

ROYAL BURGH OF WIGTOWN & DISTRICT COMMUNITY COUNCIL

PLANNING WORKING PARTY REPORT FOR FULL COMM. COUNCIL 11.5.2015

Members – Willie McCartney, Robin Richmond, Nick Walker

Current applications

15/P/1/0070 EXTENSION TO HOUSE, TORHOUSEMUIR LODGE, WIGTOWN. Addition of second storey and extension to rear, with addition of porch.

Recommend – no submission.

Update on proposals

Nil

Windfarm proposals

15/P/1/0031 SHENNANTON WINDFARM.

Neutral submission completed per previous CC meeting.

15/P/2/0053 CALIFORNIA WINDFARM.

Objection lodged per previous CC meeting (copy attached).

13/P/1/0366 AUCHLEAND WINDFARM. 7 turbines, 130 m to blade tip, ancillary structures, etc. - Ongoing exchanges with statutory consultees.

Recommendations

CC approve report and its recommended actions.

Nick Walker 8.5.2015

Royal Burgh of Wigtown & District Community Council

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22nd April 2015

Dean Clapworthy, Planner
Planning and Environment Services
Dumfries & Galloway Council
Kirkbank House, English Street
DUMFRIES DG1 2HS

Dear Mr Clapworthy

REF: 15/P/2/0053 – California Wind farm proposal, Wigtown Bay - Objection

There is substantial opposition to this proposal in our Community Council area, for a range of reasons. There are also many people without a definite opinion. However, no one has indicated to us their support for the proposal even amongst those in favour of wind power in principle, and in regard to other applications. Therefore, at its meeting on 13.4.2015, Royal Burgh of Wigtown & District Community Council resolved to object to the application. Our reasons for opposing the proposed development are detailed below.

Landscape character impact

The Overarching Policy on Landscape in the Local Development Plan (LDP) states that “*development proposals should respect, protect and/or enhance the region's rich landscape character, scenic qualities and features, and sites designated for their landscape quality at any level*”. The proposed turbines are in the Cairnharrow area for which guidance indicates a maximum turbine height of 50 m is likely to be considered suitable. The seven proposed turbines would be 110 m high. In our opinion, the size, scale and number of turbines is out of keeping with the surrounding landscape, and they would dominate the area. This would have a negative impact on the landscape character of the Fleet Valley National Scenic Area, the Galloway Hills Regional Scenic Area, the Machars Coast Regional Scenic Area, and the Wigtown Bay Local Nature Reserve. The proposal site is adjacent to an area designated in LDP Wind Energy policy as an area requiring significant protection. Therefore we believe the proposal is counter to several LDP policies (including Overarching Landscape, Natural Environment designated scenic areas, and Wind Energy).

Heritage impact

The Overarching Policy on Historic Environment in LDP states that “*development proposals should protect and/or enhance the character, appearance and setting of the region's rich historic environment principally by ensuring they are sympathetic to nearby buildings, sites and features*”. In our opinion

the proposal fails to fulfil this policy requirement. The proposal would have a significant detrimental impact on the setting of numerous designated sites of heritage importance due to intrusive visual impact for a wide area. We believe that “nearby” must be defined relative to the scale of the proposed turbines which we argue affects negatively the overall setting of historical sites even some distance away. These include the Wigtown Conservation Area, numerous Listed Buildings such as Wigtown County Buildings and Kirkmabreck Church, numerous Scheduled Monuments such as ancient sites like Cairnholy, Claghreid Stone Circle and Standing Stone of Bagbie, and other sites of national historical importance such as the Wigtown Martyrs' Stake (which recently had a permanent information sign installed nearby with a view towards the Stake and the application site). We believe the proposal therefore falls foul of several more LDP policies (including Overarching Historic Environment, Listed Buildings, Wigtown Conservation Area, and Scheduled Monuments).

