
APPLICATION DETAILS

APPLICATION NO:	3/2013/0347
FULL APPLICATION DESCRIPTION:	ERECTION OF A SINGLE WIND TURBINE 34.4M TO TIP AND ASSOCIATED INFRASTRUCTURE (REVISED SCHEME)
NAME OF APPLICANT:	MR J CARRICK
ADDRESS:	IRESHOPE PLAINS, IRESHOPEBURN, BISHOP AUCKLAND, DL13 1HG
ELECTORAL DIVISION:	WEARDALE
CASE OFFICER:	Adrian Caines Principal Planning Officer 03000 263943 adrian.caines@durham.gov.uk

DESCRIPTION OF THE SITE AND PROPOSALS

The site

1. The application site is within an enclosed agricultural pasture field, in a position close to the dry stone wall which forms the field boundary, and at a distance approximately 150m to the south east of the dwelling and associated building group at Ireshope Plains. The site falls within the designated landscape of the North Pennines Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).
2. The A689 is the main road through Weardale and travels through the valley bottom around 860m to the north. Causeway Road leads off the A689 over 660m to the north. Access to Ireshope Plains is from Stony Path just over 200m to the north west of the site and there is a road leading south east off Stony path around 460m from the site. Stony Path is also a Public Right of Way (PROW) (No.51) and one of many PROWs in the area. There are a number of PROWs which lead directly off from Stony Path in the immediate vicinity of the application site. The nearest is No.54 which passes through the middle of the field around 120m to the north below the application site. Just beyond that are PROWs 52 and 53. PROWs 44, 45, 46, 48, 49 and 50 all lead off from Stony Path to the north west and they themselves then join to many other paths along the valley.
3. The nearest neighbouring residential property is High Greenwell around 420m north west of the site. Hawkwellhead Farm lies over 620m to the east. The properties on Causeway Road (A689) are nearly 700m to the north. The properties at Low Ling Riggs, Ling Riggs, High Ling Riggs and Slack House are all over 800m to the north west of the site.

4. High Greenwell is also the nearest listed building and there are other notable listed buildings nearby including the grade II* listed Newhouse on Well Bank (1.2km) and grade II listed Wearhead Methodist Chapel on the A689 (1.2km).
5. The edge of the Ireshopeburn conservation area lies just over 760m to the north of the site. The Wearhead conservation area lies nearly 1.5km to the north west. The St John's Chapel and East Blackdene conservation areas lie around 1.7km to the north east. The Cowshill conservation area lies around 2.7km to the north west.

The proposal

6. Planning permission is sought for the erection of a single 3-blade wind turbine with a blade tip height of 34.4m and hub height of 24.8m. Ancillary development would include the concrete foundation 11mx11m, 7m of new access track (4m wide) to join the existing track from the yard and underground cabling to the transformer and grid connection. The turbine would be coloured grey (RAL 7015).
7. The proposed turbine would provide approximately 260,000kWh of electricity per annum for the farm and plant hire business which operate at the site with surplus electricity exported to the National Grid.
8. The application has been called to committee by Councillors Savory, Shuttleworth and Stanhope Parish Council.

PLANNING HISTORY

9. The planning history at Ireshope Plains relates to the erection of agricultural buildings and extension to the farmhouse, which is not of any particular relevance to this application.
10. There was an application for a white coloured turbine on this site (3/2013/0087), but it was not determined following concerns about landscape impact, which led to the submission of this application with the turbine colour now amended to grey.
11. The telecommunications mast to the north, originally a TV relay mast, dates back to 1977 and it has had various permissions over the preceding years for minor additions of dishes and antennas.
12. Although not on this site, the Council has within the last year refused planning permission for a 34m high turbine at High Greenfield Farm, Cowshill, which lies just under 4km to the north of Ireshope Plains. That decision is relevant because the turbine was the same size and style of turbine, and is in close proximity to the application site within the AONB. An appeal decision on that proposal is expected shortly.

