

TV Energy Case Study: Westmill Wind Farm, Oxfordshire

Description:	Planning approval granted in 1999 for a cluster of 5 Carter Wind turbines(installed capacity 1.5 MW) and in 2001 for Vestas V52 wind turbines (installed capacity 4.25MW). Planning application submitted in 2001 for 5 Bonus 1.3MW wind turbines (installed capacity 6.5MW). (Reason for this application was to ensure opportunity for local community ownership of windturbines.)
Status of Project:	Application for the Bonus 1.3MW rejected in October 2003. After appeal the Bonus turbines finally approved – to be constructed early 2005.
Location:	Westmill Farm, near Watchfield, Vale of White Horse, Oxfordshire.
Owner/ Developer:	Adam Twine.

Planning Background

The Watchfield Airfield site at Westmill Farm, Watchfield, Oxon, SN6 8TH is located next to a main road (the A420), and forms part of a family-run organic farm belonging to Adam Twine.

In November 1994 a planning application was submitted to the Vale of the Whitehorse District Council (VWHDC) for 5 Carter 300 wind turbines (hub height 50m) on the site and the application was approved in Nov 1999. However in the intervening years four years between the submission of the application and approval, the design of the wind turbine had become obsolete and was no longer manufactured.

On 4TH January 2001 planning consent was granted for five Vestas V52 Wind Turbines, with a hub height of 50m and a rotor diameter of 52m (WAT/1611/9). However in May 2001 the site developer, the Wind Fund, withdrew from the project. A new development partnership was established with National Wind Power (NWP) and Baywind Energy Co-operative to offer community ownership for 40% of the project. For the project to be financially viable NWP identified the Bonus 1.3 MW as the turbine best suited to the lowland location. This turbine has a hub height of 50m, the same as the Vestas but a longer blade length.

The Current Proposal

VWHDC received a planning application on 24/9/01 to modify the permission granted in January 2001 (WAT/1611/12). The only noticeable difference was a 5m extension in blade length, giving a total rotor diameter of 62 metres. The longer turbine blade length would have given a **40%** greater power output and ensured the opportunity for community ownership. The number of turbines, position, hub height, tower width, and sound output remained unchanged.

Local Opinion

Local Support Groups: local people formed a support group called Wind Over Westmill (WOW). High levels of local support was verified by an independent survey conducted by Oxford Brookes in March of 2002 and endorsed by an Oxfordshire FOE petition (with over 1000 signatories) the Environment Agency, Greenpeace and the RSPB.

Local Opposition Groups: Vale Environmental Concerns – (VECS) raised strong objections to the proposal on the grounds of planning policy, visual impact, energy production, contradiction with Government and local planning policy and a flawed environmental impact assessment. One specific issue raised by VECS concerned

that of the business carried out at Penny Hooks Farm, Shrivenham an organic farm which has diversified to include the Penny Hooks Project which is the involvement of 13 or more autistic children in a countryside stewardship curriculum. Concerns were raised by those who run the project about the detrimental effects the wind turbines would have upon the students involved.

Responses to the consultation: A wide range of responses were received in response to the applicant's consultation exercise on the EIA and the Councils own consultations carried out in relation to the application. A list of these is included in Annex 1.

A significant number of letters were received by VOWHDC both in opposition and in support of the application, from both within and outside the Vale of White Horse.

At the time of the Planning Committee meeting, in October, 203 letters of objection had been received from individuals within the district and 26 letters of objection from individuals outside the district. Generally comments made fell within the following: wind energy is not efficient and damaging and alternative renewable energy sources should be developed first, energy conservation is more useful on reducing CO₂, a blot on the landscape, inadequate wind on site, the environmental impact assessment flawed as alternative sites not considered, noise, driver distraction, distraction to horses, concerns over setting a precedent for more wind turbines in the future, property devaluation. An expanded list of these concerns is included in Annex 1.

54 letters of support were received from within the Vale area and 91 letters of support from outside the Vale area. Reasons for supporting the proposal included: 40% more energy generation, quieter turbines, environmental benefits, meeting government targets, local investment opportunities, exaggeration by local objectors, benign environmental impacts, wind energy clean and efficient form of energy generation, a local contribution to a global problem. Again, an expanded list is included in Annex 1.

Petitions and round-robin letters: Several petitions and pro forma letters were received in relation to the proposal, instigated by the objectors and applicants.

A petition in opposition was signed by 297 and submitted by Richard Hurford of Pennyhooks Farm, Shrivenham objecting to the proposal on the grounds of visual impact, low wind speed, inefficient energy production, harm to Pennyhooks farm project involved with young people with autism and the fact that the harm caused is not outweighed by the benefits.

Pro-forma letters in support of the application were received from 50 people. A petition from Oxfordshire Friends of the Earth signed by 1127 people supported the proposal on the grounds of contribution to renewable energy production.

Planning Committee Meeting 23rd October 2003

A special planning committee was held and was attended by over 200 people. **The planning Officer's RECOMMENDATION was POSITIVE**, that the Government, Structure Plan and Local Plan policies are supportive of the proposal and that objections raised to visual impact, noise, shadow flicker and other environmental grounds were not sufficient and presented no basis for refusal. The only issue of concern was that of aircraft safety at a local airfield and the Planning Officer advised the Committee could defer decision on the issue of air safety, until an expert could be found to help the Council consider this as grounds for refusal and to give the applicant time to respond. Further details on these issues are included in Annex 2.

Objectors speaking on the night included:

- **Watchfield Parish Council:** low wind speeds: regional 'guidelines' that sites under 6.5m/s were 'not viable' and 'could not be exploited', visual influence, the "miniscule" electricity output

- **Shrivenham Parish Council:** Penny Hooks Farm would close as a result, the gliding club was at risk, low frequency noise risk not known as no other wind farm sited so close to housing
- **Longcot Parish Council:** many issues to resolve and no supporters in the village
- **Local residents (2):** size of development, visual impact and high local opposition
- **The National Trust:** NT recognised the need to promote renewable energy, but consider this development to threaten a historic landscape
- **Friends of the Ridgeway and CPRE (jointly):** Impacts on a special landscape and views from the AONB which would destroy local tourism and the local economy
- **An Independent Planning Consultant:** CPRE guidelines exist that advise a 6km margin between an AONB and wind turbines
- **A Professor of Engineering from Cranfield University at Shrivenham:** Erroneous wind speed data in the EIA provided grounds to dismiss the assessment of viability.
- **A local professional engineer and machinery safety specialist:** noise issues and air safety
- **Gliding Centre Safety Manager:** air safety quoting the Baydon Meadow decision as a similar case in support of rejection.