Economic and Tourism impact

In our Community Council area, there is substantial concern about adverse impact of the proposed development on the local economy which is highly dependent on tourism. Much of what attracts tourists to visit and stay in this locality is its stunning and largely unspoilt natural beauty and its history. Visitors often comment negatively about the large numbers of wind turbines in the area as a whole. For some, their choice of where to stay and whether to return will take into account factors which disturb the naturalness of the environment, the wider setting of historical sites and buildings, and the views afforded from holiday accommodation. The proposed wind farm would adversely affect visual appreciation of several tourist sites around our area, including Wigtown Harbour, the Martyrs' Stake, the Windyhill Monument and the Crook of Baldoon RSPB Reserve, as well as many sites elsewhere in the locality, especially near the coast. It would also detract from the setting of Scotland's National Booktown and its annual, internationally recognised Book Festival. Whilst there is little formal evidence that wind farms have a negative overall impact on tourism, the absence of evidence differs from the evidence of absence. Specific developments may explicitly enhance tourism (for example by including a visitor centre at a wind farm to attract tourists, as has happened near Glasgow), the effect of which could be to mask the detrimental effect on tourism of smaller developments in unspoilt areas known for their scenic beauty. We understand that VisitScotland has presented data to show that 1 in 5 people are deterred from visiting areas where there is a wind farm; a reduction of 20% in tourist revenue locally would be substantial. Therefore we believe this proposal is counter to LDP policies aimed at enhancing small, fragile local economies, and supporting tourism.

General amenity and health impact

There are numerous dwellings within 3 km of the proposed turbines. These houses will be at potential risk from low frequency sound and vibration; there is some evidence of harm to mental and physical well-being from this so-called infrasound. Also, the visual impact of the proposed wind farm on residences and holiday accommodation facing it across Wigtown Bay will be substantial; there is evidence that this can cause significant emotional distress in some cases. Furthermore, the volume of additional heavy goods traffic associated with construction of the development on the busy single carriageway A75 Euroroute is a significant concern, with congestion likely to cause inconvenience, even risk, to road users including ambulances between the region's two largest towns and hospitals (Stranraer and Dumfries), ferry traffic, locals working elsewhere in the region, tourists, and so on. The proposal therefore risks producing considerable detriment to the daily life and well-being of a significant numbers of people both locally and in wider Wigtownshire.

Pre-application Consultation

The Community Council was disappointed at the way the developer conducted pre-application consultation. Public exhibitions were advertised with short notice. The Community Council was aware of increasing local concern about the proposal and asked the developer to arrange a public meeting for views to be expressed but the developer declined the request (on our third inquiry). Furthermore, feedback from residents who attended the developer's meeting to establish a community

liaison group indicated that the developer denied receiving the Community Council's request. We asked that the concern we raised and the level of local opposition be highlighted in the report on the pre-application consultation, but this appears to have been disregarded also. Indeed the report appears disingenuous in its avoidance of explicit reference to the level of community concerns, exemplified by unanimous refusal of community groups and organisations to participate in a community liaison group at this stage in the planning process.

Additional comments

The Community Council is not opposed to renewable energy in principle. However we believe that the impacts of this proposal on the cultural and natural heritage, landscape, amenity of the area, tourism and the economy are both significant and unacceptable. The Local Development Plan identifies localities where wind turbine development is considered suitable; the proposal site is not such an area. We believe that other sites in the region would be less detrimentally affected by wind turbine development, and the adverse impact at this proposal site is therefore even less justifiable. Finally, we maintain that there are already significant numbers of wind turbines operating in Wigtownshire, with additional turbines consented. There is therefore significant cumulative impact on this area which further reduces justification for the proposed development. Thus, in addition to the specific grounds for objection described above, we believe this proposal fails to satisfy LDP Renewable Energy and Wind Energy policies overall.

Thank you for taking our objection into account in considering this application.

Yours sincerely

Nicholas Walker, *Convenor*