PLANNING POLICY

NATIONAL POLICY

13. On March 27th 2012 the Government published the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). The framework establishes a presumption in favour of sustainable development. However, the NPPF does not change the statutory status of the development plan as the starting point for decision making. Proposed

development that accords with an up-to-date Local Plan should be approved and proposed development that conflicts should be refused, unless other material considerations indicate otherwise. The following elements of the NPPF are considered most relevant to this proposal:

14. NPPF Part 10 *Meeting the challenge of climate change, flooding, and coastal change* states that LPAs should approve applications for energy development if impacts are (or can be made) acceptable. The overall need for such development need not be demonstrated, and there must be recognition that even small scale projects provide a valuable contribution to cutting greenhouse gas emissions.
15. NPPF Part 11 – *Conserving and enhancing the natural environment* – Paragraph 115 states that great weight should be given to conserving landscape and scenic beauty in Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, which have the highest status of protection in relation to landscape and scenic beauty. The conservation of wildlife and cultural heritage are important considerations in all these areas, and should be given great weight in National Parks and the Broads.
16. NPPF Part 12 *Conserving and Enhancing the Historic Environment* states that, when considering the impact of a proposed development on the significance of a designated heritage asset, great weight should be given to the asset's conservation; and significance can be harmed or lost through alteration or destruction of the heritage asset or development within its setting.

LOCAL PLAN POLICY:

17. The following saved policies of the Wear Valley District Local Plan as amended by Saved and Expired Policies September 2007 are considered to be consistent with the NPPF and can therefore be given weight in the determination of this application:
18. *Policy GD1 (General Development Criteria)*: All new development and redevelopment within the district should contribute to the quality and built environment of the surrounding area and includes a number of criteria in respect of impact on the character and appearance of the surrounding area; avoiding conflict with adjoining uses; and highways impacts.
19. *Policy ENV1 (Protection of the Countryside)*: The District Council will seek to protect and enhance the countryside of Wear Valley.
20. *Policy ENV2 (The North Pennines Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty)*: Priority will be given to the protection and enhancement of the landscape qualities of the North Pennines Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. Development which adversely affects the special scenic quality and the nature conservation interest of the AONB will not be permitted.
21. *Policy BE1 (Protection of Historic Heritage)*: The District Council will seek to conserve the historic heritage of the District by the maintenance, protection and enhancement of features and areas of particular historic, architectural or archaeological interest.
22. *Policy BE4 (Setting of a Listed Building)*: Development which impacts upon the setting of a listed building and adversely affects its special architectural, historical or landscape character will not be allowed.

23. *Policy BE8 (Setting of a Conservation Area)*: Development which impacts upon the setting of a Conservation Area and which adversely affects its townscape qualities, landscape or historical character will not be allowed.

EMERGING LOCAL POLICY

24. The County Council is currently developing a countywide Local Plan (County Durham Plan) to replace all existing District Local Plans; however, the weight to be accorded to the draft policies is very limited in that the plan has not yet been subject to examination and may change prior to adoption. Wind turbine development is addressed in draft policy 22:
25. Policy 22 (Wind turbine development) states that planning permission will be granted for wind turbines unless, among other things, there would be significant harm to the character of the landscape. In respect of wind turbine development in the AONB, it specifically states that there will be a presumption against large scale wind development in the North Pennines AONB. Developments involving more than one turbine, or turbines with a hub height of over 25m, will not be permitted. Small scale wind development within the AONB will be permitted provided that its impacts on the environment are acceptable and its installed capacity is commensurate with the needs of the property or business.

CONSULTATION AND PUBLICITY RESPONSES

26. Full consultation was carried out on application 3/2013/0087. The main difference between application 3/2013/0087 and this new application is the change in colour of the turbine from white to grey and therefore some organisations were not reconsulted, but their previous responses remain relevant.

STATUTORY RESPONSES:

27. *Stanhope Parish Council* object to the application because of visual impact on the AONB landscape and concern about setting a precedent for other (turbine) development in the area.
28. *National Air Traffic Services (NATS)* has no safeguarding objection.
29. *Ministry of Defence (MOD)* were not reconsulted on this application because they had no objection to application 3/2013/0087.
30. *Highway Authority* were not reconsulted on this application because they had no objection to application 3/2013/0087.
31. *Natural England* were not reconsulted on this application because they had no objection to application 3/2013/0087.

INTERNAL CONSULTEE RESPONSES:

32. *Landscape* object to the proposal, despite the change in colour from white to grey. The turbine is too large and would be seen over a large area within the AONB from roads and footpaths as well as access land. In these views the proposed turbine would be a singular landmark feature, creating a dominant and eye catching focal point, weakening the degree of unity and coherence in the landscape and eroding its

tranquillity. The assessment of the visual impacts contained in the application plays down the magnitude of the impact of the proposal and two of the three photomontages have technical problems in which the apparent size of the turbine has been reduced. The turbine cannot be compared with the nearby telecoms mast because the mast does not rotate, and so is much less attention grabbing than the proposed turbine would be. The proposal is considered to be in clear and substantive conflict with policy ENV 2 of the Wear Valley District Local Plan which states that priority will be given to the protection and enhancement of the landscape qualities of the AONB. In respect of emerging policy, the proposal would not conflict with proposed Policy 22 in respect of the size of the turbine, but would conflict in respect of its impacts on the environment.

