



Hartlepool Local Planning Framework Emerging Local Plan

Matter 12

Strategic Wind Turbine Developments



September 2017



Issue 1 - Whether the proposed sites at Brenda Road and High Volts are justified, effective and consistent with national policy.

The Inspector notes that there are considerable volumes of representations both for and against the proposed strategic wind turbine development area at Brenda Road. The vast majority of these representations use standard template contents but have been treated as separate representations. The Inspectors questions focus on the key points raised in these submissions and the relevant national policy including the content of Written Material Statements. It is noted that the Council has provided a comprehensive response on representations to Policy CC4 within the Consultation Statement (document HLP01/4).

Q1. What is the rationale for the proposed sites? Is it economic strategy, a reflection of demand/interest from the industry in these sites and a need to manage development consistent with national policy, part of a Borough commitment to addressing climate change or a combination of all of these factors?

In the case of the Brenda Road allocation, the rationale is a combination of demand/interest from the industry but mainly reflective of the Council's commitment to address climate change. There have been proposals for a major wind turbine development in both the selected area and a nearby site. In the case of the High Volts allocation, there are three existing large turbines in the vicinity and there is support from the operator for an increase in the number of turbines which will also help to address climate change. The Planning Policy team consider that both allocations are consistent with national policy.

Q2. The Plan clearly identifies that the landscape evidence led to the identification of additional capacity at High Volts. The CPRE (representation Pub0074) submit that the Arup Study does not support development of the proposed scale proposed at High Volts. What is the justification for the additional scale of turbine development at this location?

The East Durham and Tees Plain Wind Farm Development and Landscape Capacity Study (Document reference HLP04/12) was produced by Arup on behalf of Durham County Council and Hartlepool Borough Council and provided an objective technical assessment of the capacity of an area to accommodate wind farm development using an agreed and accepted methodology. It includes the existing wind farm development of 3 turbines at High Volts. The study concluded that there is some limited potential for wind turbine development associated with the existing turbine development provided that the cluster did not exceed more than 6 turbines. Whilst HBC officers utilise the Arup assessment of sites and believe it remains a highly valid document, a number of Landscape and Visual Impact Assessments have been received through the planning process and the assessments of these documents by HBC officers has indicated that the High Volts site is in a relatively good position in relation to existing infrastructure and other such visual impact elements. In the interests of supporting renewable projects where appropriate, it was suggested that a small number of additional turbines of the approximate size and scale of the existing turbines could be accommodated. These would have to visually appear to be part of the same turbine cluster and should not significantly extend the visual envelope of the existing group.

Q3. In relation to Brenda Road, what is the evidence to support the identification of this particular area? Have alternative locations for strategic wind turbine developments been considered south-east of Hartlepool?

Neither the Wind Farm Development and Landscape Capacity Study (Document reference HLP04/12) or the Hartlepool Landscape Assessment (Document reference HLP10/6) included the main built-up areas, although the latter did consider urban greenspace. The closest zone to the Brenda Road area considered as part of the Wind Farm Landscape Capacity Study (Document reference HLP04/12) is that between Billingham and Hartlepool (zone 27). This zone is considered to be a medium sensitivity and the Study noted that a 'small-medium' scale wind farm (up to 6 turbines) could potentially be accommodated, related to the industrial

development of south east Hartlepool. The Study also noted however that the potential in zone 27 could be limited by the number of constraints in the area.

The Renewable Energy Evidence Paper (Document reference HLP04/16) did consider the Brenda Road area. It noted that there have been recent proposals to construct three large wind turbines in the area. It stated that, this is a predominantly industrial area and landscape, and there are several large structures in the area including the nuclear power station and the Huntsman plant. Given the industrial backdrop, the paper proposed that the Brenda Road area be identified in the Local Plan as suitable for further wind turbine developments. This would limit the adverse impacts and effects on landscape character and visual impact that would otherwise be found in more rural locations of Hartlepool. The scale of the turbines would, however, be critical as previously proposed developments incorporated turbines in the region of 200m high, which would have a much larger visual impact extending beyond the industrial area.

Q4. Is seven wind turbines with a potential installed capacity of 2MW each an appropriate basis on which to consider Policy CC4? Is the evidence clear that this would be the maximum number of turbines?

The total number of additional turbines at High Volts allowed under the policy is three which would make a total of six on the site. The Renewable Energy Evidence Paper (Document reference HLP04/16) concluded that there is some limited potential for wind turbine development associated with the existing turbine development provided that the cluster did not exceed more than 6 turbines. The total number of turbines allowed under the policy for the Brenda Road area is four. The study explains that this is a smaller area than previously suggested (proposed through planning applications) and it is therefore proposed that no more than 4 turbines should be allowed within the area. To summarise, the evidence is clear that seven new wind turbines is the maximum number of turbines that the Council considers to be appropriate in total across both areas.

Q5. Is wave and tidal technology a serious or viable renewables sector to develop or host in the coast off Hartlepool? Have there been proposals? Does the Plan directly or indirectly support off-shore renewables including the potential for tidal schemes?

