OFFICER REPORT

Case No: 25/00844/FUL **Full Planning Application**

Proposal: **Replacement wind turbine (74Metres high) in alternate location with 2No. Green housing cabinets**

Location: **Field South Of Tick Fen Farm Puddock Road Warboys**

Applicant: **Mrs Anna Whittome**

Grid Ref: **533640 284544**

DESCRIPTION OF SITE AND APPLICATION

The application site comprises agricultural land and an existing 46m high, 80kW Endurance wind turbine, permitted under planning application ref: 1101601FUL, along with associated infrastructure and hard surfacing. The site lies within a wider agricultural landscape associated with Tick Fen Farm, which is currently in arable use. The farm extends to approximately 70 hectares and is under the ownership of the applicant.

The application site itself covers 0.18 hectares, which includes the swept area of the turbine blades, the access track, a 16m2 electrical cabinet, 8.68m2 substation and the tower base with a ground surface area of 10.67m2.

Tick Fen Farm also hosts two other operational wind turbines:
o 1no. Gaia wind turbine with a tip height of 24.8m (planning ref: 1000119FUL), located approximately 73m northwest of the application site.
o 1no. Vestas V66 wind turbine with a tip height of 100m (planning ref: 24/00311/FUL), located approximately 460m southwest of the proposed turbine location.

The immediate landscape is relatively flat, characterised by arable farmland and scattered farmsteads. However, the visual character of the area is significantly influenced by the Red Tile Wind Farm, located to the southeast of the site. This operational wind farm comprises 12 wind turbines, each with a tip height of 100m, and forms a dominant feature in the wider landscape.

The application seeks planning permission for the removal of an existing Endurance 80kW wind turbine (tip height: 46m) and its replacement with a WTN 500kW wind turbine (tip height: 74m) offering a greater energy output than the existing turbine. The replacement turbine, comprising a white monopole tower and a nacelle with three blades, would have a similar visual appearance to the existing one. The replacement turbine would be located approximately 12m northeast of the existing turbine. However, two green cabinets would be installed at the base of the turbine to house ancillary electrical equipment.

Officers have scrutinised the plans and have familiarised themselves with the site and surrounding area.

NATIONAL GUIDANCE

The National Planning Policy Framework (12th December 2024) (NPPF 2024) sets out the three objectives - economic, social and environmental - of the planning system to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development. The NPPF 2024 at paragraph 10 provides as follows: 'So that sustainable development is pursued in a positive way, at the heart of the Framework is a presumption in favour of sustainable development (paragraph 10).'

The NPPF 2024 sets out the Government's planning policies for (amongst other things):
* delivering a sufficient supply of homes;
* building a strong, competitive economy;
* achieving well-designed, beautiful and safe places;
* conserving and enhancing the natural, built and historic environment.

For full details visit the government website: https://www.gov.uk

PLANNING POLICIES

Huntingdonshire's Local Plan to 2036 - adopted May 2019
*LP1: Amount of Development
*LP2: Strategy for Development
*LP4: Contributing to Infrastructure Delivery
*LP5: Flood Risk
*LP6: Waste Water Management
*LP10: The Countryside
*LP11: Design Context
*LP12: Design Implementation
*LP14: Amenity
*LP15: Surface Water
*LP17: Parking Provision and Vehicle Movement
*LP30: Biodiversity and Geodiversity
*LP31: Trees, Woodland, Hedges and Hedgerows
*LP35: Renewable and Low Carbon Energy

Supplementary Planning Documents (SPD) and Guidance:
*Wind Energy Development in Huntingdonshire (2014)
*Huntingdonshire Design Guide SPD (2017)
*Huntingdonshire Townscape and Landscape Assessment SPD (2022)
*Developer Contributions SPD (2011)
*Cambridgeshire Flood and Water SPD (2017)

Local policies are viewable at https://www.huntingdonshire.gov.uk

PLANNING HISTORY

Planning history on application site:
1101601FUL- Installation of wind turbine (46m to tip), concrete footing and underground cable- Permitted 30.03.2010

Planning history on surrounding land:
24/00311/FUL- Replacement of existing Wind Technik Nord 500kW wind turbine (tip height 74m) with 1no Vestas V66 wind turbine (tip height 100m) -Permitted 17.05.2024