33. *Design & Conservation* object to the proposal. The scale, location and colour of the proposed turbine would result in an adverse impact on the setting of numerous heritage assets in middle and near distance views including the Cowshead, Wearhead, Ireshopeburn, St John's Chapel and East Blackdene Conservation Areas, the grade II listed Methodist Chapel, grade II* Newhouse and grade II Greenwell. In considering the impact on setting using The English Heritage guidance Wind Energy and the Historic Environment, it is considered that the excessive scale of the selected turbine will become a visually dominant feature in a landscape which is now and ever increasingly less dominated by the industrial past of the area. Intervisibility in this particular case is particularly important, the dales conservation areas are a series of related villages with similar characteristics all set within a relatively undisturbed landscape. The grade II* listed Newhouse is a classic example in this context of a nationally significant asset which has been constructed to be directly linked to the surrounding landscape. It was constructed in the elevated position to provide commanding and dominating views of the landscape which it owned and managed. The setting of this building is one of open vistas and clear views of the now deindustrialised landscape of Weardale. This will be significantly harmed by the introduction of a turbine of the scale proposed. The setting in which the designated assets are now appreciated has remained unaltered now for several generations with the exception of small scale predominantly residential development throughout the area. This proposal would represent the single most intrusive feature to be introduced in to the landscape for some considerable time.

34. *North Pennines AONB Partnership* objects to the proposal. The proposed turbine would sit on an elevated point in the upper dale where it would be prominent from a number of locations within the local and wider area, especially against the skyline when viewed from the A689 to the north and other highway receptor sites. The site would lead to the turbine being poorly associated with the property it will serve and as such risk being the dominant feature in the landscape, especially considering its large height. The proposal has not adequately addressed the issues identified in The North Pennines AONB Planning Guidelines, particularly in respect of avoiding elevated sites and open locations where turbines would intrude into clean or locally important skylines. In their previous comments they also noted that The AONB Partnership has been supportive of many small scale turbine applications in the AONB, demonstrating support for renewable energy developments, but this application fails the relevant policy tests in the NPPF, Local Plan Policy ENV2 and the North Pennines Guidance.

PUBLIC RESPONSES:

35. The application has been publicised by site notice and neighbour letters. The only representations received on this application have been objections from The Open

Spaces Society and the Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE). It is however noted that there were 10 letters of support received for the previous application 3/2013/0087, all noting the general benefits of renewable energy in off-setting the carbon omissions of the existing farm business.

36. *The Open Spaces Society* objects to the proposal. They consider that the proposed turbine would dominate the landscape of this open rural area where local people and visitors come to walk and appreciate the quiet rural character of the countryside and do not expect to see structures of such proportions. The comparison made to the nearby telecommunication mast is not relevant as it is not a solid structure and the blades of the turbine would make it more noticeable on account of their movement.
37. *CPRE* objects to the proposal and reiterates their comments made on application 3/2013/0087. CPRE are in principle opposed to turbine developments which cause harm to AONBs. Even a single turbine of medium size in this location can affect the tranquillity of the area, which is a key characteristic of the AONB acknowledged in the draft Natural England National Character Assessment for the North Pennines, which describes the area as “A very tranquil landscape with a sense of remoteness, with a low population, slow rate of change, and extensive open moorlands with panoramic views and a unique wilderness quality, providing inspirational recreational experience.” The proposed turbine would be detached from the farm buildings and break the skyline. Even with a colour change it would cause harm to the landscape of the AONB.

APPLICANTS STATEMENT:

38. The Applicant has lived and worked at Ireshope Plain for 30 years and developed the farm and a plant hire and contracting company near to the village of Ireshopeburn. The Family has a long association with the area and have been at the farm since 1820. The contracting business comprises heavy plant hire and earthworks contracting, specialising in uplands restoration and environmental management work. The livestock business extends to 352 hectares, rearing around 300 sheep for meat production. The business is a major contributor to the local economy, providing employment both for the Carrick Family as well as being a significant employer of 7 local people, in an area of sparse population and limited employment opportunity.
39. The business is a large consumer of energy; the carbon footprint of the heavy plant contracting and farm business equating to around 517 tonnes of CO₂ per year. The proposed wind turbine will reduce the business' carbon footprint by providing sustainable energy and will make a significant environmental, economic and social contribution to the rural environment of County Durham, as well as contributing to Government renewable energy targets.
40. The proposed turbine is to be constructed and operated directly by the Applicant in order to move towards energy independence and a sustainable business with a reduced carbon footprint. Based on NOABL wind speed data, the turbine is expected to produce approximately 260,000kWh of electricity per annum at 6.0m/s wind speed and save 142 tonnes of CO₂ per annum, equating to 3,544 tonnes over the turbine life span. The proposed turbine will offset 30% of the business' annual carbon footprint which is a significant benefit to the business.
41. The Applicant recognises that the site is a sensitive location within the AONB. It is proposed to install a single Northwind NPS100-24-23 100kW wind turbine with a

