

**DRAFT SUPPLEMENTARY PLANNING DOCUMENT: WIND POWER
(Report by Head of Planning Services)**

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This report informs Cabinet of a draft Supplementary Planning Document on Wind Power, a copy of which is attached to the agenda separately and seeks Cabinet's endorsement of the document as a basis for public consultation.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 There has been growing interest in wind turbine development in Huntingdonshire. In addition to the existing turbines at Wood Green Animal Shelter and Ramsey a scheme involving twelve turbines has been granted permission at Tick Fen (north-east of Warboys), and enquiries relating to several other locations have been received.
- 2.2 National policy on this issue is set out in PPS22 'Renewable Energy'. This encourages local planning authorities to respond positively to renewable energy projects where the technology is viable and the environmental and other impacts can be addressed satisfactorily. It suggests that authorities should formulate key criteria against which proposals may be assessed, and appropriate considerations are set out in the Council's emerging Core Strategy DPD, as well as the draft Regional Spatial Strategy and the adopted Structure Plan.
- 2.3 Inevitably, landscape and visual effects are a key issue where wind turbines are proposed. PPS22 acknowledges this, and makes the obvious point that "the impact of turbines on the landscape will vary according to the size and number of turbines and the type of landscape involved". In this context Land Use Consultants were commissioned last year to provide the Council with advice on the relative sensitivity of the district's landscapes in relation to this form of development.
- 2.4 Their report – 'Wind Turbine Development in Huntingdonshire' – has now been used as the basis for a draft Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) on this topic, a copy of which is attached as Appendix 1. Provision for the SPD was made in the Council's Local Development Scheme, which was endorsed by the Government in April this year.

3. THE SUPPLEMENTARY PLANNING DOCUMENT

- 3.1 SPDs form part of the suite of new documents that local planning authorities may prepare as a result of the planning reforms introduced last year. Their purpose is to expand upon the policies contained in Development Plan Documents (such as this Council's emerging Core Strategy DPD).

- 3.2 The production of SPDs involves more rigorous procedures than those employed for Supplementary Planning Guidance prepared under the previous system. In particular a sustainability appraisal is required as part of the process to help gauge any potentially significant environmental, social and economic effects. A sustainability appraisal of the draft SPD has been produced by officers and is attached as Appendix 2.
- 3.3 The SPD contains chapters on each of the landscape character areas identified previously in the Huntingdonshire Landscape & Townscape Assessment, as well as providing guidance on the particular visual considerations that arise at the edge of urban areas. It provides an indication of the capacity of each area to accommodate different scales of turbine development, and also points to particular issues and mitigation opportunities that should be taken into account in each area.
- 3.4 It should be noted that the SPD provides a starting-point for the consideration of proposals, not an absolute indication of what may or may not be acceptable in specific locations. Every site is unique, and turbine proposals will need to be supported by a detailed assessment of their potential impact as part of the application process.
- 3.5 Nonetheless, the SPD does indicate clearly that some parts of the district are more sensitive than others, and importantly it explains both the reasons why and the ways in which this sensitivity varies depending upon the potential scale of development. The sustainability appraisal confirms that producing guidance on this topic is beneficial in addressing overall environmental, social and economic objectives, and in particular in addressing the tension that arises between the need to harness renewable energy and the importance of conserving valued landscapes.

4. NEXT STEPS

- 4.1 Once approved by Cabinet the draft SPD and accompanying sustainability appraisal will be issued for public consultation (this process will include consideration by Development Control Panel). The results of that consultation (and any amendments suggested in response) will then be reported to a future meeting of Cabinet, following which the document can be adopted as part of the Local Development Framework. An adopted SPD which has been through this process can be expected to be given considerable weight as a material consideration in planning decisions.
- 4.2 The proposed timetable for these remaining steps is as follows:
- Public consultation – October/November 2005
 - Report back to Cabinet – January 2006

5. RECOMMENDATION

Cabinet is recommended to endorse the draft Supplementary Planning Document on Wind Power as a basis for public consultation.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Structure Plan 2003 (Cambridgeshire County Council & Peterborough City Council, 2003)

East of England Plan (Draft RSS14) (East of England Regional Assembly, 2004)

Huntingdonshire Core Strategy: Preferred Options Report (HDC, 2005)

Huntingdonshire Landscape & Townscape Assessment (HDC, 2004)

Planning Policy Statement 22: Renewable Energy (ODPM, 2004)

Wind Turbine Development in Huntingdonshire: Final Report (Land Use Consultants, 2005)

CONTACT OFFICER - enquiries about this report to Michael Bingham (Development Plans Manager) on 01480 388431, or Julia Wilkinson (Planning Officer) on 01480 388432.