

Planning and Highways Delegations Committee
Minutes of the Meeting Held on Friday 13 February
2009

Present: Mr A Gunson
Mr I Monson

Also Present: Mr C Armes
Mr D Baxter
Dr A Boswell
Mr D Callaby
Mrs J Eells
Mrs I Floering Blackman
Mr J Perry-Warnes
Mr J Rogers
Mr A Wright

Officers: Mr S Faulkner – Planning and Transportation

1. Apologies for absence:

There were no apologies.

2. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 15 February 2008 were confirmed as an accurate record and signed by the Chairman.

3. Declarations of Interest

Mr Wright declared a personal interest in item 5, as he sat on the Wash and North Norfolk Coast European Marine Site Management Group and the Wash Estuary Local Authority Member Group.

Mrs Eells declared a personal interest Item 5 as the Local Member and as a Member of the Wash and North Norfolk Coast European Marine Site Management Group.

Mr Rogers declared a prejudicial interest in Item 4, as he owned land in Breckland that had been considered in the Local Development Framework.

Mr Monson declared a personal interest in Item 4 and said that his interest was the same as he had declared at the last meeting which was as follows: he had been on the panel at Breckland District Council that discussed the Local Development Framework and he owned a site

in Breckland that was contained in the Local Development Framework (LDF).

Mr Baxter declared a non-prejudicial interest in Item 5 as a Member of the Eastern Sea Fisheries Joint Committee.

4. Breckland District Council – Core Strategy and Local Development Control Policies Proposed Submission Document

Mr Rogers left the room.

The annexed report by the Director of Environment, Transport and Development was received.

Housing Numbers and Spatial Strategy

The following comments were made:

There were concerns over the Weeting Buffer Zone as at 1.5km it was considered to be too large. As a result there could be no development in that area over the next 15 years were this to be put in the LDF. It was felt that there should be some flexibility over planned development in the buffer zone.

There needed to be some development in the Brecks, it should not all be discounted, which would be the case if the buffer zone was accepted as proposed. There were both social and environmental reasons why some development would be desirable within the area.

Members felt that the Habitat Regulation Assessment (HRA) should be carried out again by Breckland District Council to obtain a further opinion from ornithologists on the matter of the stone curlews in the area.

In response to these concerns it was noted that Breckland District Council (BDC) was required to work within the strategic framework and an HRA had been carried out by consultants who had worked with Natural England and the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds. The Principal Planner indicated that BDC had acted entirely within the prescribed regulations with regard to the assessment.

The Principal Planner confirmed that the overall numbers of houses were not affected by the HRA. Six thousand houses had been identified in the north of Thetford where the greatest impact would be seen.

There were concerns by the Local Member for Thetford East, that there would be no open spaces in Thetford as the new housing to the north of the town would mean other facilities and amenities would be squeezed in between this and the existing housing. This would also

cause congestion on the A134 into Thetford. He felt that this proposal needed to be looked at once again and that the original plan with growth all the way around the town was a better option. He felt that developments to the north of the town would be detrimental and that the 6,000 proposed houses should be reduced if the zone was to remain as it was. A 1,500 metre buffer zone would cause real problems for the town and its expansion.

Another Member felt that the matter should be revisited for an independent more informed approach and to look at how the stone curlew population might be increased.

The Chairman read out the concerns of Local Member for Swaffham, which stated as follows:

- She objected to the car parking provision of .85 per household and would prefer 1.25 having had the original proposal of 1.5 turned down.
- Public transport in the area was inadequate
- The minimum net increase of jobs to 2021 is 300-650 but she suggested 400-800 having had 750-1,000 turned down.
- The net figure of 250 new houses until 2026 shows the allocation working out to an increase of only 14/15 new dwellings per year. This would be unrealistic and restrictive on natural growth in the town. The Town Council regards the overall minimum figure should be 1600 giving a net figure of 600 houses to add to the 250 offered.
- There was a danger that the town would stagnate as the town was not large enough to sustain the shops there. There was needed a diversity of new jobs and houses to go with them to provide an element of sustainability.

In response it was stated that the County Council had not raised these issues at a previous stage. The levels of housing in Swaffham had previously been agreed by this Committee in responding to the preferred options stage. The other issues raised had been assessed at the preferred option stage and did not affect the overall soundness of the LDF.