Supporters:

- **Independent Planning Consultant:** need for renewable energy, acceptability of the site
- **TV Energy:** regional targets, government policy, security of supply, need for dispersed generation, public acceptability at other sites and need for regional flagships
- **Local teacher:** why should this ‘inspiring’ example for children be refused when planning permission was frequently given for fast food outlets like McDonalds?
- **Local ‘A’ level student:** the Committee should consider future generations
- **Local residents:** strong local support and the turbines would be acceptable
- **Climatologist from Oxford Brookes University:** climate change evidence and impacts
- **A neighbour of the Delabole Wind Farm in Cornwall** – initially had objected to these turbines, but now realised that they had no detrimental impact. ‘The machine they use to cut the grass under the turbines is noisier!’

Planning Committee Decision

8 Councillors voted to reject and 7 to support the application

FOR

Councillors Mary de Vere
 Tony de Vere
 Richard Farrell
 Richard Gibson
 Jerry Patterson
 Sylvia Patterson
 Terry Quinlan

Total 7

AGAINST

Councillors Matthew Barber
 Terry Cox
 Roger Cox
 Julie Mayhew-Archer
 Peter Saunders
 Margaret Turner
 Pam Westwood
 John Woodford

Total 8

Extract from the Minutes of the Meeting:

RESOLVED

(a) *That the Committee is minded to refuse application WAT/16/11/12 on the basis of :-*

- (i) *the harmful visual impact of the scheme on the rural and historic character of the locality, within the area of High Landscape Value, including harm to the setting of the nearby listed buildings, and the harmful visual impact upon the residential amenities enjoyed by nearby property and in particular Strattenborough Castle Farm.*
 - (ii) *harm to the health and wellbeing and amenities of local people due to the effects of low frequency noise in particular upon the children involved in the Penny Hooks Farm project; and*
 - (iii) *the turbines will prevent the safe operation of the Vale of White Horse Gliding Centre and, therefore, represent an unacceptable hazard to aviation safety in the locality.*
- (b) *In the case of reasons (ii) and (iii) above, a further report from the Officers shall be brought back to the Committee before a final decision is taken. (Proposed by Councillor Terry Cox, seconded by Matthew Barber and agreed by 8 votes to 7).*
- (c) *That application WAT/1611/13 (a new electrical substation for the wind farm) be refused on the basis that it is a new building in the open countryside that is not justified in that location. (Proposed by Councillor Jerry Patterson, seconded by Terry Cox and agreed by 15 votes to nil).*

The Director of Support Services confirmed to Members that when the further report came back to the Committee, Members would be invited to look only at the 3 reasons mentioned for refusal and not re-open other debates on other issues unless there had been a material change in circumstances between meetings.

Relevance to Regional Planning Policy

The decision reached by the Planning Committee of the VOWHDC had a number of implications for the South East England Regional Assembly's Proposed Alterations to RPG9 regarding renewable energy, which were published during 2004:

Regional Renewable Energy Targets: Studies carried out by ETSU give a small practical wind resource for Oxfordshire, similar to many of the South East counties. This is due to the National Planning designations on much of the windier elevated sites and the relative density of settlements.

The Old Airfield at Watchfield will be similar to many of the limited 'stock' of potential wind energy development sites across the south east region, in that it has sufficient elevation for a commercially viable wind resource, no national planning designation, and is sufficiently far away from any dwellings. Technically, the turbines are at the lower limit of commercial viability with wind speeds expected of between 6 and 7 metres per second (average at 50 metres hub height), but this is perhaps the best wind regime that can be expected at inland sites, outside of designated areas, in the South East region.

If sites such as Westmill Farm are not considered appropriate for wind development by local planning committees, the question of 'If not here, then where?' arises. While the issue of precedence should obviously not be a material consideration in planning decisions, the rejection of such a promising site does provide a poor case example for other south east local authorities. It also does little for progress towards the regional targets set out in the Proposed Amendment to RPG9 (March 2003, SEERA) and the expectation that:

'...all local authorities in the region will accommodate at least one wind energy development over the next two decades' (paragraph 1.53)

It also sets the region back in establishing flagship renewables projects that can serve as educational examples.

Community Ownership: using the 'Baywind' model would have also set an important case example for the region and could have heralded many further such community schemes, again providing a necessary model for development that reflects the principles established in the Proposed Amendment to RPG (2003), paragraph

1.60:

‘Community-based and owned projects, in which communities develop and operate projects and in which economic benefits are retained within a locality, will be important in improving understanding and acceptance, and enabling a steady build up of renewables in the region.’

The role of education: the need for further education of Councillors in renewable energy issues is frequently cited as the cause for adverse planning decisions. However, in this case, the Planning Officer had arranged a visit for Committee members to a wind farm of 7 Bonus 1.3MW turbines in East Yorkshire to assist them in assessing the application. Adam Twine, WOW, the local FOE Group and TV Energy also did all they could to provide Members with up to date information on the issues and the site. The vote showed that despite the best efforts at education, it had limited impact in comparison to the weight attached to local, parochial interests.

Quality of local democracy: The decision made by the Committee went against the recommendations and evidence presented by the Planning Officer and the Council’s independent experts and could be argued as highly questionable. This has been the view of a number of independent consultants and industry developers following the case. The vote also displayed evidence of voting along political lines: the 8 objectors included all of the 6 Conservative Members on the Committee, plus 2 Liberal Democrats. Therefore in the face of all the educational work carried out, this decision calls into question the fairness and objectivity of some of the local Councillors on this particular Planning Committee.