1300084FUL - Installation of 1 WTN 500KW wind turbine with tip height of 74M and associated temporary infrastructure - Approved

1400967FUL - Installation of 2 substations adjacent to WTN 500kW wind turbine (PP 1300084FUL) - Approved

1000119FUL - Erection of an 18m high domestic wind turbine, concrete footing and underground cable - Approved

1101601FUL - Installation of wind turbine (46m to tip), concrete footing and underground cable - Approved

CONSULTATIONS
NATS Safeguarding- No objection. The proposed development has been examined from a technical safeguarding aspect and does not conflict with our safeguarding criteria. Accordingly, NATS (En Route) Public Limited Company ("NERL") has no safeguarding objection to the proposal.

Natural England- No objection. Based on the plans submitted, Natural England considers that the proposed development will not have significant adverse impacts on statutorily protected nature conservation site or landscapes.

Environment Agency- No objection.

CCC Highways-No objection. The existing access to Tick Fen Farm will be used which is already adequate for HGV use. Therefore, no significant adverse effect upon the Public Highway should result from this proposal should it gain benefit of Planning Permission.

Warboys Parish Council - No objection and recommends approval.

HDC Ecology Officer - No comment at the time of determination.

HDC Landscape Officer- No objection. The proposed replacement wind turbine is 28m taller than the previous and would be seen in the context of the red tile windfarm in the fens, landscape harm is not considered to be significant.

REPRESENTATIONS
No third-party representations received in support or objection at the time of determination.

SUMMARY OF ISSUES
The main issues to consider in the determination of this application are:
- Environmental Impact Assessment
- Principle of development
- Design, Visual Amenity and Impact on the Character and Appearance of the Area
- Residential Amenity
- Highway Safety
- Biodiversity
- Flood Risk
- Other considerations

*Environmental Impact Assessment
The proposed development qualifies as 'EIA development' under the Town and Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2017, as it falls within the description set out in Schedule 2, Column 1 - 3(i): Installations for the harnessing of wind power for energy production (wind farms). It also meets the applicable threshold in Column 2 - (ii): where the hub height of any turbine or the height of any other structure exceeds 15 metres.

Planning officers have undertaken an EIA screening opinion using the Screening Matrix in accordance with the 2017 Regulations. Following this assessment, it has been concluded that the development does not require an Environmental Statement. A summary of the screening opinion is provided in Section 18 of the matrix, which is available on the planning file for this application.

*Principle of development
The application site is situated within the countryside, where Policy LP10 of the Local Plan applies. This policy seeks to restrict development to limited and specific opportunities as set out in other relevant policies of the Local Plan. In this case, it is considered that Policy LP35 (Renewable and Low Carbon Energy) is applicable to the proposed development, given its nature, purpose and use.

Paragraph 161 of the NPPF 2024 states the planning system should support the transition to net zero by 2050 and take full account of all climate impacts including overheating, water scarcity, storm and flood risks and coastal change. It should support renewable and low carbon energy and associated infrastructure. Page 77 of the NPPF 2024 defines renewable energy as energy flows that occur naturally and repeatedly in the environment e.g. from the wind. Policy LP35 is consistent with the NPPF 2025 in terms of proposals for renewable energy.

Policy LP35 of the Local Plan states that a proposal for wind energy development will only be supported where:
a. it lies within the area identified as suitable for wind energy development, being the whole of the district with the exception of the Great Fen and its Landscape and Visual Setting, or within an area defined in an adopted neighbourhood plan;

The site is not located within the Great Fen or its defined Landscape and Visual Setting. As such, it is considered to be an appropriate location for wind energy development.

b. following consultation, as set out in the Wind Turbine Development guidance note, the Council is satisfied that all potential adverse planning impacts, including cumulative impacts and those identified by affected local communities, have been fully addressed.

No objections have been received from either statutory or non-statutory consultees. While the cumulative landscape and visual effects will be assessed in detail in the following section of this report, it is not considered that the proposed replacement wind turbine would result in any significant or detrimental planning impacts.

Policy LP35 also requires provision for the removal of apparatus and reinstatement of the site to an acceptable condition, should the scheme become redundant or at the end of the permitted period for time limited planning permissions.

