

**LANDSCAPE SENSITIVITY TO WIND TURBINE DEVELOPMENT DRAFT REVISED
SUPPLEMENTARY PLANNING DOCUMENT
(Report by the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Environmental Well-Being))**

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 At its meeting held on 9th July 2013, the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Environmental Well-Being) considered a report by the Planning Service Manager (Policy) seeking approval of the Landscape Sensitivity to Wind Turbine Development Supplementary Planning Document and the endorsement of supporting technical evidence.

2. THE PANEL'S DISCUSSIONS

2.1 The Draft Revised Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) has been updated to take into account the publication of new national policy guidance within the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and the methodological approach undertaken to assess landscape sensitivity to wind turbine development since 2005. It further attempts to provide some guidance on the siting and design of smaller scale wind turbines and clarifies the evidence base which underpins the document. To strengthen further the evidence base for the SPD, an additional piece of work has been commissioned by the Planning Department on the Cumulative Landscape and Visual Impacts of Wind Turbines in Huntingdonshire, which details all operational and consented wind turbine developments in the District together with those awaiting determination. **The Panel regards this as an important piece of work and proposes that it should be subject to separate public consultation. This will give it extra weight and will strengthen the support it gives to the SPD making it better able to withstand the rigours of an appeal. Members therefore suggest that recommendation 5.3 of the report should be amended in this respect.**

2.2 The Panel has received a letter from a member of the Molesworth Action Group expressing concerns over various aspects of the SPD namely in relation to the perception that the guidance on wind turbine developments has been relaxed, the separation distances between developments and the definition of the term "historic village". The issues raised have been discussed by the Panel and a written response will be made.

2.3 Referring to the NPPF, the Panel has commented upon the omission of the terms "adverse visual impact" and "material harm" from the SPD. Whilst implied references appear within the Draft Local Plan to 2036 and the former Core Strategy, **the Panel is of the view that explicit reference to the terms "adverse visual impact" and "material harm" should be incorporated within the planning policy framework.**

2.4 Concerns remain over the group sizes proposed within the SPD. The Panel is not satisfied that the group sizes have been satisfactorily justified, particularly when considering the District's unique landscape characteristics. The Panel has reiterated the view that the SPD should not include the proposed upper limit for large groups of wind turbines. Members echo their comments made in January

2013, when the draft revised SPD was considered prior to public consultation, that the specification of an upper limit will provide developers with an indication of the level of development they could expect to receive approval for, and in some cases, they might expect to exceed that level. It is felt that the SPD should be strengthened to provide more rigidity in this respect. Whilst it is acknowledged that the previous Land Use Consultants Study was used to inform the existing and the revised SPD group sizes, it is felt that this report was based on areas which had differing landscape characteristics to those of Huntingdonshire. Table 1 of the SPD provides a summary of potential capacity for wind turbine developments, which indicates that there is at best moderate capacity for large groups and some of these are limited to groups of 13-15. Furthermore, Table 6 shows that some areas of the District are reaching saturation point. In addition, conditions placed on existing developments severely restrict further development. Members argue that if capacity for turbines at the upper end of the large group size is so restricted the large group size should not be set at 24. **It is recommended that further work is undertaken significantly to revise downwards the size of the groups.**

2.5 Members are concerned over the absence of a separation distance from the draft revised SPD and suggest that a minimum distance of 2km is introduced. It is felt that this should either be included within the draft Local Plan or the SPD itself. **It is suggested that Officers should be requested to produce terms for such a policy for approval by Members.**

2.6 The Panel supports the need for the Council to have in place an SPD for wind turbine developments. Referring to the Cumulative Landscape and Visual Impacts of Wind Turbines in Huntingdonshire, it is evident that the District is meeting the challenge set by the Government and is reaching saturation point in certain landscape character areas. There appear to be fewer wind turbine developments in neighbouring local authority areas.

2.7 The Panel is aware that the Department for Communities and Local Government is shortly due to produce guidance on wind turbine developments. The impact of this announcement is not yet known but it will need to be taken into account.

2.8 The Panel has commended Officers for the production of a high quality, objective and comprehensive report.

3. RECOMMENDATION

3.1 The Cabinet is invited to take into account the views of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Environmental Well-Being) as part of its deliberations on the report by the Planning Service Manager (Policy).

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Minutes and Reports of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Environmental Well-Being) held on 9th July 2013.

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