

Aylburton Parish Council: Emergency meeting to discuss wind turbine proposal, Court Farm, Alvington.

Minutes of meeting held on 6th November 2012 at 7:00 PM in the Memorial Hall.

Please note that these minutes have not been ratified due to the nature of the meeting. If you consider that they do not correctly reflect proceedings or that essential items have been omitted, please contact the clerk with any suggestions.

Present

Maurice Bloomfield (Chair), Colin Newman, Jane O'Donnell, Andy Jones, Simon Newman, (Councillors); Karen Blackwell (clerk). Marion Winship, Terry Glastonbury (District).
Also in attendance: members of the public (Approx. 70), members of Alvington Parish Council, & members of The Resilience Centre (the developers applying for planning permission).

Apologies

Frankie Evans.

The meeting was accompanied by a display of the proposal & plans for the wind turbine, including statistics & survey reports, erected by Andrew Clarke of the Resilience Centre.

The chairman opened the meeting by thanking all present for attending to discuss this highly contentious & emotive issue. He then went on to give a brief précis of the rules governing planning applications & objections thereof. (These can be viewed in full on the FoDDC website). Those which perhaps apply most pertinently to this issue are as follows: objections cannot be made on the grounds of loss of view or devaluation of close-by properties. Similarly the efficiency or otherwise of wind turbines, or the aesthetics of the structure, are not grounds on which to object.

Objections can be made on the following grounds: the effect on other buildings; environmental issues; the loss of an open space or amenity; the size of the structure; the effect on the land with regard to stability / flooding; and Health & Safety matters pertaining to the detrimental effect on hearing (as supported by noise pollution surveys).

John Ridley raised an objection on the grounds of the height of the proposed turbine, stating that it would be "overwhelming & overbearing". There had been some confusion as to the planned height on examination of the application. He also questioned the statistics regarding the issue of noise pollution from the turbine as these appeared to have been taken from studies involving a smaller turbine.

Simon Rutherford requested that the matter of size be clarified. Andrew Clarke (on behalf of the application team) provided the following data: the turbine will be 87metres in height with a 500kw engine.

Lorna Dyer informed those present that early research into low-level noise pollution indicates that this will in the future be a major issue, and Clare Bloomfield was keen to state that the noise assessment already completed does not demonstrate the effect on the majority of households nearest to the proposed site. This was reiterated by John Ridley who went on to say that research done so far is biased & a new independent survey should be undertaken.

Carol Bendall expressed concerns about the health issues surrounding noise and submitted a report by Andrew Gilliagan in the Daily Telegraph (3 Nov 2012)

Mark Sargent asked that people be aware that some turbines do in fact end up being taller than first stated on application. He also believes that the turbine will spoil the view from many local footpaths thus having a negative environmental impact.

Simon Rutherford raised his concerns regarding the issue of "flicker" or shadowing from the structure & the environmental impact of this.

A question was asked about the Severn Estuary in terms of its status as a site of special scientific interest (SSI) but the chairman informed the meeting that research (submitted by the Developers) indicates there will be no negative impact on estuarine birds.

Marion Winship asked that it be made clear that if this application is passed it may lead to a cumulative effect in the future, with possibly 3-4 further turbines placed along the banks of the Severn. In response to this Mark Sargent suggests that the impact of such structures should also be assessed from the opposite river bank.

Simon Rutherford then went on to question the issue of community benefit or involvement. At this point the chairman of Alvington Parish Council attempted to raise the matter of perceived misinformation supplied by the applicants with reference to the height of the turbine (a presentation

had been made by the company to Alvington P/C in July). Perhaps feeling that he was not being properly heard he chose to leave the meeting.

Andrew Clarke asked that it be pointed out that any application is an ongoing issue subject to change pending further investigation & available data. Mr Rutherford retorted that this is merely obfuscation!