The accompanying Design and Access Statement indicates that the proposed wind turbine has an expected operational lifespan of 25 years. At the end of this period, it is anticipated that the turbine will be decommissioned, and the site will be restored to its original agricultural use. In light of this, it is recommended that a planning condition be imposed to limit the operational period of the turbine to 25 years from the date of first generation. Additionally, a further condition should require the submission and implementation of a scheme for the repair or removal of the turbine and associated infrastructure, including remedial works to the land, in the event that the turbine ceases to generate electricity for a continuous period of 12 months.

Having regard to the above, the principle of a replacement wind turbine accords with local and national policy. In accordance with Paragraph 166 of the NPPF 2024, the applicant is not required to demonstrate the overall need for renewable energy. Furthermore, the NPPF 2024 sets out that local planning authorities should give significant weight to the benefits of utilising an established site to applications for the repowering and life-extension of existing renewable sites (Paragraph 167). The principle of development is therefore supported, subject to all other material planning considerations assessed below.

*Design, Visual Amenity and Impact on the Character and Appearance of the Area
Policies LP11 and LP12 of Huntingdonshire's Local Plan to 2036 state that developments should respond positively to their context, draw inspiration from the key characteristics of its surroundings and contribute positively to the area's character and identity. Furthermore, Policy LP10 requires proposals in the countryside to recognise the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside.

Whilst the site and its surroundings are not legally or statutorily protected, the site is identified as being within 'The Fens' Landscape Character Area in Huntingdonshire's Landscape and Townscape Supplementary Planning Document 2022. According to paragraph 3.1 of the Wind Energy

Development in Huntingdonshire SPD (2014), this landscape character area is considered to have a high capacity to accommodate single wind turbines and medium-scale turbine groups.

During the course of the application officers clarified the 16m2 electrical cabinet and 8.68m2 substation would be located on existing hardstanding. The proposed turbine would be sited 12m northeast from the existing turbine and be 28m taller. The turbine proposed comprises a monopole tower, nacelle and 3no blades and would be painted in a light grey colour with a matt finish the same as the existing turbine.

The application is accompanied with photo montages of the existing 80KW turbine and the proposed WTN 500 turbine in the proposed siting.

Photomontages 2a (existing) and 2b (proposed), viewed from the concrete access road, indicate that the proposed development would result in only a minor impact on the character of the flat fenland landscape when observed from this angle.

Photomontage 1a (existing) and 1b (proposed) viewed from Paddock Road, demonstrates that the proposal would increase the visual impact to the character of the landscape, however all of the wind turbines (12non. x100m turbines at Red Tile Wind Farm) in the vicinity of the site are out of scale with the immediate flat landscape of the fens landscape. In this context, the proposed replacement with a single WTN 500kW wind turbine, featuring a tip height of 74metres, is not anticipated to give rise to any significant environmental effects. The turbine would be perceived as part of the existing wind farm grouping, and any visual or landscape impact resulting from the increased height and altered siting would be limited and contextually acceptable.

Furthermore, the Landscape Officer was consulted on the application and raised no objection to the submitted scheme. The Officer stated the proposed replacement wind turbine is 28m taller than the previous and would be seen in the context of the red tile windfarm in the fens, landscape harm is not considered to be significant.

Given that the proposed turbine is intended to replace an existing structure, albeit in a slightly amended siting, and considering its location in the context of the medium-scale wind farm to the south, it is not considered that the development would have an adverse impact on key landscape values or appear unduly prominent within its rural setting. It is recommended that a condition be imposed requiring the turbine to have a light grey finish, as previously approved, prohibiting the display of any logos, signage, or similar markings, and ensuring that the turbine is not illuminated. The proposal therefore complies with Policies LP10, LP11, LP12 and LP35 of the Local Plan and the Wind Energy Development in Huntingdonshire SPD (2014).

*Residential Amenity
Policy LP14 of the Local Plan states a proposal will be supported where a high standard of amenity is provided for all users and occupiers of the proposed development and maintained for users and occupiers of neighbouring land and buildings. Potential residential amenity impacts associated with the development include noise and shadow flicker.

A noise specification report for the proposed WTN 500 kW wind turbine has been submitted in support of the application. The report follows IEC standard measurement techniques and provides detailed sound power and pressure levels across a range of wind speeds and frequencies.