The Local Member for Elmham and Matishall expressed concern over more development taking place in Dereham. It was noted in response that no concerns had been raised previously over the level of houses in Dereham. More houses had been proposed in Dereham Town Centre and surrounding villages, due to the fact that it was a sustainable location with plenty of jobs in the area. There were about 600 dwellings proposed in this area but the siting of them was not for discussion at this point. That would be contained in the site specific plan and would be dealt with separately.

The Cabinet Member for Waste Management and the Environment said that he was not in favour of prohibiting any growth in the areas of Munford, Weeting and Thetford for the next 15 years which would mean that even private dwellings would not be able to have extensions added to them. He proposed that Breckland District Council be asked to look again at a possible extension of the buffer zone exception areas in settlements over 1,000 people, especially bearing in mind the growth point area in Thetford.

The recommendation in 4.6 of the report was agreed,

Attleborough

The proposals for Attleborough were accepted and it was requested that all infrastructure should be in place. It was suggested that more land be made available in order to make the proposals more sustainable.

The recommendation at 4.14 of the report was agreed.

Thetford

Growth options in Thetford were reported. The recommendation at paragraph 4.19 was agreed.

Infrastructure and Service Provisions

It was reported that a stronger policy CP 5 was needed, therefore a proposed revised policy was contained in the Appendix to the report, which took into account Norfolk County Council's Planning Standards.

The recommendation at 4.21 of the report was agreed.

It was **RESOLVED:**

To agree all the recommendations set out in the report. In addition the Committee agreed the following representation:

“That Breckland District Council be asked to re-consider the 1,500 metre buffer zone around Special Protection Areas (SPAs) with Stone Curlews, as set out in Policy CP.10 and Map 3.1, in favour of a more flexible approach to possible development in those areas adjacent to settlements with over 1,000 population. The County Council has particular concern about the impact of the currently drafted buffer zone around Thetford, since this will severely limit the options for future growth around the town, which has Growth Point status.

The Committee agreed that the buffer zones should either be reduced or a more flexible approach applied to development in such areas having regard to appropriate environmental criteria.”

In making the above comment the Committee wanted to make it clear that the County Council was not raising a “soundness objection” to the Proposed Submission Document.

In addition the Committee amended the suggested revised Policy CP.5 to refer in the bullets to “Highways and Public Transport” rather than simply “Transport”.

Reasons for Decision

The level and distribution of growth as set out in the emerging Core Strategy is consistent with the adopted East of England Plan. Many of the concerns/issues previously raised, particularly in relation to reducing the number of service villages with planned housing growth have now been addressed. Major growth in Attleborough and Thetford was supported subject to the infrastructure requirements arising from the planned growth being delivered through developer funding and other possible external funding streams agreed with the infrastructure and service providers. Furthermore it is felt that the District Council should consider additional employment provision in Attleborough in order to achieve a more sustainable balance between jobs and housing

The provision of infrastructure was a major issue and it is felt that the Infrastructure Policy (CP.5) should be strengthened/clarified and the supporting text expanded to refer to the County Council’s Planning Obligations Standards. Moreover, any new policy on planning obligations ought to have regard to the preparation of an Integrated Development Programme (IDP), which would assist in identifying the infrastructure investment needed to deliver growth in the plan period and any potential shortfalls. The IDP could then be used to consider alternative funding streams in partnership with other infrastructure and service providers

On the basis of the report it was felt that no soundness objection should be raised to the Proposed Submission Document subject to the recommendations set out above being satisfactorily dealt with by the District Council ahead of formal Submission

Alternative Options Considered

The report set out a number of recommendations. Not pursuing these recommendations would be contrary to the aims of the adopted East of England Plan (2008).

5. Docking Shoal Offshore Wind Farm Proposal – Centrica Energy Limited

The annexed report by the Director of Environment, Transport and Development was received.

The following points were made:

- There were currently around 270 permitted offshore wind turbines which could produce 800 megawatts of energy, and power half a million homes.
- Members of the Committee felt that there would be a detrimental impact on the Cley and Brancaster landscape, tourism and nature conservation in these areas if the application went ahead.
- The Local Member for North Coast, Mr Bett had objected to the application.