Hartlepool Port (Policy EMP4: Specialist Industries) has been designated as an Enterprise Zone for the off-shore wind sector. Oakesway (Policy EMP3a: General Employment Land) has been included as part of the Enterprise Zone Local Development Order. Oakesway has been identified by the Council's Economic Regeneration team as where 2nd and 3rd tier suppliers could operate to serve a large wind turbine manufacturer based at the port. The Plan does therefore indirectly support off-shore renewables.

The Council is not aware of any specific study to consider the potential for develop wave and tidal technology off the coast off Hartlepool. However, the Government has identified and designated for off-shore renewable energy development, an area at the Dogger Bank in the North Sea to the east of Hartlepool. Any proposals to develop wave and tidal technology off the coast off Hartlepool would be considered by the Marine Maritime Organisation, not Hartlepool Borough Council.

Any inshore tidal renewable scheme would require a Habitats Regulations Assessment, particularly if the proposed extension to the Teesmouth and Cleveland Coast SPA and Ramsar is approved, as this extends 6km out to sea.

Q6. The Planning Practice Guidance¹ refers to community backing and this is reflected in the wording of Policy CC4. In this context is community backing necessary for the identification of suitable areas in Plans or is it specifically a criteria when considering development proposals?

The PPG states the written ministerial statement made on 18 June 2015 is quite clear that when considering applications for wind energy development, local planning authorities should (subject to the transitional arrangement) only grant planning permission if:

- the development site is in an area identified as suitable for wind energy development in a Local or Neighbourhood Plan; and
- following consultation, it can be demonstrated that the planning impacts identified by affected local communities have been fully addressed and therefore the proposal has their backing.

The PPG seeks to ensure that the concerns of the local community are fully addressed before the granting of planning permission for a wind turbine proposal. However, it is important to note that it is clear that *'whether the proposal has the backing of the affected local community is a planning judgement for the local planning authority.'* It is clear that this is a judgement that should be made at the stage of determining a planning application.

Q7. In respect of the proposed site at Brenda Road, what does the level of community comment (both for and against) indicate in terms of whether Policy CC4 proposal at Brenda Road would be deliverable? Consequently, would the policy be sound, in terms of being effective?

There has been significant community comment both for and against the proposed site at Brenda Road with approximately twice as many representations objecting to the proposed allocation as supporting it. Officers are firmly of the view that the proposed allocation is technically suitable for a strategic wind turbine development. If the allocation is supported by the Inspector then the local planning authority will work with the applicants for any proposal to seek to ensure that the proposal addresses the concerns of the local community. The Council is therefore confident that the policy would be deliverable.

Q8. Has it been satisfactorily demonstrated that on-shore wind turbine structures can be accommodated at Brenda Road without significant adverse impact on residential amenity and the amenity of those employed in the Southern Business Zone (primarily relating to noise and flicker)?

The Council's Environmental Health Manager (Environmental Protection) has advised that the industrial backdrop to the location is positive in principle for this type of development, within the context of environmental conditions, at the scale and number of turbines proposed within the policy. This is subject to any applications would need to be supported by a noise assessment under the ETSU-R97 guidance document and a shadow flicker assessment. These are dependent on the size and design of individual turbines and the technical specifications of the proposed turbines.

Officers would note that in response to public concern at the Preferred Options Stage as to the impact that the proposed turbines would have on residential amenity the Council reduced the proposed number of turbines from six down to four and moved the area of the proposed allocation to the west of Brenda Road in an attempt to reduce any adverse impact on residential amenity.

¹ Paragraph: 033 Reference ID:5-033-150618

Q9. What would be the harm to local character? In what visual context do the turbines need to be considered?

Within more rural/semi-rural sites in Hartlepool the primary harm to local character relates to the apparent industrialization of the area resulting from the presence of wind turbines and associated infrastructure. Although this would be true for the majority of land based wind turbines in the UK, which are largely located with rural and semi-rural areas, Hartlepool has a relatively small amount of surrounding 'countryside'. In this respect this area of Hartlepool countryside is an important recreational and amenity resource for the wider Hartlepool community, especially given the relative dearth of similar resource elsewhere in the borough. The fact that much of Hartlepool (and Teesside) is heavily urbanised and industrialised is often used as the basis of an argument for further degradation on what is viewed by some developers as already degraded landscape, or lower quality landscape (especially in regards to the larger tracts of countryside present in neighbouring County Durham). However, given that much of Hartlepool is visually dominated by urban and industrial elements the remaining accessible countryside is often afforded greater importance in its local context than the landscape may otherwise warrant in areas with a broader 'stock' of countryside. In this sense the visual impact of turbines may well be viewed more significantly in an area which is perceived as relatively unspoilt countryside by many local users. The presence of turbines should be considered in this context, with attempts made to minimize the visual envelope of such developments and consideration given to how the countryside is used and perceived by the wider community (and visitors).