Measurements were taken at a distance of 75 metres from the turbine base, with the hub height at 50 metres. The A-weighted total sound pressure level recorded was 55.3 dB(A), and the sound power level ranged from 92.8 dB(A) at 5 m/s wind speed to 100.1 dB(A) at 10 m/s. Frequency-specific data confirms that no clearly audible tones or impulses were detected during testing. The report also includes a graph showing the attenuation of sound pressure levels with distance, indicating a significant reduction in noise levels beyond 300 metres from the turbine. The closest residential dwellings to the site are "The Farm" at Tick Fen Farm over 350m from the application site

and therefore, it is not considered the noise would have a detrimental impact on the occupants of surrounding residential properties.

Guidance indicates that shadow flicker can occur within a distance equivalent to 10 times the rotor diameter, and within an arc of 130 degrees either side of north. Based on this, Red Tile Farmhouse, located approximately 200 metres to the southeast of the proposed turbine, falls within the theoretical shadow flicker zone.

However, shadow flicker is generally rare and only occurs under a specific combination of conditions, including clear weather, low sun angles, seasonal timing, and the orientation of nearby receptors (e.g. presence of windows, screening vegetation, or intervening structures such as barns).

Notwithstanding this, the proposal involves the replacement of an existing turbine, and the applicant has confirmed that there are no non-financially involved residential properties within the critical distance of the new turbine location. As such, the risk of shadow flicker affecting sensitive receptors is considered to be minimal.

It is not considered the replacement wind turbine would result in detrimental adverse amenity impacts and therefore complies with Policy LP14 of the Local Plan.

*Highway Safety
Policy LP17 of the Local Plan to 2036 seeks to ensure that new development incorporates appropriate space for vehicle movements and facilitates access for service vehicles.

Cambridge County Council as the Local Highway Authority have raised no objection to the proposal. The existing access off Puddock Road to Tick Fen Farm would be utilised and already provides an adequate access for HGV use.

During the decommissioning and installation of the wind turbine, cranes would be required to install the turbine and concrete lorries for the construction of the foundation. During the course of construction it is anticipated 16 HGVs would access the site to deliver the concrete foundations over one week. The installation of the proposed wind turbine would require a maximum of 2no. cranes over a week. The installation team would create up to 5 vehicle trips per day during the removal and installation of the proposed wind turbine.

The trip generation listed above is only associated with the removal of the existing turbine and its replacement. The established access is considered to accommodate the type and number of vehicles associated with the installation. Once operational, traffic generation would be limited to maintenance activities, which are not expected to cause any significant disruption to the use of the existing access.

It is considered the proposal would be acceptable in terms of highway safety and complies with Policy LP17 of the Local Plan.

*Biodiversity
Paragraph 187 of the NPPF (2024) states planning policies and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment. Policy LP30 of the Local Plan requires proposals to demonstrate that all potential adverse impacts on biodiversity and geodiversity have been investigated and ensure no net loss in biodiversity and provide a net gain where possible.

The submitted Design and Access statement and Biodiversity Statement as well as the accompanying Biodiversity Checklist indicates the site is of low ecological value given only 10.67m2 of agricultural land would be converted to concrete hardstanding to facilitate the installation of the new turbine.

Notwithstanding the above, an Extended Phase 1 Ecology Survey (Avian Ecology Ltd, 2012), albeit considered out of date, concluded that the proposed development would not result in direct or indirect impacts on statutory or non-statutory ecological designations. The site lies outside sensitive bird zones and within an RSPB-defined 'green zone', indicating low ornithological value. Bird species recorded in the wider area are not considered at significant risk of collision or displacement, and cumulative impacts from nearby turbines have been found to be negligible.

The site is also considered low risk for bats due to the absence of roosts, foraging features, or linear vegetation. No impacts are anticipated on other protected species such as badgers, reptiles, amphibians, otters, or water voles due to poor habitat suitability and lack of watercourse disturbance.

As of 2 April 2024, a mandatory 10% Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) requirement applies to small sites. The application form accompanying this proposal states that the development is exempt from BNG under the de minimis threshold, which applies to developments that impact less than 25m² of on-site habitat and less than 5m of linear habitats.

During the course of the application officers clarified the 16m2 electrical cabinet and 8.68m2 substation would be located on existing hardstanding and a new 10.67m2 area of concrete would be installed on the agricultural land to act as a foundation for the tower of the turbine. It is therefore considered the development would not exceed the de minimis threshold and is BNG exempt.