Mr Baxter stated the following on behalf of the fisherman in the area:

Their main concern was that there was a lack of baseline information that had been gathered by the developers and that it was insufficient to determine whether the wind farms would or would not effect the marine ecosystem. The developers would say that they had met the requirements demanded of Defra and Cefas under their construction licenses but the concerns of the fishermen remained. It had come to light that surveys were simply used to determine what species were present. Post construction surveys would be used to determine whether there had been changes to the species populating the area around wind farms. The problem is that the surveys would not be able to determine changes in abundance. If surveys detected species before and after construction then it would be deemed that there was no negative impact from the construction. The baseline information collated for wind farms is normally one or two years.

The developers had spent considerable amounts of money in an attempt to allay the fears regarding the potential negative impact of these turbines. There were real concerns regarding the potential negative impact of these turbines. There were real concerns regarding the creation of electro magnetic fields around the cables. It was thought that the electro magnetic fields could affect sensory responses of fish. The Collaborative Offshore Wind Research into the Environment (COWRIE) had spent considerable time and money studying these potential effects. Many of the predicted impacts from the development of these wind farms were derived from sophisticated modeling. Modeling is not an exact science and there were examples where the natural environment has not adhered to predicted outcomes.

Wind farm developments undertaken by Centrica in particular have also suffered due to poor communication between themselves and fishermen. This has hampered discussions and the dissemination of important information.

The Local Member for Dersingham said that the underground cabling would affect her area and resented the application and felt that it was an unnecessary intrusion into rural life in West Norfolk. She felt that no

thought had been given to the impact on the environment when constructing and siting turbines in an area of outstanding natural beauty. There would be an adverse effect on birds and other wild life in the area. There would be untold damage to the sea bed and marine life, tide change and coastal erosion. Many people in Norfolk relied on tourism for their livelihoods like hotels and they needed support and safeguarding. The turbines would have significant effect on the most protected estuary in England.

The Local Member for Marshland North said that the cabling for the turbines would go through the Walpoles. It would affect the fish and shellfish living in the Wash. He felt that the cables would be better going into Skegness rather than the Wash but this would be more costly so he suspected that this was why it was not being proposed by the developers. Thirty turbines were already visible from Brancaster, the effect of more turbines being visible would have a major adverse economic effect on the County. It was also suggested that the erection of turbines could cause sea levels to rise.

The Local Member for Holt, raised concerns over the visual impact, stating that it would change the seascape considerably on a clear day. He had concerns over the effects on the fishing industry and tourism in the area.

The Local Member for Fakenham, was concerned that the cabling would be going through a sensitive area of the Wash and could cause problems with electro magnetic fields. He felt that if the cabling were to go through Skegness, which was deeper water then the cables would be better placed. He felt that none of the environmental concerns had been addressed by the report.

The Local Member for Nelson Ward said that he was in favour of the turbines and it would be right not to raise an objection to the proposal. He felt that there was a need to engage in discussion with the fishermen in order to protect the fishing grounds as much as possible. He felt that industry should be welcomed into Norfolk so that jobs were created locally. He said that the reason that cabling was proposed to go through the Wash was so it could connect to the National Grid. He also said that there could be economic benefits to the turbines. He stated that nuclear energy was not a feasible solution as it would not deliver the energy needed by 2020 and when it did it would only increase fuel bills.

The Cabinet Member for Waste Management and the Environment said that he was in a dilemma, as the shallow waters in the Wash where there was plenty of wind was an ideal place for the turbines, especially as they were not popular on land. The Secretary of State would be looking to reach its targets for sustainable energy by 2020 and turbines would save on fossil fuel. Landscape issues were an important part of his portfolio but the cabling needed to go through the

Wash in order that it could connect up to the super grid although he did have concerns over the fishing industry and possible problems to tides.

The Local Member for Elmham and Matishall asked that she see the process in detail so that she had a good understanding of it. The Principal Planner agree to send her the non- technical summary of the process after the meeting.

The Cabinet Member for Planning and Transportation made the following comments:

- There were 270 permitted turbines in the County which could power half a million homes, which was more than the amount of homes in Norfolk. The County could be seen as self sufficient in terms of power.
- There would only be more employment in the region whilst the turbines were being built.
- The equipment would be made in Germany so would not help the UK economy.
- The erection of the turbines would see an industrialisation of the area.
- This was a protected area of outstanding natural beauty and was prized for its open spaces and wilderness which was unique to Norfolk.
- It seemed that rules over what could and could not be built in certain areas applied to the individual personal applicant but large scale developments were allowed to go ahead.
- The impact on the fishing industry could not be proven at this point but once the application was granted the turbines could not be removed if they did have an adverse effect on the sea life.