While it is not fair to extend this conclusion generally to all Councillors, this does raise questions about the weight which may in practice be attached to the Government’s draft new planning guidance on renewable energy (PPS22) which is currently under consultation.

The roots of local opposition: Adam and his supporters worked hard to provide information, answer questions and counter some of the widespread misinformation about the project (including exhibitions in nearby towns and villages, organising public meetings, participating in debates, stalls at a dozen local shows and fetes , giving talks to local groups, putting the EIA in village halls, open days on site etc). They also established a local supporters group and the importance of this should not be underestimated. It is however interesting to note that the previous planning application for the Vestas did not attract the same level of controversy in 1999. Understanding why this is the case, could offer some insights for future developments. The reasons are not easily defined, but may be related to:

- (a) The increasing activity among local CPRE groups in organising opposition campaigns to renewable energy schemes. The Oxfordshire CPRE group organized a highly questionable survey of local people, which contained a number of biased questions and misleading information. See Annex 3.
- (b) High levels of information and publicity about the site generated by the landowner and other local organisations. Industry developers have commented informally that projects with a low public profile are often not singled out for the same high levels of opposition action. However, best practice for developers requires local communities to be informed, educated and consulted on renewable energy projects as thoroughly as possible in order to generate local understanding and support. This is also the principle set out in the Proposed Amendment to RPG9, paragraph 1.73:

‘Dialogue between renewable energy developers, electricity supply and distribution companies, local authorities, and local stakeholders and communities at sub-regional and local level should occur at an early stage and continue throughout the planning and development process, including policy development, gain understanding of concerns and aspirations, and to develop a mutual trust’.

There is clearly a conflict here. Adam Twine certainly did a great deal more than many other developers to provide information to local people. However, did this give the opposition groups the motivation and the information to object as strongly as they did?

- (c) The impact that one or two local people may have in mobilising very local opposition. A new owner moved into a nearby farm in 2001, came out strongly in opposition to the scheme and encouraged the start of local opposition actions and some very misleading publicity campaigns. It is also worth noting how a very small group of people can have a disproportionate effect on Councillors (who may in any event have no knowledge or interest in the wider issues) if they are sufficiently well resourced, prepared to distribute misleading information and if they have connections into local party politics.
- (d) Increasing general public hostility to wind energy projects in the UK. This is a difficult issue as it is clear from the Oxford Brookes 2002 Community Survey in local villages around the Westmill site, that high levels of local support did exist. However, a number of national papers have carried very negative reports in the past 6 months on wind farms which could have had an influencing factor. Also some regional/local papers have a clear anti-wind farm agenda e.g. Western Morning News in Cornwall/Devon, and in this case the Oxford Times gave consistently greater coverage to the opposition group and CPRE. It is also worth noting that in the regional TV coverage, both the BBC and ITV were only interested in the frisson of opposition and despite plenty of soundbites from supporters about Climate Change did not choose to air these. When a complaint was made about this to a regional BBC TV news editor, it was stated this was because Climate Change is not "local" !

Special Planning Meeting – 19th April 2004

At a 5 hour long special meeting of the Vale of the White Horse District Council's planning committee, a decision was made to refer the planning application for five 1.3MW Bonus wind turbines at Westmill Farm to the Secretary of State to decide upon.

Special Planning Meeting – 27th October 2004

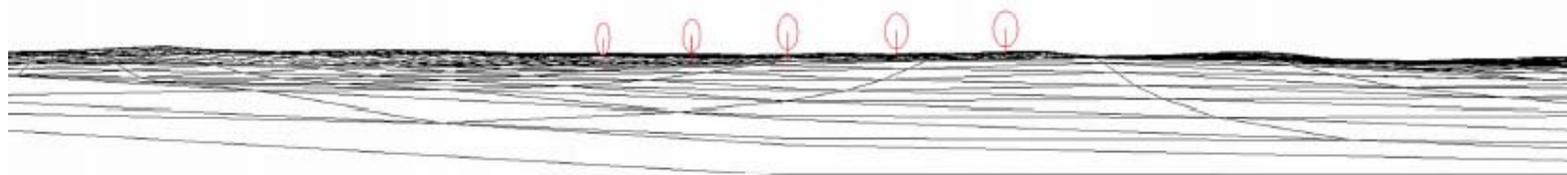
At a further 5 hour meeting a final decision was made on the Bonus turbines and with the narrowest of margins (9 to 8), councillors voted to approve the scheme.

Following this outcome of the planning application for the Bonus turbines, the Baywind Energy Co-operative Ltd. have committed to take the Westmill Wind farm forward as a fully Co-operatively owned local project. Baywind are a renewable energy co-operative based in Cumbria with six wind turbines and more than 1,300 shareholders, who have received annual dividends of 6 to 8% per annum to date. In addition to returns on their shares, local people will benefit from an energy conservation and education trust which will be set up with a percentage of the total scheme income.

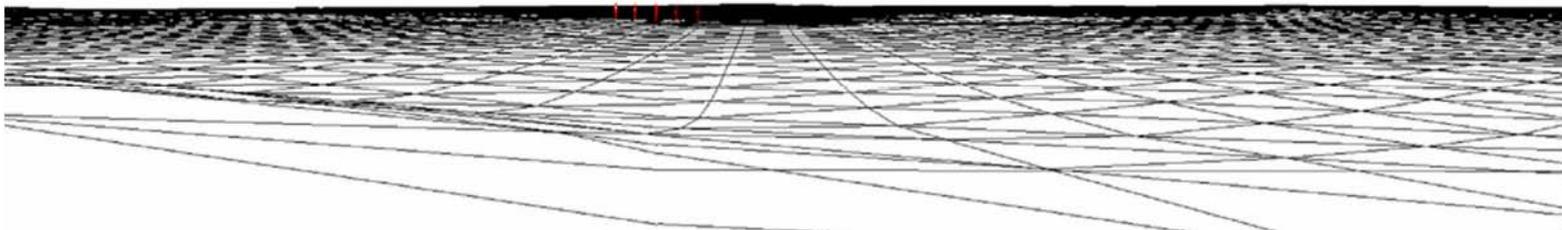
Construction is due to commence for the five 1.3MW turbines in early 2005. Through the setting up of a local co-operative and share issue in the turbines, the plan is significant in that the site will become not only Oxfordshire's first wind farm, but also the first 100% community- owned wind farm in Southern England.