Given the proposal replaces an existing turbine, it is not considered there would be any detrimental impacts on biodiversity as a result of the proposal. It is not considered the proposal would result in net loss, subject to the imposition of conditions, and therefore it complies with Policy LP30 of the Local Plan.

*Flood Risk
The application site is located within Flood Zones 2 and 3a on the Environment Agency's Flood Map for Planning and Huntingdonshire's Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (2017). A Flood Risk Assessment has been submitted in support of the development.

Paragraph 177 of the NPPF 2024 states that if it is not possible for development to be located in areas with a lower risk of flooding (taking into account wider sustainable development objectives), the exception test may have to be applied. The need for the exception test will depend on the potential vulnerability of the site and of the development proposed, in line with the Flood Risk Vulnerability Classification set out in NPPF Annex 3. The proposal for a wind turbine is 'essential infrastructure' as per Annex 3 and this is compatible use of the land with Flood Zone 3a subject to the exception test.

Paragraph 178 of the NPPF 2024 states that to pass the exception test it should be demonstrated that:
a) the development would provide wider sustainability benefits to the community that outweigh the flood risk; and
b) the development will be safe for its lifetime taking account of the vulnerability of its users, without increasing flood risk elsewhere, and, where possible, will reduce flood risk overall.

The application is accompanied with a Flood Risk Assessment (FRA) which states the development would introduce a small area of impermeable surface (approx. 18.8m² for the turbine base), with temporary access panels and crane pads used only during installation. The site is flat, located at 1m AOD, and lies outside the most flood-prone surface water areas, though it remains at some risk during extreme events. The nearest drain is 35m away, and the turbine is sited to avoid oversailing the 9m buffer zone required by the Internal Drainage Board (IDB). The control panel would be elevated 600mm above ground level, and operatives are advised to consult the Environment Agency's Floodline service before site visits. The submitted FRA concludes the proposal would pass the exception test due to its renewable energy benefits and minimal flood risk impact.

Given the small area of additional impermeable surface created by the development, and the fact that it involves the replacement of an existing turbine, it is considered that the proposal would not result in any material increase in flood risk to others. Furthermore, the sustainability benefits associated with the generation of renewable energy are deemed to outweigh any potential flood risk. On this basis, it is considered that the proposal meets the requirements of the Exception Test as set out in the National Planning Policy Framework.

Subject to a condition ensuring that the development is carried out in accordance with the submitted Flood Risk Statement and associated mitigation measures, the proposal is considered acceptable in flood risk terms. The proposal complies with Policy LP5 and the NPPF 2024 in this regard.

*Other considerations
Impact on Air Safety:
As the nearest licensed aerodromes are Peterborough Conington (15.3 km northwest) and Cambridge Airport (29.9 km southeast), aviation interests including the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA), National Air Traffic Services (NATS) and the Ministry of Defence (MOD) have been consulted on the application.

The site lies outside the 5 km safeguarding zone for Peterborough Conington and just within the 30 km zone for Cambridge Airport.

Whilst the proposal looks to increase the height of the turbine by an approximate 28m and relocate its positioning approximately 12m northeast, this would be in close proximity to a wind farm comprising 12 no. 100m high wind turbines at Red Tile Wind Farm. Neither the MOD nor NATS raised objections to the original turbine or the Red Tile Wind Farm. In this case NATS raise no objection to the proposal. Due to the presence of existing large-scale turbines at Red Tile Wind Farm, it is considered unlikely the proposed turbine would cause any further impact on the operational activities of nearby licenced aerodromes, including Peterborough Conington Aerodrome and Cambridge Airport.

*Conclusion and Planning Balance:
Having regard to applicable national and local planning policies, and having taken all relevant material considerations into account, it is therefore recommended that planning permission should be granted for the following reasons:

* The principle of development is acceptable
* Is of an appropriate scale and design and would not have a harmful impact upon the character and appearance of the area;
* Would not have a significantly detrimental impact upon the amenity of neighbours;
* Would have a negligible impact on biodiversity and geodiversity.
* Is acceptable in flood risk terms
* There are no other material planning considerations which lead to the conclusion that the proposal is unacceptable.

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CONTACT OFFICER:
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