Marion Winship then asked that the applicants once again address the issue of community involvement & benefit. Mr Clarke responded by saying that the turbine would be opened up to community investment which could lead to a community trust fund, with approximately 4% of the annual profits being paid into this for use as the community sees fit. He went on to state that Alvington had been made aware of this option & that it is in fact also contained in the public statement.

However this matter raises its own concerns with regard to investors who may not live locally so have no interest in how the turbine would affect the area, seeing it only in terms of a profit-making exercise. A question was asked as to whether it would be possible to have access to a list of likely backers.

It was strenuously argued by many of those attending the meeting that a public consultation such as this proposal warrants has not occurred. Tim Scott of Aylburton Lodge invited people to view from his home the recently erected St Briavels turbine which went up in 2 days with no notice or consultation with Aylburton parishioners and which he states has a huge, negative visual impact. Lorna Dyer then added that she is in favour of alternative energy sources – after all something has to be done- but this proposal would be overbearing in her environment and asks if the turbine could perhaps be smaller thus less impactful? On this note Maurice Bloomfield reminded those present that our Parish Plan demonstrated that 61% of those who responded indicated that they are in favour of finding alternative, sustainable energy sources. Mark Sargent agreed with this point but would very much like to see a smaller turbine, or even several smaller turbines, erected to limit the visual impact. It was pointed out by one resident that the landscape in which the turbine would be placed is in fact very horizontal, & that to have a huge vertical structure would be glaringly at odds with the area as it currently is.

Simon Wakeham asked that it be recognised that children, having raised the matter with his own, are generally in favour of the idea. Hazel Brookshaw of Sandford terrace is also in favour of the notion, again reiterating the need to find alternative energy.

A further question was raised regarding the effects of the turbine on local telecommunications. Ofcom implies that no detrimental effect will be noticed but those present with an engineering or scientific background felt that more research must be done to prove this due to the reflection & shadowing issues.

Colin Newman asked the applicant to address the issue of life expectancy of the turbine as well as contingency plans for repair or removal in the event of mechanical failure or financial loss. Andrew Clarke replied that a refit would be undertaken in the 15th year after erection, & that if the turbine was inoperable for a period of 3-6 months it would be taken down by either the company (if still trading) or the landowner / other interested parties. Planning permission would have to be re-applied for every 25 years. Mr Clarke went on to point out that sufficient value would be retained in the turbine in terms of metal etc to pay for decommissioning if necessary.

John Openshaw of Upper Common believed that the applicants had misled people as to the nature of this proposal & that its research, in terms of noise impact, was flawed. He pointed out discrepancies with regard to the size & height of the turbine within the actual application & the fact that an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) had been deemed unnecessary solely based on statistics using a smaller turbine as per early indications on behalf of the applicants. Furthermore he highlighted the lack of consultation with the Wildlife & Wetlands Trust at Slimbridge, & a total lack of concern for the bat population. Finally he questioned the seemingly arbitrary distances used to calculate noise & visual impact. Simon Wakeham asked if the Parish Council would consider undertaking an independent survey to clarify the impact of any noise pollution. It was pointed out that if this is to be done it will need to happen quickly due to the short time left in which to make objections.

The chairman advised those present that as individuals they are fully entitled to voice their concerns directly to the planning committee. Terry Glastonbury has asked that this matter be put before the planning committee which will probably meet again in December. At this point Mr Rutherford suggested a show of hands to gauge public feeling. The vast majority (approx 60) were against the proposal rather than for (5 people) or undecided (3 people). This provided a clear mandate for the council upon which to act.

The public meeting closed at 8.25pm.

Immediately following the public meeting the Parish Council reconvened to discuss how best to proceed with this matter. It was agreed that Maurice Bloomfield would write to the Planning Committee expressing the many issues raised by members of the public, stressing the fact that although people are generally in favour of finding an alternative energy source there is grave concern as to the sheer size of the proposed turbine & its impact on the local environment & quality of life.

Meeting closed 8.40pm.