

2.8.2016

Application Number: 16/01657/FUL. Withington Estate Withington Gloucestershire. Installation of 2 x 18m wind turbines.

The Cotswolds Conservation Board wishes to raise an objection in relation to this development:

Although the measures by the Estate to secure renewable forms of energy in a sensitive way are fully appreciated by the Board, in this case the proposed development will result in a negative impact on the character and special qualities of the nationally protected AONB.

There are always challenges in locating wind turbines in nationally protected landscapes as wind turbines, to function efficiently, need exposed often elevated locations. The site proposed is one of the most elevated in the immediate area and significantly higher than the nearby settlement of Withington. In certain circumstances, in the right context and in certain locations an 18m high wind turbine may appear insignificant. However, by the nature and sensitivity of the landscape the two proposed wind turbines are to be located within an exposed hillside countryside location.

The site is located within Landscape Character 7C Cotswolds High Wood Plateau (though will also impact the adjacent Landscape Character Area 8D Upper Coln Valley). The 2016 Adopted Cotswolds AONB Landscape Strategy and Guidelines specifically states in relation to this area that:

“Landscape Sensitivity

Despite its predominantly agricultural character, the wide, elevated, gently undulating plateau landscape retains a strong sense of remoteness and tranquillity contributing to its high sensitivity. Wide panoramic views, a high degree of inter-visibility, and limited woodland cover also add to the sensitivity of the High Wold landscape to development, particularly tall vertical elements, such as telecommunication masts and wind turbines and to woodland creation and shelterbelt planting.”

In addition the potential landscape implications from new development are stated as:

“Introduction of vertical elements such as communication masts, wind turbines, drilling rigs, electricity pylons and large road signs particularly on prominent hill top, valley rim and escarpment edge locations”

Accordingly the landscape strategy for this area is to:

“Conserve the open, remote character by objecting to the development of vertical elements on the skyline or where these would adversely affect views across and to the High Wold.” (underlining added).

The sites location in relation to the context of the National Grid transmission lines is noted. However a base level of harm should not be given as a reason for allowing permissions that would result in an even greater level of harm within a nationally protected landscape. The proposed wind turbines will still be visible in their own right, in a different colour to the transmission lines and their motion will if anything draw more attention to the transmission lines as they rotate within the visual context of the adjacent fixed lines and pylons. Although the Cotswolds AONB has not been selected as a location for the future undergrounding of pylons as part of the national programme. Nevertheless the Cotswolds Conservation Board is taking part in the National Grid's Landscape Enhancement Initiative (LEI). The Board is therefore actively seeking to improve the landscape around the National Grid transmission lines as being part of this LEI scheme and to reduce the level of harm from this existing nationally important infrastructure. Adding additional development in the context of the existing transmission lines would therefore be a clear step backwards.