hub height of 22.6m and a blade diameter of 23.6m. The proposed turbine is therefore lower than the maximum height of 25m to hub height advised in both the North Pennines AONB Planning Guidelines and emerging Policy 22 on wind turbine development within the North Pennines AONB. The turbine is also available in dark grey, which has been identified as a key consideration by the Landscape Officer.

42. The turbine location and the scale have been informed by the constraints of the site and the surrounding area alongside consultations with stakeholders, including the North Pennines AONB Partnership. The application is supported by a robust Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, Ecological Impact Assessment and a Noise Impact Assessment. These reports demonstrate that the application is acceptable when assessed against current policy at all levels, emerging policy and other material planning considerations and that it provides material benefits that far outweigh any limited impact on the surrounding area.

PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS AND ASSESSMENT

43. Having regard to the requirements of section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, Section 85 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000, development plan policies and relevant guidance, and all other material planning considerations, including representations received, it is considered that the main planning issues in this instance relate to the principle of development; landscape and visual impact; impact on the amenity of neighbours; ecology; and any other matters.

Principle of development

44. General protection of the countryside and landscape quality is set out in Wear Valley Local Plan Policies GD1 and ENV1. More specifically Local Plan Policy ENV2 gives priority to protection and enhancement of the landscape qualities of the North Pennines AONB, an area within which the application site falls, noting development which adversely affects the special scenic quality of the AONB will not be permitted. Policies BE1, BE4 and BE8 are concerned with conservation of the historic heritage of the district and development which impacts on the setting of listed buildings or conservation areas will not be allowed.
45. Other important material considerations are Government guidance including the NPPF and National Policy Statements for Energy (EN-1) and for Renewable Energy (EN-3). EN-1 advises that in order to meet emissions targets the consumption of electricity will need to be almost exclusively from low carbon sources. The implication is that, in the short-term, much of the new capacity would need to come from on- and off-shore wind generated electricity. However, EN-1 confirms that National Parks, the Broads and AONBs have the highest status of protection in relation to landscape and scenic beauty. Each of these designated areas has specific statutory purposes which help ensure their continued protection. The conservation of the natural beauty of the landscape and countryside should be given substantial weight in deciding on applications for renewable energy development in these areas.
46. A core principle of The NPPF is that planning should support the transition to a low carbon future and encourage the use of renewable resources. Paragraph 93 provides for planning to play a key role in helping to shape places to secure radical reductions in greenhouse gas emissions, minimising vulnerability and providing resilience to the effects of climate change, and supporting the delivery of renewable energy and associated infrastructure. Paragraph 98 recognises that small scale

projects provide a valuable contribution to cutting greenhouse gas emissions. The NPPF's core principles also recognise the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside and that development should contribute to conserving and enhancing the natural environment. Paragraph 115 confirms that great weight should be given to conserving landscape and scenic beauty in National Parks, the Broads and AONBs, which have the highest status of protection in relation to landscape and scenic beauty.