The High Volts area, although located within a wider area of semi-rural landscape may offer a modest opportunity to expand the existing turbine cluster without significantly impacting on the more 'unspoilt' countryside in the vicinity. This is not an argument on the basis of further degrading an already degraded landscape, but rather recognising that a small expansion (on the basis of turbines of similar height) could be accommodated within the existing visual envelope of the site rather than expanding it. The harm to local character in this case would be reduced by the presence of existing infrastructure. This is not the case for the majority of other sites with existing turbines and it is a combination of topography, intervening landscape and established landscape features which presents a different visual context to most other sites. There are, however, already a considerable number of existing wind turbines in the vicinity of the A19 corridor and there is concern that road users experiencing the visual cumulative impact of turbine clusters will further exacerbate the concerns that a 'wind farm landscape' is developing around Hartlepool. This has implications for how the borough is perceived by potential visitors, investors and by the local population. Any further expansion of the High Volts cluster would have to ensure that it did not exacerbate this issue.

The Brenda Road area offers a very different landscape character to the areas of countryside to the west of the borough where the majority of existing sites are located and where wind turbine applications are generally focussed. The landscape context includes large industrial buildings and other clearly visible signs of industrialisation, albeit interspersed with areas which appear relatively 'green'. The location of turbines at this point would likely have a reduced impact on the landscape character (assuming the scale of the turbines was appropriate) within an area that is more readily accommodating of such developments. The scale of the turbines is, however, critical in ensuring that the development remained within the context of the industrial area and did not visually extend the impact of the industrial area outside of the area.

Q10. Is there evidence that the Brenda Road proposal would 'sterilise' or inhibit employment proposals within the Southern Business Zone? Conversely, is there evidence that wind turbines at this location could have a positive impact on employment and businesses in the area?

Any applications would need to be supported by a noise assessment under the ETSU-R97 guidance document and a shadow flicker assessment. These are dependent on the size and design of individual turbines and the technical specifications of the proposed turbines. HBC officers consider that the Brenda Road proposal would have no discernible impact, either positive or negative, on the employment vitality of the Southern Business Zone and are not aware of any evidence to the contrary.

Q11. **Are there any likely significant effects on bird populations associated with the nearby SPAs?**

Allocated sites

Two areas are allocated for wind turbine development – at the existing High Volts wind farm between Hart and Elwick villages and in the Brenda Road industrial area.

European Sites

The closest SPA (and Ramsar site) is the Teesmouth and Cleveland Coast (T&CC). This covers large tracts of land in Hartlepool borough. This includes the Tees estuary wetlands north of Greatham Creek, coastal sand dunes, Seaton Common, the rocky foreshore of Hartlepool Headland, the sandy shore of North Sands and the Crimdon Dene little tern nesting colony. The imminent Defra public consultation on the proposed extension to the T&CC SPA is likely to result in the whole of the borough's coast + inland waters being a SPA designation by spring 2018.

T&CC SPA interest features:

- Breeding little tern
- Passage sandwich tern
- Wintering knot
- Passage redshank
- Internationally important assemblage of wintering waterfowl (20,000)

T&CC Ramsar qualifying features:

- Internationally important assemblage of wintering waterfowl (9,528)
- Wintering knot
- Passage redshank

It is accepted that there is considerable movement between designated sites by some of these species and also that there is movement to and use of, some non-designated sites. In planning terms these other sites are referred to as 'functional land'. These sites have weighting in the planning system as they support a qualifying species and loss of that site for those birds, is a material consideration. For example, curlews have been captured on Seal Sands and fitted with colour rings on their legs. Some of these birds have then been sighted at other sites, e.g. Hurworth Burn Reservoir 14km to the NW.

Assessment of Likely Significant Effect - Brenda Road area

Some bird survey work was done for the 'giant turbine' planning applications in 2015-16. Hartlepool BC screened out HRA stage 1 Likely Significant Effect (LSE) as there was no evidence of flight lines over the three sites. The HBC Ecologist assesses that there will be no LSE in this area for the following reasons:

- During surveys, no bird movements were logged over the sites.
- The majority of bird movements are between the core wetland sites in the Tees estuary and along the coast and not over the Brenda Road area.
- The allocated site does not fall between the Tees estuary core sites and any close by wetland sites.
- Any birds moving westwards to Crookfoot Reservoir or Hurworth Burn Reservoir would fly high as the distances are over 10km.
- There are no significant tracts of suitable habitat to attract SPA birds (bird preference is for wet grassland habitat).

Assessment of Likely Significant Effect - High Volts Wind Farm

There is a number of existing wind turbines on the site, which was given planning permission in 2001. The Environmental Statement was weak on ecology and referred only to farmland birds. The HBC Ecologist assesses that there will be no LSE in this area for the following reasons:

- The allocated site does not fall between the Tees estuary core sites and any outlying wetland sites.

- High Volts is over 8km from Seaton Common, the closest suitable site for wildfowl and waders
- Council records have not indicated regular movements of waterfowl other than high-flying gulls.
- Most of the on-site habitat is arable, so there is little suitable habitat to attract SPA birds to the allocated site (bird preference is for wet grassland habitat).

Q12. **The area for Policy CC4 at Brenda Road washes over general employment land at Policy EMP3g and land for specialist employment at EMP4e. Is that deliberate and does it?**

This is deliberate as HBC officers consider that strategic wind turbine development can be accommodated alongside employment development.