
Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 8 October 2013

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

Decision date: 9 January 2014

Appeal Ref: APP/G0908/A/13/2192507

Land adjoining airfield, Wiggonby, Wigton, Cumbria CA7 0JR

- The appeal is made under section 78 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 against a failure to give notice within the prescribed period of a decision on an application for planning permission.
 - The appeal is made by Windberry Energy Operations Ltd against Allerdale Borough Council.
 - The application Ref 2/2012/0682 is dated 24 August 2012.
 - The development proposed is the erection of a single wind turbine with a maximum blade tip height of 62 metres and associated infrastructure including creating a new access track (approximately 78m in length), a crane pad (measuring approximately 20m by 22m), and an equipment housing cabinet.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Procedural matter

2. Details of the equipment housing cabinet referred to in the description of the development were not submitted, due to an oversight, with the application or with the appeal documentation. This matter could be covered by imposition of a condition if planning permission was to be granted.

Reasons

3. The main issues are; first, the effect of the proposed wind turbine, both individually and cumulatively with other existing wind turbines in the area, on the character and quality of the landscape; and second, whether any harm is outweighed by the benefits of the proposal.

The first issue – the character and quality of the landscape

4. The proposed wind turbine would be located towards the north-east corner of a field and close to a country road that loops around the west corner of Great Orton Airfield, once a WWII airfield but now the home of Watchtree Nature Reserve. About 0.8 kms to the south of the location of the proposed turbine is the linear village of Willonby and about 2.5 kms to the east is the village of Great Orton. The villages and the former airfield are within undulating farmed countryside to the north of the A596 and A595 in north Cumbria. The area within which the turbine would be located has a tranquil character and is attractive. It is not a dramatic landscape, like the landscape of the Lake District fells to the south, but it is, nevertheless, a landscape that will be appreciated by those who reside in it and by those who visit the area.

5. The proposed wind turbine, which would have a blade tip height of about 62 metres, would be only about 75 metres from the nearest country road. In views north and west from this road, given its proximity and height, the turbine would be an intrusive feature that would have a significant adverse effect on the character and appreciation of the landscape. In these views a significant feature of the landscape would be to the rear because the airfield is home not just to the nature reserve but to a development of six wind turbines. These turbines are 68 metres high to top blade tip, are almost in a line, and are regularly spaced.

6. The existing Great Orton wind farm dominates the countryside area between Great Orton and Wiggonby and is visible not just from these villages but from country roads and footpaths in the area. The erection of the turbines has resulted in the creation of a wind farm landscape where the turbines are the dominant features. The turbines are, in themselves, large and prominent features but their spinning blades also draw the eye and are seriously intrusive in views of the wind farm in distances across the landscape up to about 2 kms.

7. The six existing turbines are intrusive and prominent in the landscape but they are, given their regular spacing about 250 metres apart, uniform height, near linear arrangement and consistent form, a planned and coherent development. The proposed turbine would be about 800 metres to the west of the nearest existing turbine at the former airfield. It would be slightly different in height and form, would not be in line with the existing arrangement of turbines, and would not continue the regular spacing of the existing turbines.

8. The existing six turbines and the proposed single turbine would all be visible in views from the country roads to the south, west and north of the former airfield and in views from in and around Wiggonby to the south-west. In other views the proposed turbine would be visible in close proximity to one or more of the six existing turbines. The proposed turbine would compromise, and would be awkwardly juxtaposed to, the existing planned wind turbine development that is the principal feature of the landscape between Great Orton and Wiggonby.

9. Apart from the six turbines at the former airfield there are other, albeit smaller, turbines in the area, all within 3 kms of the location of the proposed turbine. There is one to the west near to Aikton, two to the south-west at Thornby Villa, one to the north at Oughterby, one to the west at Moordyke and one to the south-west at Greyrigg. Furthermore, a 74 metre high wind turbine has been permitted by Carlisle City Council for a location to the north-west of the existing six turbines at Great Orton and just outside the perimeter of the former airfield.

10. The proposed turbine would add to the number of turbines in the vicinity of the former airfield and would contribute to an impression that there is already an over-concentration of turbines in the area. The proposed turbine, individually and, more importantly, cumulatively with existing turbines, would have a significant adverse effect on the character and quality of the landscape in the vicinity of the former airfield. The proposal thus conflicts with saved policy E37 of the Cumbria and Lake District Joint Structure Plan (SP) and with saved policies EN19 and EN25 of the Allerdale Local Plan (LP).

The second issue

11. Farming and other activities, such as an increasing reliance on motorised transport in the last hundred years, have contributed to changes in the global climate that are having a detrimental effect on, amongst other things, the

landscape. The landscape of Allerdale is not immune to the effects of climate change. Flooding is a serious issue and will have affected Allerdale and the lives of those who live within the area. This one effect of climate change causes erosion of the landscape and alters how the landscape can be farmed and used.

12. Moving towards a low carbon future is at the heart of Government policy that seeks to meet the challenge of climate change. In paragraph 93 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) it is stated that 'Planning plays a key role in helping shape places to secure radical reductions in greenhouse gas emissions, minimising vulnerability and providing resilience to the impacts of climate change, and supporting the delivery of renewable and low carbon energy and associated infrastructure'. Paragraph 14 of the NPPF states that there is "...a presumption in favour of sustainable development..." and that for decision making this means granting planning permission unless "...any adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits...".

13. Saved LP policy EN25 states that "Proposals which would cause unacceptable harm to the character of the landscape...will not be permitted unless an overriding need for the development can be demonstrated". The policy, though it predates the publication of the NPPF, recognises that need or benefit of a proposal can outweigh the harm it would cause. Similarly, saved SP policy R44, which also predates the NPPF, states that in considering applications for planning permission the environmental, economic and energy benefits of renewable energy proposals should be given significant weight. There is, therefore, a balance to be struck between the harm and benefit of a renewable energy proposal.

14. Paragraph 98 of the NPPF states that "...even small-scale projects provide a valuable contribution to cutting greenhouse gas emissions". The small-scale energy project has not been proposed to provide energy for any specific business or enterprise. Instead, the claim is that it would provide enough electricity to supply the equivalent of about 185 households and would displace the equivalent of about 373 tonnes of CO₂ emissions per year from conventional forms of electricity generation. The turbine would reduce demand in the country for energy produced by the burning of fossil fuels and would assist in mitigating climate change by moving further towards a low carbon economy.

15. If the proposed turbine was to be a singular feature in the landscape the harm it would cause to the character and quality of the landscape would be outweighed by its renewable energy benefit. However, it would not be a singular feature but would be added to many existing similar features in the near vicinity and in the wider area. There is already an over-concentration of wind turbines in the countryside area that encompasses Wiggonby and Great Orton and the proposed turbine would, cumulatively with existing turbines, have a significant adverse effect on the character and quality of the landscape. This significant adverse effect, despite the encouragement provided by paragraph 98 of the NPPF, is not outweighed by the renewable energy benefit of the proposed wind turbine.

16. All other matters mentioned, both for and against the proposal, have been taken into account but do not outweigh the overall conclusion that planning permission must be withheld for the proposed wind turbine.

John Braithwaite

Inspector