47. Section 12 of the NPPF includes guidance on conserving and enhancing the historic environment. In paragraph 132 it states that when considering the impact of a proposed development on the significance of a designated heritage asset, great weight should be given to the asset's conservation; and significance can be harmed or lost through alteration or destruction of the heritage asset or development within its setting. Harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset should be weighed against the public benefit of the proposal.
48. The Government has also recently published Planning Practice Guidance for Renewable and Low Carbon Energy. Paragraph 15 confirms that "the need for renewable or low carbon energy does not automatically override environmental protections"; "Proposals in National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, and in areas close to them where there could be an adverse impact on the protected area, will need careful consideration" and "Great care should be taken to ensure heritage assets are conserved in a manner appropriate to their significance, including the impact of proposals on views important to their setting. It also includes advice on the assessment of cumulative landscape and visual impacts; and acknowledges that depending on their scale, design and prominence a wind turbine within the setting of a heritage asset may cause substantial harm to the significance of the asset.
49. The Wear Valley Local Plan is due to be replaced by the County Durham Plan (CDP). Consultation on the Pre Submission Draft ended in December 2013 and the final submission is likely to be made in April 2014, with examination following later in the summer 2014. The weight to be accorded to the draft policies is limited in that it has not yet been subject to examination and may change prior to adoption, having regard to amongst other things the responses received during the consultation. Wind turbine development is addressed in draft policy 22, which states that there will be a presumption against large scale wind development in the North Pennines AONB, but small scale wind development under 25m hub height will be permitted in the AONB provided that its impacts on the environment are acceptable and its installed capacity is commensurate with the needs of the property or business. The supporting text includes reference to the wilderness and remoteness of the AONB which are also among the special qualities identified in the AONB Management Plan 2009-2014.
50. Section 85 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 requires the decision maker to have regard to the purposes of designation of an AONB when considering development that could affect the AONB. The primary purpose of AONB designation is to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the area, but in pursuing that purpose account needs to be taken of (amongst other things) the needs of rural industries and of the social and economic needs of local communities, with particular regard paid to sustainable forms of social and economic development that in themselves conserve the environment.
51. It has been estimated by the applicant that the proposed turbine would result in a carbon saving of approximately 88 tons which is 17% of the carbon footprint of the farm business (517 tones of CO2 per year). This in itself is a fairly significant carbon

saving for the farm, but in wider terms, a turbine with a rated output of 55kW would only make a very modest contribution to renewable energy. Nevertheless, The NPPF recognises that even small-scale projects provide a valuable contribution to cutting greenhouse gas emissions. Any surplus electricity could be exported to the grid and there would be economic benefits and energy security to a firm operating in a rural area.

52. By comparison with many other local authority areas, County Durham is making good progress with its contribution towards the national target for 30% renewable electricity by 2020 with current commitments to renewable energy to provide 27% of Durham's own electricity needs. However, much of the committed capacity in Durham has been created by large scale commercial wind farm development in areas of the county previously identified as of least constraint in past regional policy, and the draft CDP at paragraph 5.80 suggests that technical and environmental constraints indicate there is only limited potential for further such large scale wind farm development in the future. This could mean that a greater proportion of wind energy output is expected to be provided by small and medium scale turbines such as the application proposal. Nevertheless, there are likely to be other opportunities within the County to provide renewable energy on a similar scale to the application proposal in less sensitive locations outside the AONB.
53. Therefore, having regard to the policy context above, there is strong policy support for renewable energy development in the form of the proposed turbine. However, it is also clear that the need for renewable or low carbon energy does not automatically override environmental protections and throughout the policy context reference is made to the "great" and "substantial" weight that must be given to the protection of designated areas such as AONBs and the conservation of designated heritage assets. Where significant harm occurs it must be justified in the wider public interest.
54. So notwithstanding the acknowledged need for renewable energy, factors such as the progress County Durham is making towards the national target, together with the modest contribution the proposal would make to renewable energy and that there are likely to be opportunities for turbines of this scale outside the AONB, suggests that the application proposal is not essential to meet local or national targets. Therefore if the proposal is considered in the following sections to have a significant impact on the landscape of the AONB or significance of designated heritage assets, this will not be outweighed by the environmental and economic benefits of this particular proposal.

Landscape impact

55. The turbine would sit within a pasture field on the open, southern hillside of the Wear Valley at a point just below the transition to the upper moorland landscape of Harthope Moor, all of which is within the North Pennines Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), a landscape which merits the highest level of landscape protection. There is landform evidence of past mining activity to the north and west of Ireshope Plains, which is a common feature throughout this part of the AONB and is part of the area's mining heritage. These landforms have remained unaltered as such for many generations, thereby representing an important part of the landscape character of the area as opposed to being something that detracts from it. Apart from the small Hole Plantation lower down the valley to the north and the Rowantree Plantation to the south east, tree cover on the hillside is scarce and therefore except where topography limits close and medium range views of the site, views are generally expansive across the valley and beyond to open moorland, particularly views from

the northern side of the valley and the roads and footpaths to the north west. Relevant key characteristics of the AONB are an upland landscape of high moorland ridges divided by broad pastoral dales with remote moorland summits and blanket bog. Particularly when the site is seen in wide panoramic views from the opposite side of the valley, this area has wilderness qualities and tranquillity, which are key landscape characteristics of the AONB designation. The AONB landscape is highly sensitive to change and even minor changes can result in significant impact on its character. The applicant's landscape assessment plays down the sensitivity of this landscape and strict statutory protection afforded to it.