Photomontages of the Site

A. View from Coleshill at approx 2km from the site, showing the turbines (top), a wire frame showing positions (middle) and the existing landscape (bottom)



B: The site from the White Horse Hill



Westmill	Prepared by: 
Photomontage 4	Grid Ref. 429703 186476
LOCATION: White Horse Hill	Recommended viewing distance approx. 30cm
Distance to turbines 7.1km	

C: Impression of how the turbines would look when viewed across the nearby fields



D: A Bonus 1.3MW turbine, the model planned for Westmill Farm

Annex I: Consultation

A: Responses received to consultations on EIA and the Planning Application

Supportive / No Objections:

1. Faringdon Town Council: fully supportive
2. Swindon Borough Council: no objections
3. Bishopstone Parish Council *"We are concerned for the local residents and have concerns about the visual intrusion from the Ridgeway. However we recognise the importance of alternative sources of energy, we note that currently there is an overabundance of supply in the National Grid."*
4. Oxfordshire County Council Highway Authority. No objections on the grounds of highway safety.
5. Oxfordshire County Council Structure Plan Authority. Supports development of wind energy. *"The difference in the environmental effects of the current proposal compared to the permitted proposal in terms of noise and of visual amenity versus the increased power generation are best assessed by your Council as the Local Planning Authority"*.
6. Oxfordshire County Council Ecologist. *"The location of the site is a large arable field with minimal ecological interest. As a result, I have no serious objections to the proposal from an ecological point of view"*.
7. Oxfordshire County Council Archaeologist. No objections subject to a condition for the implementation of a phased programme of archaeological investigation.
8. Oxfordshire County Council Rights of Way. No objections.
9. English Heritage Do not view the impact of one such development as being detrimental but consider that a number of sites might well be.
10. Defence Estates (consulted re proximity to RAF Fairford). Response by the Navigation Spectrum and Surveillance National Air Traffic Services Ltd. The proposed wind farm development has been examined from a technical safeguarding aspect and does not conflict with our safeguarding criteria. Accordingly this department has no safeguarding objections to this proposal.
11. Environment Agency. *"Wishes to support this application. Not only does it represent a minimal change from the current (approved) planning application in terms of impact, it represents a significant additional energy output (+40%). Total anticipated energy generation is equivalent to the domestic consumption of both Faringdon and Shrivenham offsetting some 11,000 tonnes of CO2 per annum"*.
12. Royal Society for the Protection of Birds supported the application on the grounds that it would have no significant effect on significant nature conservation interests, That the electricity supply would assist the Government's targets for renewable energy and that wind power will reduce greenhouse gas emissions.
13. Greenpeace Fully supported.
14. Friends of the Earth (Oxfordshire) fully supported the proposal, in their view the landscape impact resulting from the proposed additional blade length will be insignificant compared to the existing approval, whilst providing 40% more power. The application should be approved due to contribution towards renewable energy production.

Objectors:

1. Watchfield Parish Council: inadequate wind available on the site to justify the wind farm, that a significant majority of residents opposed. That the noise generated by the turbines and in particular low frequency noise, represents cause for concern and that the Environmental Impact Assessment was considered to be flawed.
2. Shrivenham Parish Council. on the grounds of noise and visual impact.
3. Great Coxwell Parish Council on the basis of potential danger to drivers through distraction and visual intrusion in the landscape.
4. Bourton Parish Council. *"The Parish Council was asked by a small number of parishioners to represent their concerns about height, possibility of noise nuisance and the proximity of the wind farm close to a bridle path. In*

representing the views of these parishioners however, the general view of the Parish Council is not one of total opposition”.

5. Colleshill Parish Council. Submitted several letters detailing concerns of the visual impact on historic landscape and impact of noise and blade flicker, and particular possible substantial impact on several outlying properties. In letter from the Parish Council following a meeting of the village included the following: “objections were raised on both aesthetic and technical grounds, visual impact and on landscape of great beauty, effect on those who live in close proximity to the proposed turbines from noise and vibration and questioning of the viability of the scheme and whether there is sufficient wind power at the site. In the event the majority of those present expressed support for the scheme and a survey placed in the local shop also produced a majority in favour 40 to 2.”
6. Highworth Town Council visual intrusion
7. Defence Estates (RMCS and JSCSC) objections on the basis of impact of noise on Shrivenham Station staff and families, concern that the wind farm will be a dominant feature of the landscape. Further concerns regarding potential impact of low frequency noise on the Watchfield quarters closest to the development.
8. Civil Aviation Authority. Had no statutory role in this case as the White Horse Gliding Club have an unlicensed airfield. However the CAA provided informal advice based on the standard CAA guidelines. These indicate that the turbines would present a danger to air safety if the nearest turbine is closer than 2000m to the end of the runway. In this case the gliding club has planning permission and operates from a grass runway running broadly east west.
9. The Friends of the Ridgeway Objected due to impact on views from the Ridgeway and in addition to arguments on the grounds of visual impact they also consider proposal of doubtful economic viability.
10. White Horse Gliding Centre raised strong objections to the proposal “the proposed turbines by reason of their siting and total obstacle height within the area of the obstacle limitation services for Watchfield (Sandhill Farm) aerodrome would represent a material threat to the safety of aircraft and passengers overflying the locality of the site. The proposed turbines would thereby be seriously prejudicial to safe and continued flying operations at the aerodrome.”
11. The National Trust raised strong objections to the development on the following grounds:
 - the impact on the historical landscape
 - contrary to planning policy for the area
 - conflicting issues within the National Trust’s energy policy
 - insufficient information available to make an informed decision.
12. Subsequently the National Trust commented on the environmental impact statement and on the independent report produced by David Jarvis Associates. The Trust maintains its strong objections to the development primarily on the grounds of visual impact on the historic environment and in particular upon Colleshill.
13. Council for the Protection of Rural England objected strongly to the proposal due to it’s impact on the landscape, in particular the visibility of the development from the AONB and in their view the development will make a minuscule contribution to usable electricity supplies whilst having a highly adverse impact on local populations, the area of high landscape value and AONB. The CPRE also carried out their residents’ survey and distributed 1500 questionnaires of which 227 were returned, of which 167 were in opposition and 60 in favour.
14. The Ramblers Association (Oxfordshire area) Objected. Concerns about increase in size from previous permission, harm to views from Colleshill Park and the Ridgeway, object due to AONB and Area of High Landscape Value, and consider the energy generation to be insignificant.