He felt that a precautionary principle should be adopted and proposed that an objection be raised to the application on the grounds of:-

1. The scale of the proposal and the detrimental impact on an outstanding area of natural beauty.
2. That the impact on the landscape would have a detrimental effect on tourism and the local economy.
3. The proposed cable route would have a detrimental effect on a conservation area.
4. It would have a detrimental impact on the local fishing industry.

It was generally felt that the cumulative impact of the turbines would destroy the unique features of the North Norfolk countryside and coastline.

The Cabinet Member for Waste Management and the Environment said that he did not agree with the effects the turbines would have on tourism in the area. It could not be proven that it would detract tourists

from the area and felt that it could actually increase it and so he would like that reason removed from the reasons for objection.

After much debate regarding whether or not the detrimental effect on tourism should be contained in a resolution, The Cabinet Member for Planning and Transportation proposed the following **RESOLUTION**:

That the Department of Energy and Climate Change be informed that Norfolk County Council wishes to raise a strategic objection to the Docking Shoal Offshore Wind Farm on the following grounds:

1. The scale of this proposal in combination with the other permitted offshore wind farm schemes would have a detrimental impact on the North Norfolk Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and Heritage Coast contrary to Policy ENV.2 of the East of England Plan;
2. There was concern that the landscape impact arising from this proposal on the North Norfolk Coast could have a detrimental effect on visitor numbers and the local economy contrary to the objectives set out in Policy E.6 of the East of England Plan;
3. There was concern that the proposed cable route and wind farm will have a detrimental impact on the Wash Estuary as a whole, which has a number of national and international nature conservation designations, including: RAMSAR site; National Nature Reserve; Special Protection Area (SPA); Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). As such the proposal is contrary to Policy ENV.3 of the East of England Plan; and
4. There was concern that the proposal could have a detrimental impact on the local fishing industry and local economy contrary to the wider sustainable aims of Policy SS.1 of the East of England Plan.

The Cabinet Member for Waste Management and the Environment said that he could not agree to the Resolution whilst it contained paragraph 2, so he would abstain from voting on the matter.

The Committee did not request a Public Inquiry but asked that the Department of Energy and Climate Change fully take into account the County Council's concerns before determining the Docking Shoal Wind Farm proposal.

With one vote for and one abstention it was **RESOLVED** Accordingly.

Reasons for Decision

The proposal would have major environmental benefits in terms of producing significant amounts of renewable energy. The Applicant's Environmental Statement indicated that the proposal could supply electricity for around 340,000 homes and lead to the reduction of up to 1.1 million tonnes carbon dioxide each year. These benefits were clearly consistent with:

- National Policy on renewable energy targets;

- Meeting the UK's Kyoto Protocol targets for reducing emissions of greenhouse gases;
- Meeting the aspirations/objectives set out in the Climate Change Act (2008), Energy Act (2008), and Planning Act (2008);
- The conclusions reached in the Stern Report;
- Policy ENG.1 of the East of England Plan (2008); and
- A Climate Change Strategy for Norfolk (2008).

The Committee accepted the above and that the proposed development would undoubtedly have major environmental benefits in terms of producing significant amounts of renewable energy but it was felt that despite the above, the Committee's objections would override these benefits and therefore it was agreed to raise an objection.

The objection to the proposal was raised based on:

- The scale of this proposal in combination with the other permitted offshore wind farm schemes would have a detrimental impact on the North Norfolk Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and Heritage Coast contrary to Policy ENV.2 of the East of England Plan;
- There was concern that the landscape impact arising from this proposal on the North Norfolk Coast could have a detrimental effect on visitor numbers and the local economy contrary to the objectives set out in Policy E.6 of the East of England Plan;
- There was concern that the proposed cable route and wind farm will have a detrimental impact on the Wash Estuary as a whole, which has a number of national and international nature conservation designations, including: RAMSAR site; National Nature Reserve; Special Protection Area (SPA); Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). As such the proposal is contrary to Policy ENV.3 of the East of England Plan; and
- There was concern that the proposal could have a detrimental impact on the local fishing industry and local economy contrary to the wider sustainable aims of Policy SS.1 of the East of England Plan.

Alternative Options Considered

The Principal Planner's report considered and recommended not raising an objection based on current local and regional policies.

CHAIRMAN

The meeting ended at 1.10pm



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