56. The Zone of Theoretical Visibility (ZTV) accompanying the application confirms the high visibility of the site from immediately to the west and from the rising ground on the opposite side of the valley, with the majority of visibility lying within a 5km radius of the site, which is the distance a turbine of this size would be a noticeable feature.
57. In long distance views greater than 5km the turbine would be a relatively small feature in the landscape and this is where the grey colour would help reduce its visibility. The impact at this distance is likely to be low and therefore not significant.
58. However, at medium distance views between 1.5 and 5 km from the site, the turbine would become more prominent and the impact on the landscape more significant. Some of the more adverse views at this distance range are likely to be from the A689 at Copthill on entry down into Cowshill at a distance of about 3.1km; the road from Cowshill to Burnhope Reservoir 2.2km-2.4km; the northern entry into Wearhead on the A689 near West Fall about 2.2km; and travelling from the east along the road from Daddry Shield to East Blackdene and the higher road above at a distance of about 2.1km. At these distances and because of the turbine's elevated position, it would be clearly identifiable in the landscape and the movement of the blades would make it more noticeable. The top of the turbine would appear as a moving element against the moorland tops and may break the skyline in some of the views. These views do encompass vegetation, buildings and other minor vertical elements which would help reduce the significance of the impact, but because of the sensitivity of the landscape and the fact it would be the only turbine of its type and size visible, the impact would be adverse.
59. The views from the high road leading from Cowshill to Bail Hill and Well Bank (and footpaths leading off the road) at between 2.5km and 1.4km; Grasshill Causeway 2.2km; and the descent from the north down Well Bank between 3.1 and 1.8km are where the turbine would be most likely to have a significant adverse landscape impact at medium distance. In all these elevated views the turbine would be visible in wide open vistas encompassing the remote wilderness qualities of the AONB. The turbine would be prominent in relation to other elements within the surrounding landscape where it would be a large, distinctive moving feature. Other than the telecommunications mast nearby there are no other strong vertical features of a similar scale visible and the solid nature, colour and moving blades would render the turbine far more attention catching and visible than the mast. The impact on these views would be a significant adverse effect on the purposes and special qualities of the AONB due to intrusion, thereby detracting from its wilderness and remoteness.
60. In close distance views under 1.5km the turbine would be a dominant feature in a number of views for both road users and recreational users of the many footpaths in the area. Recreational footpath users and other visitors to the area particularly are likely to be more sensitive to features in the landscape as views of the landscape are one of the main objectives of leisure walks and visits to the area. The A689 is the

primary road through Weardale travelled by residents as well as visitors who come to the area to experience the unique wilderness and landscape qualities of the area. There would be largely unbroken views of the turbine for a stretch along the A689 of about 660m between Wearhead and the road to West Blackdene. A view of this is shown in photomontage viewpoint 2 which is about 1.2km from the site. Along this section of the A689 the turbine would be a very noticeable, large, moving feature on the hillside where it would break the skyline. It would also appear particularly dominant from the Wearhead Playground on this section of road. The farm buildings at Ireshope Plains are barely visible in these views which would make the turbine appear particularly isolated. Again, because of its solid nature and moving blades, the turbine would be more noticeable than the nearby mast and its position higher up the hill would add to its impact. The same would apply from public footpaths 35 and 37 crossing the fields to the south. The impact on these views would be a significant adverse effect.

61. From the upper sections of Causeway Road near High Wham, High Ling Riggs (shown in photomontage viewpoint 3) and public footpaths 11, 12 and 40 the blades of the turbine would break the skyline and would be mostly seen in the context of the wide open moorland tops at a scale that would dominate the farm buildings. This scale of structure is not normally expected within the AONB and there are no other examples of turbine development of the type and scale proposed in this part of the AONB. The turbine would be highly intrusive with a significant adverse impact on the AONB landscape.
62. At the closest views from Stoney Path under 300m (shown in photomontage viewpoint 1), the turbine and its large concrete pad would appear most dominant, but these views are perhaps a little less sensitive because the farm complex would be prominent in the foreground and there is lesser appreciation of the wider open AONB landscape seen in more distance views. Nevertheless, the siting of the turbine would still be detached from the farm buildings and the further away you get from the farm complex along public footpath 54, which runs through the field the turbine would be sited in, and public footpath 51, which carries on south past the farm complex along Stoney Path, the more sensitive the landscape becomes and the more adverse the impact from the turbine would be to the extent that footpath users would be likely to find the scale of the turbine and its movement intrusive and significantly detracting from the remote, tranquil characteristics of the AONB.
63. These concerns are shared in the objections from the Council's Landscape Section, The AONB Partnership, The Open Spaces Society and CPRE. It is therefore considered that the visual intrusion of the proposed turbine into the AONB landscape from the identified roads and footpaths would have a significant adverse effect on the purposes and special qualities of the AONB. This would be contrary to Wear Valley Local Plan Policy ENV2 and more generally policies GD1 and ENV1. It would also be in conflict with the aims of the NPPF in terms of the great weight that should be given to conserving the landscape and scenic beauty in AONBs, as well as the statutory purpose of AONB designation to preserve and enhance the natural beauty of the area.
64. While the applicant has made reference to draft policy 22 of the emerging CDP, the weight that can be given to the policy is very limited given it has not been through public examination. Nevertheless, even though the proposed turbine would technically fall under the 25m hub height restriction within draft policy 22, this would only be by 200mm and therefore be so marginal. It is also not clear if the height of the concrete pad has been taken into account. In any case the wording of draft policy