Absenters:

1. The Countryside Agency did not wish to formally comment, but wishes to encourage the County and District Councils to start preparing character based guidance on location and capacities for wind developments so that they are able to respond to the wind proposals that are coming in an informed and strategic way, rather than considering each proposal in isolation.
2. Longcot Parish Council: Noise may cause problems, will it spoil the view on the horizon?

B: Common Themes from the Letters of Objection recived by VOWHDC

1. That alternative renewable sources of energy such as biomass, offshore wind, solar and tidal power are more efficient and less environmentally harmful and destructive than on-shore wind power, in particular the current scheme. It would require tens of thousands of these machines to produce any meaningful contribution to the UK's electricity generation capacity.
2. That energy conservation would be significantly more useful in reducing greenhouse emissions without the environmental damage associated with wind farm schemes.
3. The proposal represents a massive physical blot on the landscape that would blight an attractive area and undermine its existing rural character. That the visual impact of the scheme is entirely unacceptable in this area of High Landscape Value visible from the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and that the turbines are out of scale and out of character and out of keeping with this tranquil rural environment.
4. That there is an inadequate wind resource on the site to justify the development which would not in reality be viable. Figures from the Met Office indicate a lack of wind resource and contradict the information provided by the applicant. The applicants wind data contains a serious error and is therefore not to be given weight in assessing the scheme.
5. That the environmental impact assessment is fatally flawed in that it has not considered alternative sites for this wind farm.
6. That the noise from the turbines will be unendurable within 1.5 km, and would cause serious harm to the amenities of people living nearby and that low frequency noise is poorly understood but potentially a very damaging result of the development.
7. That the impact on the historic landscape listed buildings conservation areas has been underplayed in the environmental assessment, and these turbines would be extremely harmful in that context.
8. The photo montages provided by the applicants in the environmental statement are not accurate and underplay the visual impact that would result and that the environmental statement itself is biased in favour of the proposal and fails to identify how significant the harm will be.
9. The turbines will represent a serious distraction to drivers on the A420 and be a hazard.
10. The turbines will be a serious distraction to horses and spoil the use of the nearby bridleways and represent a hazard.
11. This will represent a precedent and result in a much larger number of turbines in the future.
12. That the existing permissions are both incapable of being implemented and should be given no weight in the consideration of this application. The second approval for wind turbines was not subject to an environmental impact assessment and was therefore flawed.
13. The wind farm will result in massive property devaluation in the area and be a real blight with people unable to sell their homes.

C: Common Themes from the Letters of Support received by VOWHDC

1. The Bonus 1.3 turbines will provide 40% more energy and be quieter than the approved Vesta turbines.
2. The current scheme will enable local people to invest in this development and be part of this local generation scheme.
3. All forms of energy have an environmental cost producing local energy resources will have only a local environmental impact, in this case visibility in the local landscape.
4. This is a sustainable development that will benefit the Government's targets for renewable energy production, and reduction in the emission of greenhouse gasses.
5. The impact the proposal may have on the local environment visually in terms of noise or house prices
6. The information provided by the objectors and anti campaigners is misleading and contains lies and omissions, and seeks to scare the local populous.
7. Alternatives to fossil fuels should be encouraged and will take a variety of forms, including on-shore wind.
8. No different from electricity pylons that people do not object to.
9. Adding five windmills to the landscape in this area is benign in comparison to the impact created by other major development within the vicinity.

10. The permission would be for a limited time period only, and any impacts are therefore not permanent, but temporary.
11. The wind turbines will be a striking and beautiful addition to the landscape and are far more acceptable than many other more permanent and more environmentally destructive forms of development. The wind turbines will be an important landmark in our psychological as well as real landscapes. Apart from the desirable energy benefits, the wind turbines will substantially enhance the landscape of South West Oxfordshire in visual terms, as great engineering structures.
12. The proposal has benefited in terms of clean electricity generated, but it also a visible demonstration of the Council's commitment to a more sustainable future for the Vale and the country as a whole.
13. Wind energy is clean and fully renewable, a wind turbine will produce 30 times more energy in its lifetime than is used in its production.
14. Modern wind turbines are extremely quiet and unobtrusive in noise terms. Considerably less noisy than the A420.
15. These wind turbines are a local contribution to global problems and should be supported.

Annex 2: Key Issues Under Consideration at the Planning Committee Meeting 23rd October 2003

The Council had appointed a number of specialist 'witnesses' in the fields of visual impact, noise and wind speeds to provide advice to the Planning Committee on the night and had taken the advice of Richard Drabble QC on a number of issues. In the Planning Officer's view the key determining issues on the case were:

1. The legality of and material weight to be given to the **existing planning permissions** when assessing the acceptability or otherwise of the current proposal.
2. The **visual impact** of the development. Both in terms of the landscape characteristics of the area and in terms of the heritage features in the vicinity such as Listed Buildings, Conservation Areas and Ancient Monuments.
3. The impact of the wind turbines on the **residential amenities** of neighbouring properties and in particular the effects of noise, including low frequency noise and shadow flicker.
4. The effect of the development on **road safety**, particularly on the A.420.
5. The **benefits of the development** and whether **alternatives** have been adequately assessed.
6. The consequences on **aviation safety** and in particular the effect on the operation of the White Horse Gliding Centre.

