



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 16 May 2012

by Philip Major BA(Hons) DipTP MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government

Decision date: 30 May 2012

Appeal Ref: APP/T2350/A/12/2169968

Westby Hall Farm, Gisburn, Clitheroe, Lancashire BB7 4LL.

- The appeal is made under section 78 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 against a refusal to grant planning permission.
 - The appeal is made by Mr Robert Townson against the decision of Ribble Valley Borough Council.
 - The application Ref: 3/2011/0103, dated 10 February 2011, was refused by notice dated 12 January 2012.
 - The development proposed is the erection of a wind turbine for the farm use and as a farm diversification project.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issue

2. The main issue in the appeal is the effect of the proposed development on the character and appearance of the surrounding rural area.

Reasons

3. The proposed turbine (which would be of considerable size at about 44m to hub height and over 60m to tip) would be located in an attractive rural area which is characterised by its gently undulating and pastoral nature. It is within a wide valley flanked by higher land to north and south. The Forest of Bowland Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) lies nearby. The landscape is 'small scale' and 'intimate' for the most part, in that fields tend to be of modest size, and separated by hedges and occasional tree belts and woods. When added to the natural undulations of the landform this results in surprise views and hidden corners.
4. The evidence before me is that the landscape forms part of the landscape character area described as undulating lowland farmland in the Council's assessment. The 2005 publication '*Landscape Sensitivity to Wind Energy Development in Lancashire*' assessed this area as having a moderate to high sensitivity to such development. I agree with that. In addition the *Forest of Bowland AONB Landscape Character Assessment* considers this landscape to be moderately sensitive to development (not restricted to wind energy).
5. There is limited documentation associated with the proposal in relation to the potential landscape impact. The visualisations supplied are restricted in their viewpoints, and from my own observations I cannot be sure that they are an accurate representation of the turbine proposed. In any event, visualisations

do not offer a better assessment tool than the eye. I visited the site and its surroundings and have therefore seen the context of the proposal from a larger number of vantage points. I deal with some of them below.

6. When travelling towards the site from the east, along the minor road which also carries the Pennine Bridleway, the viewer would be in an elevated position relative to the appeal site. From here, as the land drops towards the A682, the turbine would be an obvious and uncharacteristic structure in the landscape. It would bear no relation to the scale of surrounding landscape features, and would be seen to be set apart from the farm buildings. The turbine would break the ridgelines in the distance and be seen against the sky.
7. When approaching the farm directly along the bridleway the turbine would loom larger as the viewer would be closer. Along the section of the bridleway which forms the farm access the turbine would be seen against the backdrop of Pendle Hill within the AONB. Pendle Hill has been described as iconic in representations, and that is a reasonable description. The turbine would interrupt the current unspoilt views of this significant upland area.
8. The area to the north of Westby Hall Farm dips away to the A59 and the views from the bridleway here would be more restricted. Nonetheless, in the absence of anything to show otherwise it is my judgement that the turbine blades and their associated movement would be visible against the backdrop of Pendle Hill. This is also true of the area around the entrance to Ribblesdale Park.
9. Although the appellant suggests that the turbine would not be visible from the A59 I am sure that it would be possible to see the turbine in views from the A59 to the west of Gisburn, and from the A682 where it drops northwards from higher ground. There is a public footpath running roughly north to south which begins in Gisburn village and passes close to the proposed turbine location. This would offer close and uninterrupted views of the development.
10. I have no doubt that there are other vantage points in publicly accessible areas, but those noted above indicate that the proposal would be highly visible from a wide area, though clearly would be less intrusive from longer range views. In my judgement the turbine would be of a height and scale which would be seriously harmful to the unspoilt attractive countryside in which it stands. There is nothing in the locality of a similar nature and it would stand out as an isolated and obtrusive structure. The landscape qualities which make the area appealing would be materially compromised.
11. The development would therefore be in conflict with those policies of the Ribble Valley Districtwide Local Plan which seek to protect the countryside and ensure that development is compatible with its surroundings. These policies include ENV2 and ENV3. There would also be conflict with the objectives of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) which seek to protect and enhance valued landscapes and recognise the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside.
12. On the other hand the Local Plan gives support to renewable energy projects, including wind power, in policies ENV24, ENV25 and ENV26. But these policies are criteria based and require a balance to be struck between the benefits of renewable energy and the impacts of the development, including on the landscape. This is a similar approach to that taken in the NPPF. Although

strongly in favour of renewable energy the NPPF indicates that adverse impacts should be addressed satisfactorily.

13. I accept that the proposal is a sustainable form of development and would help to address climate change whilst assisting the farm business. This seems to me to be supported by the economic and social roles of sustainable development as noted in the NPPF. However, the fact that the development would have a serious and damaging impact on the character and appearance of the surrounding rural area, including views into the AONB, means that the environmental role of sustainable development is not supportive in this case.
14. Turning to the overall balance on the main issue I cannot agree that the important objective of introducing renewable energy and assisting the diversification of the farm business is of sufficient weight to override the harm in this instance. The damage which would be caused to the character and appearance of the landscape would be too great.

Other Matters

15. There are some other matters which have been brought to my attention which do not affect the balance of my decision. These include the effect on biodiversity in a wildlife corridor, and potential harm to bats, but I do not have sufficient information to make a judgement on this matter. The effect on tourism is also cited as a concern, but again there is no evidence that the turbine would be likely to have a material effect. The Council accepts that noise from the turbine would be unlikely to cause disturbance and given the distance to properties I agree with that. There is no risk that approval of this development would cause others to be permitted since each case would be considered on the basis of the particular characteristics of the proposal. For similar reasons the reference to other cases is of limited value. The effect on property values is not a matter to which weight can be attached in land use planning.

Overall Conclusion

16. For the reasons given above I conclude that the proposed development would cause unacceptable harm to the character and appearance of the surrounding rural area and that there are no considerations which are sufficient to outweigh that harm. Therefore the appeal must fail.

Philip Major

INSPECTOR