22 does not suggest that all turbines of that size would have acceptable impacts in all areas of the AONB as the impacts on the environment still need to be acceptable in each individual case. As the proposed turbine would have a significant adverse impact on the landscape and character of the AONB from a number of points, the proposal would still be in conflict with draft policy 22.

Impact on designated heritage assets

65. In the exercise of its planning functions with respect of any development which affects a listed building or its setting, the Local Planning Authority must have regard to section 66 of The Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990. This provision requires the Local planning authority to pay special regard to the desirability of preserving the listed building, or its setting, or any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses.
66. There are 5 conservation areas and various listed buildings within 3km of the application site, all of which are designated heritage assets and the development has potential to impact on the setting of those heritage assets. The NPPF confirms that significance of heritage assets can be harmed or lost through development within its setting. The Planning Practice Guidance for Renewable and Low Carbon Energy confirms that a wind turbine within the setting of a heritage asset may cause substantial harm to the significance of the asset.
67. The landscape section above identifies where the most prominent views of the proposed turbine would be. Some of those views coincide with views within or over conservation areas and from or over listed buildings.
68. The views of the turbine from Copthill would be over the Cowshill conservation area at approximately 3.1km, but views within the conservation area would be limited and at the distance involved the impact on the character of the conservation area would not be substantial. Similarly from Four Lane Ends there would be views over the East Balckdene and St John's Chapel conservation areas with limited views from within and again together with the distance involved, the impact on these conservation areas would not be substantial.
69. On the A689 the turbine would come into view at the northern entry into Wearhead before the primary school at about 2km away. The view of the turbine for drivers would be central, but quickly changing and softened by the presence of telegraph poles in the foreground. It would however, be more visible from the primary school and the nearby footpath no.39 where the impact would be more adverse. This part of the conservation area is very open and rural. The intervisibility between the conservation area and landscape is important to the significance of the conservation area as the countryside permeates into the conservation area giving it its rural character. From here the turbine would appear as a notable and unexpected feature on the hillside where it would intrude into the open views of the hillside from the school and footpath within this part of the conservation area. Its location, scale and impact on intervisibility would cause substantial harm to the setting and significance of the conservation area from these points.
70. The views of the turbine from Causeway Road at High Wham, High Ling Riggs and footpaths 11, 40 and 42 would be over the grade II listed Greenwell. The turbine would be the dominant element in these views and would therefore draw attention away from Greenwell and detract from its rural setting and relationship with the surrounding countryside. The impact on the setting of Greenwell would therefore be

adverse although it is lessened by the presence of the telecommunications mast and farm buildings which already dominate Greenwell in these views.