The Planning Officers view on these key issues, supported by the QC and specialists, was that:

1. **Existing permissions:** The legality of the previous two planning permissions for the site had been called into question by opponents, but in the Officer's opinion these were legal. The Committee were advised that only the second permission for the 850kWh turbines was still economic to develop. Also the committee was not asked to consider the difference in blade length between the two turbine types; they had to consider the acceptability and impact on the environment of the current application as a whole and separately from the previous permission. The Committee were reminded they had found both previous applications for turbines on the site acceptable and that the desirability of consistent decisions was in itself a material planning consideration.
2. **Visual impact:** was inevitable with the significant scale of development, but this would depend on distance and viewpoint and was highly subjective. Ultimately just because a development was 'significant' did not give grounds for refusal. Regarding the threat to an historic landscape, the turbines had to be seen in the context of a landscape that is evolving and is a product of generations of human intervention. Also the development would be temporary for 25 years.
3. **Residential Amenities: Property values** could be argued to be a material planning concern, but should be given only very limited weight. The issue of **noise** had been evaluated (including a

consideration of low frequency noise) and these were considered to provide no strong grounds to reject the proposal. **Low frequency noise** impact is a difficult issue to prove or dispute as there has been only limited research into the problem and the Council's noise specialist said that he was 'not aware of a proven low frequency noise issue with any of the 83 wind sites within the UK'. There was also no evidence he suggested to support the claim that this would affect the autistic children at Penny Hooks Farm 1400m away and only a 'remote possibility' that low frequency noise would be noticed or a problem.

4. **Road Safety:** the Highway Authority had no comment or objections on this basis and believe that the turbines would not represent a danger given their distance from the road and the nature of the road itself and the views available from it.
5. The **benefits** of the scheme included CO2 emissions reductions and provision of electricity to up to 9000 people. Objectors argue this is miniscule and of no consequence compared to the harm on the rural character of the area and the health and well being of local people. In the Planning Officers view, which is supported by case history, it is evident that comparatively small contributions to renewable energy production are considered to be a benefit that should be weighed in the balance when assessing a proposal. **Offshore/alternative sites** – alternative sites are only a material consideration for exceptional developments. Therefore, this could not be a material consideration
6. **Aircraft safety** was the only key concern for the Officer, following receipt of a letter from the White Horse Gliding Club on the 16th October, expressing concerns that operations would be affected and safety compromised if the wind turbines were to be constructed. This is an unlicensed airfield, therefore the CAA cannot comment formally, but their informal opinion supported this claim. The Council could not check these claims due to the late submission of the letter

The key issues quoted by Councillors who voted in rejection of the application were:

- Doubts that the low frequency noise issue had been satisfactorily resolved
- Doubts that the wind speeds were adequate on the site for significant energy generation
- A wind farm visited in Yorkshire by the Committee members had caused greater concern by confirming the Westmill site would have a significant visual impact on a high value landscape
- Proliferation of turbines in the countryside similar to Denmark was likely, estimated to be in the order of '200,000 turbines to replace Didcot power station which would only run at 35% efficiency compared to 80% efficiency at Didcot'.
- Safety issues at the gliding club
- Impacts on Penny Hooks Farm
- 'I can see the advantages and the presumption for development is strong and that there is a case for renewable energy, however I don't think I would like to drive to work each day and see these wind turbines in the local landscape'
- 'Right time but wrong site' due to concerns over the gliding club and landscape value
- The argument for a 40% increase in power output is sensible, but the output would still be 'of minor importance compared to the national picture'

The key issues quoted by Councillors who voted in favour of the application were:

- The issue of consistency: 'The general public have a right to expect us to give permission to this site again unless there has been a significant change in government guidance'
- No concerns and 'not convinced' over the noise impacts, especially following the site visit to Yorkshire where there was no noise until very close to the turbines
- 'No louder than my washing machine which would not be heard at the end of the road!'
- 'This development may only generate electricity for a paltry number of people, but if these people had their supply from the national grid switched off they would not like to be thought of as miniscule and insignificant'
- 'Very little development is acceptable to local people and the conflict between visual impact and the landscape was difficult to decide upon, however overall wind turbines are a positive thing in the landscape'

- The Swaffam wind turbine is located very close to the town and a second is being built and no problems have been reported with this site
- The wind speeds on the site must be adequate as the applicant would not be going to the lengths he is to develop the site
- 'I believe we should support renewable energy and the county must do its bit'
- 'Wind turbines are tall, elegant and slim. We have to go forwards'

Annex 3: CPRE Objections

Council for the Protection of Rural England

Oxfordshire Branch – Vale of White Horse District

CPRE



Your countryside
Your voice

Objection to Windfarm development at Westmill Farm, Watchfield.

Dear Resident

12th February 2003

CPRE is a charity dedicated to protecting the countryside and to minimising inappropriate development within it. We believe that finding solutions to the UK's energy needs will mean changing the way we use energy and finding technologies that can provide energy without damaging our precious countryside.

You may be aware that an application for five wind turbines at Westmill Farm, Watchfield has been made to the Vale of White Horse District Council. While we recognise that wind generation could help provide sustainable energy, CPRE Oxfordshire is strongly opposed to this particular windfarm because the scale of damage it would bring to our landscape is not outweighed by the relatively small amount of electricity it would generate. We believe that the local heritage and character of rural Oxfordshire make it a unique place to live and work. The five proposed turbines would have a major impact on an expanse of exceptionally attractive countryside, and views from the Ridgeway and North Wessex Downs, which I'm sure you have enjoyed.

64 CPRE will be making our objections to the local authority, but as a local campaign group it is important that we can feed your views into the planning process. We would like to know what you think about the proposed windfarm at Watchfield and how you believe it would affect you.

We would be grateful if you would take the time to complete the enclosed residents' survey with your views on this development. Our findings from this survey will be summarised and reported to the local press.

If you would like to support our local work in Oxfordshire, you can join CPRE using the form in the enclosed *Worth Protecting* leaflet. Please send this to us with your completed residents' survey. Your support through becoming a member of CPRE would in itself be greatly appreciated, although your help with the local work we do would be even more welcome. You can find out more about what we stand for by visiting our website at www.cpreoxon.org.uk.

