

Planning and Highways Delegations Committee

Minutes of the Meeting Held on Friday 24 April 2009

Present: Mr A Gunson

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

Officers: Mr S Faulkner – Planning and Transportation
Mrs Anita Ragan - Planning and Transportation

1. Apologies for absence:

There were apologies from Mr Monson.

2. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 13 February 2009 were confirmed as an accurate record and signed by the Chairman.

3. Declarations of Interest

Mr Wright declared a personal interest in item 4, 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 4 as a Member of the Wash and North Norfolk Coast European Marine Site Management Group.

Mr Rogers declared a personal interest as a Member of Breckland District Council.

4. Race Bank Offshore Wind Farm Proposal, Centrica Energy Ltd

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

It was noted that the Local Member for Docking, Mrs Monbiot supported the recommendation as contained in the report to raise an objection.

Mr Baxter said that he too supported the recommendation to raise an objection to the application for the same reasons as he gave on page six of the minutes of the last meeting on 13 February. He said that the people of Wells connected with the fishing industry were not in favour of the proposed turbines. He felt that there was a lack of baseline information, with only one to two years research which was completely insufficient to determine the future effects of such an installation.

The following comments were made for and against wind turbines.

- Oil supplies would cease in the next 25 years.
- There had been no objections to the turbines from the residents at Wells.
- When the wind stopped blowing no power would be generated.
- Turbines would not be erected at all if subsidies were not given by the Government to install them.

The Local member for Dersingham, Mrs Eells said that she supported the recommendation due to the unknown effects the turbines could have on The Wash and the marine life in it. She asked how it had been authorised that cables be laid through The Wash as the area had been clarified at the High Court as a “no mans land.” She also said that jobs of local fishermen were at stake. She said that she had been elected to represent the people in her division, some of who were people who rely on their income from the sea.

In response the Principal Planner said that he was not aware of the legal case she had referred to but understood that Crown Estate own, or are responsible for the sea-bed. He indicated that the application was not covered by land use planning legislation and would be determined by the Secretary of State responsible for Energy and Climate Change under the provisions of the 1989 Electricity Act. The Committee were being asked only for its comments on how the application would affect Norfolk.

In response to questions over numbers, the Principal Planner stated that 275 off shore wind turbines had been permitted or were operational off the coast of Norfolk. If this application went ahead there would be around 500. It was the cumulative impact which was the issue with this application and the fact that the proposal in combination with other permitted schemes would have implications on designated landscape and nature conservation areas.

Mr Callaby felt that wind power was a cleaner and better way to supply power but he had concerns about the power cables going through The Wash. He felt a study needed to be carried out on the impact of the turbines to see whether or not The Wash could withstand them.

Dr Boswell made the following points:

- He shared concerns over the cables going through The Wash and felt that the Grid connection needed to be moved out to Skegness to enable them to bypass The Wash.
- Centrica had published an extensive programme of data collection that had taken place which showed the application was designed to avoid areas of environmental importance.
- The issues raised about the inefficiency of turbines were unproven, there would never be a time when there would not be sufficient wind to produce electricity.
- Employment would be created for thousands of people around the area of Wells so it would be doing a disservice to the people of Norfolk if the application was not supported.
- Views taken on the application seemed very parochial. Although the energy that would be created by the turbines would be more than was needed in Norfolk it would mean providing energy for the rest of the country.
- The turbines would help reduce the impact of climate change.
- He had concerns about the livelihoods of the fishermen but the DTI had set up a Fishing Liaison Forum, so that any concerns could be voiced.
- There was no evidence to say that there would be a negative effect on visitors to the region.

Mr Wright said that it would be an impossible task to lay cables on the sea bed of The Wash as it changed continually, so there would not be a safe route for cables. There was a need to put pressure on the appropriate body to get the cables to go via Skegness.

The Chairman felt that the precautionary principle should be adopted and proposed to **RESOLVE:**

That the Department of Energy and Climate Change be informed that the County Council wishes to raise an objection to the Race Bank wind farm on the following ground:

The proposal in combination with other permitted and planned offshore wind farm schemes would have a detrimental impact on 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 in combination with other permitted and planned wind farms could have a detrimental impact on visitor numbers and the local economy contributing to the objectives of Policy E.6 of the East of England Plan.
- There were concerns about the cumulative impact of this proposal, taken with other permitted and planned schemes, on

the local fishing industry and local economy. The proposal is considered contrary to Policy SS.1 of the East of England Plan.

- There were environmental concerns regarding the wind farm and cabling route through the Wash Estuary, which has a number of national and international designations, including: Ramsar site; National Nature Reserve; Special Protection Area; and Site of Special Scientific Interest. As such this proposal is contrary to Policy ENV.3 of the East of England Plan.

Reasons for Decision

The proposed Race Bank wind farm development would undoubtedly have major environmental benefits in terms of producing significant amounts of renewable energy. The applicant's Environmental Statement indicates that the proposal could supply electricity for around 420,000 homes and lead to the reduction of up to 848,000 tonnes of carbon dioxide each year. These benefits are 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 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)
- A Climate Change Strategy for Norfolk (2008)

However, offset against these wider benefits, it recognised that this proposal was the latest in a series of offshore wind proposals off the North Norfolk coast, which has a variety of national landscape designations (e.g. Heritage Coast and AONB). It was felt that this proposal in combination with other permitted and proposed offshore wind farms would have a detrimental impact on the landscape character of the north Norfolk coast. This in turn could detract from the County's tourism offer and have an adverse economic impact. There were also concerns about the impact on the local fishing industry

In responding to the last three offshore wind farm proposals (August 2006; March 2007; February 2009) the County Council has taken a cautious view, raising concern about the cumulative adverse impact on the north Norfolk coast. Although the County Council has signed up to the Norfolk Climate Change Strategy (2008) which firmly recognises the need to cut carbon emissions, the potential adverse socio-economic and landscape impacts of the proposal are important material considerations.

Therefore, considering the cumulative impacts of successive proposals in the Greater Wash, it was recommended to raise an objection to this proposal. While previous advice in respect of the Docking Shoal

proposal recommended not raising an objection, in this instance it is felt that the combined impact with other permitted and proposed schemes is now too significant in landscape, ecology and local economy terms for this particular proposal to be supported. As such, an objection is recommended to the Race Bank offshore wind farm.

Alternative Options Considered

Any decision relating to this proposal would need to balance the local and national objectives for addressing climate change while at the same time needing to protect a very precious and sensitive part of the County's environment. The potential benefits arising from this proposal were significant in terms of the number of households (420,000) which could be supplied with electricity from a sustainable renewable source. This potentially could produce enough electricity to meet the needs of all the outstanding housing (still to build at March 2006) in the Eastern Region up to 2021. The proposed wind farm could significantly reduce carbon emissions by 850,000 tonnes per year. On this basis, it could be argued that the proposal is consistent with national, regional and local policies on energy and climate change. Therefore it could have been proposed to support the application.

It was further **RESOLVED** not to ask for a public enquiry.

CHAIRMAN

The meeting ended at 12.00pm



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