71. The Wearhead Methodist Chapel is grade II listed and lies just south of Wearhead on the A689. The chapel faces south over the playing fields to the hillside where the turbine would be located approximately 1.2km away. At this distance the turbine would be a highly prominent and dominant, moving feature high up the hillside. This would have a significantly adverse impact on the currently peaceful and still views of the landscape the chapel faces onto, which are important factors in its setting and historical significance as a chapel and place of peace. This would cause substantial harm to the experience and setting of the chapel, thereby harming its significance.
72. Once again, the views of the turbine from Well Bank are also likely to have a significant impact, this time on heritage assets. The first 500m up Well Bank falls within the Ireshopeburn conservation area. There is also the very notable grand 18th Century grade II* listed Newhouse adjacent to Well Bank. The turbine would be highly visible ahead on entry into the conservation area when travelling down Well Bank and then following a short period of limited visibility would become open to view again from the point almost immediately adjacent to Newhouse and down the rest of the lower section of the road before the riverside trees block the view of the hillside opposite. As acknowledged in the Conservation Area Appraisal the surrounding hills provide the backdrop to all views from within the village and therefore the intervisibility and views of the open moorland hilltops are an important part of the significance of the conservation area, contributing to its rural character. The turbine would appear as a large, intrusive, moving element on the hillside when travelling down Well Bank within the conservation area, thereby causing harm to the setting and significance of the conservation area.
73. The grade II* status of Newhouse means it is one of the most important buildings in the country. The property has been the home of successive agents of the Beaumont lead mine owning family. It was constructed in its elevated position to provide commanding and dominating views of the landscape which the occupiers owned and managed. As noted in the Conservation Area Appraisal Newhouse enjoys "splendid views to the south" from its many south facing windows and this is a key feature of its setting and significance. A photo of the view onto the proposed turbine site even features in the Conservation Area Appraisal. From here the turbine would appear to sit on top of a ridge and would appear very prominent and intrusive to a much greater extent than the existing mast. The prominence of the turbine and regular, continuous movement of the blades would have a substantial adverse impact on the presently open and still landscape views from Newhouse. This would cause substantial harm to the experience and setting of Newhouse, thereby harming its significance.
74. These concerns are shared in the objection from the Council's Design and Conservation Section. It is therefore considered that the visual intrusion of the proposed turbine in the open AONB landscape would also be significantly harmful to the setting of the grade II* listed Newhouse and the grade II listed Methodist Chapel, as well as to the setting of the Ireshopeburn and Wearhead conservation areas. The substantial harm caused to the heritage assets would not be outweighed by the economic and environmental benefits of this proposal. This would be contrary to Wear Valley Local Plan Policies BE1, BE4 and BE8, and more generally policy GD1. It would also be in conflict with the aims of the NPPF in terms of the great weight that should be given to conservation of heritage assets.

Other matters

75. Turbines are unlikely to be overbearing at distances of greater than around seven times their height. There are no neighbouring properties within seven times the proposed turbine height (241m) with the nearest being High Greenwell at 420m away. While the turbine would be a prominent feature in the landscape over a wide ranging area for many properties, its scale together with the distance involved would not be unreasonably overbearing from within any neighbouring properties to the extent that they would become unattractive places to live.
76. A noise assessment accompanying the application indicates the turbine will meet the LA90 35dBA criterion specified in ETSU-R-97 for neighbouring properties. This is likely given the distance to neighbouring properties and could be controlled by condition.
77. There are no neighbouring properties within ten rotor diameters and therefore shadow flicker would not be an issue within any neighbouring properties.
78. The site is in grazed pasture and together with its high elevation and its distance in excess of 50m from any hedges, trees and buildings; means the proposed turbine is unlikely to have any adverse impact on bats. This is confirmed in the ecology survey accompanying the application, which also assesses the impact on bird populations to be insignificant. There are no objections from the Council's Ecology Section.
79. There were no aviation safeguarding concerns from the MOD or NATS.

CONCLUSION

80. The proposed turbine would make a contribution towards the supply of renewable energy and reduce the carbon footprint of the business activities at Ireshope Plains, but the environmental and economic benefits of the proposal and the acknowledged need for renewable energy are not in this case sufficient to override the strict environmental protection afforded to the landscape of the AONB and conservation of designated heritage assets. The proposal is in conflict with Wear Valley Local Plan Policies ENV2, BE4, BE8 and more generally GD1, ENV1 and BE1, and the impacts are not acceptable in terms of NPPF paragraph 98.

RECOMMENDATION

That the application be **REFUSED** for the following reasons.

1. The proposed turbine, by reason of its scale and siting, would have a detrimental impact on the landscape of the North Pennines Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. This is contrary to saved policies ENV2, GD1(i)(ii)(xi) and ENV1 of the Wear Valley Local Plan, as well as NPPF paragraphs 98 and 115.
2. The proposed turbine, by reason of its scale and siting, would have a detrimental impact on the setting of the grade II* listed Newhouse and the grade II listed Methodist Chapel, as well as the Ireshopeburn and Wearhead conservation areas. This is contrary to saved policies BE1, BE4 and BE8 of the Wear Valley Local Plan, as well as NPPF paragraphs 98 and 132.

STATEMENT OF PROACTIVE ENGAGEMENT

76. In arriving at the decision to refuse the application the Local Planning Authority has assessed the proposal against the NPPF and the Development Plan in the most efficient way, however, given the issues of concern could not be overcome, it has not been possible to achieve a positive outcome.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Submitted Application Forms, Plans and Statements

National Planning Policy Framework

National Policy Statements for Energy (EN-1) and for Renewable Energy (EN-3)

Planning Practice Guidance for Renewable and Low Carbon Energy

Wear Valley Local Plan

North Pennines Planning Guidelines

Consultee comments

Public Consultation Responses

