency of around 25 to 30 per cent.

Conclusion

It has been determined that on balance the proposals would represent inappropriate development in the Green Belt, would not completely preserve the openness of the Green Belt, and would not be wholly consistent with the aims of including land in the Green Belt. The proposals are therefore considered inappropriate development in the Green Belt and such development is by definition harmful.

However, the wider environmental benefits associated with the increased production of energy from renewable sources is considered to be a 'very special circumstance' of significant weight. The proposals are also in general accordance with the aim of encouraging the diversification of the rural economy.

Although the turbines would inevitably have an impact on the landscape, it is not considered that the overall open character of the Green Belt in this locality would be significantly compromised and landscape impact would generally be limited to local views, and in the context of the existing electricity pylons. No significant views into or out of any protected area would be significantly harmed. It is therefore considered on balance that the impact on the landscape would be acceptable.

The proposals would not result in any significantly detrimental effects to the amenities of residential properties in the area, the viability or amenity of the adjacent golf driving range or the ecological resources of the area.

Though it is noted that the proposals are opposed by a significant number of local residents, two other neighbouring properties have expressed support for the proposals, which points to the fact that such applications raise necessarily subjective and emotive issues.

Taking these matters into account, in light of national and local targets on renewable energy, and the absence of any special landscape or ecological designation on the site, it is considered on balance that the benefits of the proposal exceed the relatively minor harm caused to the openness of the Green Belt.

It is recommended that conditions are attached to the permission to ensure that a landscaping scheme, the finished colour of the turbines and the details of the

hardstanding area are submitted for approval, to ensure that any impact on the Green Belt and landscape character is minimised.

Referral to the Secretary of State

It is noted that the Town and Country Planning (Consultation) (England) Direction 2009 directs that, where the Council does not propose to refuse planning permission for certain categories of development, it should consult the Secretary of State. One such category (as listed at Paragraph 4(b)) is inappropriate development on allocated Green Belt land "where the development, by reason of its scale or nature or location, would have a significant impact on the openness of the Green Belt".

As the above assessment indicates, officers are of the view that the development would have a material impact on the openness of the Green Belt. However, this would not amount to a 'significant' impact for the purposes of the Direction, and the decision would therefore not need to be referred in the event that Members to resolve grant planning permission.

RECOMMENDATION: that permission be **GRANTED**, subject to the following conditions:

- 1) C001 - Standard time - three years
- 2) The disposal of storm water shall be by means submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority and be operational before building works commence.

REASON: In order to secure the satisfactory drainage conditions in accordance with Policies ES1 and ES6 of the Bromsgrove District Local Plan 2004.

- 3) The scheme shall be so designed, installed, operated and permanently maintained to ensure that the resultant combined noise level from the installation does not exceed the background noise level by an $L_{A90,10min}$ of 35dBA (free field) up to wind speeds of 10 m/s (at 10 metres height) at any noise sensitive premises. Noise levels shall be measured in accordance with ETSU-R-97 'Assessment and Rating of Noise from Wind Farms', including the addition of a tonal penalty if required in accordance with Figure 16.

REASON: To ensure that residential amenity is not adversely affected by the noise emitted by the wind turbines, in accordance with Bromsgrove District Local Plan Policy S19.

- 4) If the wind turbines hereby permitted are decommissioned or otherwise cease to be used they shall be removed from the site and the site reinstated to its former condition in accordance with a scheme that has previously been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority.

REASON: In order to ensure that the landscape character of the area is not unnecessarily affected by disused wind turbines, in accordance with Worcestershire Structure Plan policies CTC.1 and CTC.2 and Bromsgrove Local Plan policy C4.

- 5) Details of the colour and finish of the wind turbines hereby permitted shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The turbines shall be finished in accordance with such details as are agreed prior to being erected on site, and this finish shall thereafter be permanently maintained.

REASON: In order to secure the satisfactory appearance of the development and to protect the landscape character of the area in accordance with Worcestershire Structure Plan policies CTC.1 and CTC.2 and Bromsgrove Local Plan policies C4 and DS13.

- 6) Before the commencement on site of any works which are the subject of this permission, a scheme of landscaping and planting shall be submitted to, and approved by the Local Planning Authority in writing. The scheme shall include the following:-
- a) Full details of all existing physical and landscape features on the land of the applicant's ownership including the position, species and spread of all trees and major shrubs clearly distinguishing between those features to be retained and those to be removed;
 - b) A scheme of new planting including a plan showing the layout of proposed planting within existing hedgerows surrounding the site and the thickening of any roadside hedgerows within the applicant's ownership, in positions to be agreed with the Local Planning Authority.

The approved scheme shall be implemented in full within 12 months from the date when the hereby approved development is completed.

Any trees / shrubs / hedges removed, dying, being severely damaged or becoming seriously diseased within 5 years of the date of the original planting shall be replaced by plants of similar size and species to those originally planted.

REASON: In order to protect the trees and hedges which assist in screening the development and to protect the landscape character of the area, in accordance with Worcestershire Structure Plan policies CTC.1 and CTC.2 and Bromsgrove Local Plan policy C4.

- 7) Prior to the commencement of any development on the site full details of the surface treatment of the hereby approved driveway / access track shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The surface shall be laid in accordance with the approved details.

REASON: in order to minimise harm to the character of the Green Belt in accordance with policy D.39 of the Worcestershire County Structure Plan, policy DS2 of the Bromsgrove District Local Plan and the provisions of PPG2.

Recommended reason for approval:

This decision has been taken having regard to the policies within the West Midlands Spatial Strategy (WMSS) June 2004, the Worcestershire County Structure Plan (WCSP)

June 2001 and the Bromsgrove District Local Plan (BDLP) January 2004 and other material considerations as summarised below:

WMSS	QE1, EN1, Draft Policy SR1c
WCSP	CTC.1, CTC.2, CTC.7, D.38, D.39, EN.2, SD.2
BDLP	C1, C4, C31, C32, DS1, DS2, DS13, ES1, ES6, S19
Others	PPS1, PPG2, PPS22, Planning for Renewable Energy: A Companion Guide to PPS22, ETSU-R-97 Assessment and Rating of Noise from Wind Farms

The proposals would represent inappropriate development in the Green Belt, would not completely preserve the openness of the Green Belt, and would not be wholly consistent with the aims of including land in the Green Belt. The proposals are therefore considered inappropriate development in the Green Belt and such development is by definition harmful.

However, it is not considered that the overall open character of the Green Belt in this locality would be significantly compromised and landscape impact would generally be limited to local views, and in the context of the existing electricity pylons. No significant views into or out of any protected area would be significantly harmed.

The wider environmental benefits associated with the increased production of energy from renewable sources is considered to be a 'very special circumstance' of significant weight. The proposals are also in general accordance with the aim of encouraging the diversification of the rural economy.

The proposals would not result in any significantly detrimental effects to the amenities of residential properties in the area, the viability or amenity of the adjacent golf driving range or the ecological resources of the area.

It is therefore the Council's view that, on balance, there are no justifiable reasons to refuse planning permission.