Yours faithfully,

Geoffrey Somerset

The Hon Geoffrey Somerset
Chairman, CPRE Vale of White Horse
(c/o Punches Barn, Waterperry Road, Holton, OX33 1PP, Tel 01865 874780)

A company limited by guarantee, registered in England, number 04443273 Registered Charity Number 1093081

Recycled Paper

Residents' Survey

Will a windfarm at Watchfield damage Oxfordshire's countryside?

CPRE



Your countryside
your voice

CPRE Oxfordshire's local group in Vale of White Horse is concerned about plans for a windfarm at Westmill Farm, Watchfield. We believe that this could severely damage the countryside of Vale of White Horse, and the views from nearby Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty. The proposed turbines would be 266 feet (81 m) tall, and have a blade span of 203 feet (62 m).

1 We believe that this particular proposal for wind turbines at Watchfield is inappropriate because it would severely damage local rural beauty. Do you agree?

Yes No

2 We believe that other sites should be considered where a windfarm would be more efficient and less harmful to the character of the local countryside. Do you agree?

Yes No

3 We do not believe that the small amount of energy that could be produced by the proposed Watchfield windfarm justifies the landscape impacts it would cause. Do you agree?

Yes No

4 Would you be interested in helping to protect the Oxfordshire countryside from other inappropriate developments?

Yes No

CPRE Oxfordshire would like to keep you informed of the results of this campaign and other local issues. We respect your privacy and assure you that CPRE fully complies with the Data Protection Act (1998). No personal information held by CPRE will be disclosed to any third parties. If you would prefer NOT to receive any future communication from us, please tick this box.

CPRE Oxfordshire (Registered Charity No. 1093081) is a charity working for a beautiful and living countryside.

5 We would like to hear your views about the Watchfield windfarm. A compilation of comments made by residents will be passed on to Vale of White Horse District Council, Oxfordshire County Council and the local press.

(please summarise your views here)

Thank you for completing this survey. Please return it to the address below (where you can also obtain further copies of this survey) by the end of February. Please accept our apologies for not being able to cover postage costs. As we are a charity, our funds are limited.

Margaret Preston
CPRE Oxfordshire
Punches Barn
Waterperry Road
Holton
Oxfordshire OX33 1PP

Tel: 01865 874780 Fax: 01865 876937
Email: oxoncpre@globalnet.co.uk

We would appreciate you providing your name and address and we will keep you updated on this and other issues.

Name
Address
Post Code
Phone
Email

Council for the Protection of Rural England's Letter

APPENDIX 19

Annex 4: Vale Environmental Concerns

SAY "NO" TO WIND TURBINE BLIGHT NOW!

Did you know that a local landowner has applied for planning permission to erect 5 huge wind turbines on the north side of the A420 opposite Watchfield and Shrivenham? If this development goes ahead our landscape will be ruined, our lives blighted by high levels of intrusive noise and the value of our properties will plummet. *If this catastrophe is to be prevented it is vital that YOU act NOW.* The danger is real and immediate

Is wind power a good idea?

Yes – in the right place. In windy, isolated areas, such as out at sea, wind power is a good source of renewable energy. *However, this area is NOT the right place.* Figures from the Meteorological Office reveal that it has very low average wind speeds. If these turbines are erected they will cause **HUGE** damage to our visual and aural environment and will generate only barely viable quantities of electricity. Data from the manufacturers of the turbines indicates that their output will be only 10% of the output achievable in a more windy area.

Noise

These turbines are very noisy. The manufacturer's data says they are nearly as noisy as a pop group. They will generate more than 100 times the noise power of the Shrivenham and Watchfield bypass. Down wind the sound of the turbines may be heard more than 3 miles away. Those unfortunate enough to live in the Watchfield, Shrivenham, Longcot and Coleshill areas may have to stay indoors and keep their windows closed to keep their vile noise out.

Damage to Property Values

A respected local Estate Agent estimates that property prices will be very badly affected if this proposal goes ahead. *The worst affected properties could, they advise, be devalued by between 30-50%.*

Visual Impact

The turbines are huge – nearly 270feet high. *They are almost as big as Didcot Power Station cooling towers – see the sketch behind this pamphlet.* Don't forget there are five of them. They will dominate the landscape from every direction. They will be visible from as far away as Oxford.

"Green" Credentials?

The landowner who is promoting this scheme constantly emphasises how "green" and hence, by implication, virtuous he is. However, it is also true that if this scheme goes ahead he stands to gain a very large subsidy – a subsidy paid out of **OUR** tax revenue. Exact figures are difficult to obtain, but *this might be more than £200,000 over the life of the turbines.* Indirectly we, the taxpayers, will be paying him to pollute our atmosphere with noise and to ruin our landscape.

Benefits of the scheme?

Apart from the financial benefit to the applicant, there are none. Not only will no worthwhile amounts of electricity be

generated, but also *existing power station will reduce its output because of this scheme, electricity bills will not be reduced and not one local permanent job will be created.* We have much to lose and *nothing to gain.*

Public Opinion

A recent, very misleading pamphlet distributed by Friends of the Earth said that there was "66% local support" for this proposal. *This is absurd.* Because plans for large industrial schemes like this one are handled in just the same way as plans for minor changes to ordinary houses most of us have never been officially consulted. Furthermore 98% of the Shrivenham and Watchfield residents who have so far written to the Planning Officer about the turbines have opposed the plans. Far fewer people have written supporting the scheme and more than half of those who have done so do not even live within the Vale of the White Horse. *They are not going to suffer the noise and the visual blight!*

Defeatism

The landowner who is promoting this scheme has already got planning permission for 5 much smaller Vestas 850kW models, and this had led some people – including some of our own Local Councillors – to give up their opposition to the plan on the grounds that "nothing can be done". *This is thoroughly defeatist.* We believe that a principal reason for the new application to build the bigger turbines is that the smaller ones are totally uneconomic and that, consequently, the applicant has been unable to raise the

financial backing necessary for the scheme. *This is not the time for faint hearts.* All local voters should be asking their elected representatives where they stand on the issue. *If we are united and determined we can defeat this proposal.*

What can YOU do to prevent this disaster?

1. Write to your Parish Council to make your objections known. Parish Councils have a right to speak at the Planning Meeting at which this application will be heard. It is important that they reflect local opinion accurately. As we go to press, Watchfield Parish Council say that local public opinion is evenly divided about this. We know that this is not true, but **THEY** will not do so unless **YOU** let them know your views.
2. WRITE URGENTLY to the Planning Officer,

Mr. K. Dijkstra,
VWH District Council,
PO Box 127, Abbey House,
Abingdon,
Oxon, OX14 3JN

quoting reference WAT/1611/
outlining your objections to the scheme.

DO IT NOW!

IT IS VITAL THAT THE DISTRICT COUNCIL KNOWS THE VIEWS OF LOCAL PEOPLE. THE APPLICATION WILL BE HEARD ON 31 MARCH. WRITE IMMEDIATELY BEFORE IT IS TOO LATE. COPY YOUR LETTER TO VECS AT THE ADDRESS BELOW, AND WE WILL SEND IT TO YOUR PARISH COUNCILLORS.

This document has been published by Vale Environmental Concerns (VECS), Pennyhooks Farm, Shrivenham, Swindon, SN6 8EX. We are a group of local residents who have banded together to fight this scheme. If you would like to help in any other ways please contact us on 01793 782436, or email at pennyhooks.farm@virgin.net, durbinhome1@aol.com, VECS@envirotechs.com

Annex 5: Press Clippings

Extract from Oxford Times article by Nigel Hanson 31/10/03:

A CONTROVERSIAL scheme to install Oxfordshire's first wind farm near the Uffington White Horse suffered a severe blow last night (Oct 23) when councillors refused planning permission. The proposals were defeated by eight votes to seven after being debated by the Vale of White Horse District Council's development control committee at Uffington village hall. Landowner Adam Twine wanted to erect five 81m-tall wind turbines at Westmill Farm, Watchfield, near Wantage.

The project, using turbines with three 62m-long blades to catch the wind, would have fed enough electricity into the National Grid to meet the energy requirements of 9,000 people - the combined population of Faringdon and Watchfield.

Mr Twine won planning permission in 2001 to erect slightly smaller Vesta turbines but revised the plans to incorporate larger Bonus turbines that have five-metre longer blades and would have increased power output by 40 per cent, making the scheme more commercially viable.

Planning officers recommended approval in line with the latest Government guidelines that envisage three wind farms being built in the county over the next 20 years in a bid to reduce emissions of greenhouse gases such as carbon dioxide from conventional power stations. There is a national target to cut carbon dioxide emissions by 20 per cent by 2010.

About 150 people crammed in to the hall to hear arguments for and against the plans by 25 public speakers, including experts on noise and global warming. English Heritage, Greenpeace, the RSPB, and the Environment Agency supported the plans in written submissions, but the National Trust, the Council for the Protection of Rural England, and the Friends of the Ridgeway opposed them.

Petitions showed local opinion was divided, but the parish councils of Watchfield and neighbouring Shrivenham, Longcot and Great Coxwell all opposed the scheme. District councillors' views split along party political lines, **with all Conservative councillors opposing the scheme**, and most Lib Dem councillors supporting it.

Tony de Vere (Lib Dem) said: "I believe it is very important that we support renewable energies and that we, in this county, do our bit."

But the majority rejected the proposals on grounds of detrimental visual impact in a designated Area of High Landscape Value, which is near the North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, the 6,000-year-old Ridgeway track and the White Horse of Uffington.

Members were also worried about creating a hazard for gliders from the nearby Vale of White Horse Gliding Centre and the potentially harmful effects on local residents of low-frequency noise from the turbines.

Councillor Clare Saunders, the local member, was concerned that distraction and noise from the wind farm could force an educational project for people with autism at neighbouring Penny Hooks Farm to close. Others said there was insufficient wind for a wind farm on the site, despite a study by Rutherford Appleton Laboratory that found acceptable average wind speed of 6.6m per second.

Mr Twine was clearly disappointed with the refusal, but would not say whether he planned to appeal or press ahead with the scheme using Vesta turbines, as approved two years ago. He would only say: "We need to fight climate change."

The exact reasons for refusal are to be drafted in November.

Shortly before the meeting, Deputy Prime Minister **John Prescott** withdrew the committee's power to grant planning permission by **issuing** what is known as an '**Article 14 direction**' in a letter dated October 22. He wanted more time to consider interested parties' representations before deciding whether to call the application in. The council's solicitor, David Quayle, however, advised councillors they still had power to refuse planning permission.

From the Swindon Evening Advertiser Saturday 10 January 2004:

Grey like the sky!



The farmer behind the controversial wind turbines planned for a former RAF base near Swindon wants them to be rainbow coloured.

Adam Twine, 42, thinks a dash of colour on the landscape near Watchfield would cheer up the often dull and drizzly skies.

The artist's impression above shows how the energy-saving landmark could look.

But councillors of the Vale of White Horse District Council clearly do not share Mr Twine's vibrant idea.

They recommended that the five turbines planned for Westmill Farm are painted a pale grey colour.

Mr Twine, who lives in Coleshill and runs the organic farm at Westmill, said: "I favour the shimmering rainbow effect that an iridescent finish would produce. It's like you see on some road signs.

"I think councillors have missed a creative opportunity, but I can understand why they have opted for grey. It's the safer option."

Most wind turbines in the UK are painted grey, partly to help them fit in with the UK's grey skies.

Other suggestions made by disgruntled local residents at an exhibition last year included camouflage patterns, Day-Glo orange and invisible ink.

Mr Twine won planning permission for five turbines with 85ft blades in 1999. The towers will be 164ft (50m) tall about the height of Nelson's Column.

His application to extend the length of the blades by 16ft was narrowly rejected at a planning meeting of the Vale of White Horse District Council in October.

Mr Twine said: "As climate change gets worse people will realise we have to bite this bullet, address our dependence on fossil fuels and look at the wider picture, rather than the view from the back window.

"At the moment people don't care about climate change until they get flooded out of their house.

"Climate change is happening and it will affect everyone."

The £3.5m wind farm, located 100 metres outside the Swindon borough boundary, will create about 8.8 gigawatt hours per year enough energy to power 2,500 homes.

Construction is due to start this summer.