

Application No: 08/02236/F **Ward:** Caversfield

Date Valid: 21/10/08

Applicant: Bolsterstone Innovative Energy (Fewcott) Ltd

Site Address: Land North of Willowbank Farm, Fewcott Road, Fritwell

Proposal: Installation and operation of a Meteorological testing mast for the period of one year to evaluate wind resource

1. Site Description and Proposal

The site is within an agricultural field associated with Willowbank Farm near Fewcott. It is approximately 360m west of the M40 motorway and approximately 1.2km north of Fewcott village. The land is relatively flat and there are public footpaths and bridleways running in close proximity to the site.

The proposal is for the installation and operation of a meteorological testing mast for a period of one year. The mast has an overall height of 60 metres, is 20cm in diameter and is secured by guy wires made from stainless steel which span 60 metres. At the top of the mast are booms which hold the measuring instruments. The mast is secured into the ground using galvanised iron ground anchors. These anchors can be completely removed at the end of the consent period.

Access to the site is achieved via the existing farm access off the Fewcott Road.

2. Application Publicity

The application was advertised by way of a press notice and 6 site notices. These were displayed at the access to Willowbank Farm, the access to the footpath to the south east of Willowbank Farm, the access to the bridleway at the B4100, the access to the Bridleway opposite the village hall in Fritwell, the Parish notice board at the Post Office in Fritwell and the Parish notice board at Ardley and Fewcott village hall. The last day for comment on the application is 5 December 2008.

At the time of writing the report no comments had been received specifically in relation to the test mast. If any comments are received these will form part of an update at the Committee meeting.

Whilst this application is solely for the test mast its submission has overlapped with the developers carrying out public exhibitions relating to a potential wind farm on the site. This has led to the receipt of two letters expressing views on this potential future development. Although not directly relevant to this application one makes reference to this application number therefore should be reported. In summary the comments are as follows;

- Strong objection to wind turbines
- The area is becoming a dumping ground for quarries, incinerators, houses, wind turbines
- A turbine has been turned down at a house in Fewcott because it was near a footpath. If the turbines are approved they will all be close to footpaths
- They will be three stories high and a blot on the landscape
- The turbines will produce enough electricity for 5 and half thousand homes in Bicester, why not put them in Bicester. The conclusion has been reached that it is

better to upset a couple of hundred people in 2 villages than a few thousand in Bicester

- We're also surrounded by flyovers and motorway noise. Wind turbines are very noisy too
- There is no way that this project will supply enough energy to thousands of homes, there is insufficient wind at this site
- This is not the way to achieve targets of 10% of electrical energy to come from renewable sources – wind farms should be coastal, not inland
- The effect on wildlife has the potential to be overwhelming, especially to Bats
- The offer of a community fund to provide valuable services to the local community is derisory

3. Consultations

Ardley with Fewcott and Fritwell Parish Council's have not yet commented on the application.

The Local Highway Authority raises no objections.

The Council's Anti Social Behaviour Manager has no observations or objections.

The Council's Landscape Services Department has stated that the proposal is not within a designated area of High Landscape Value although it is within 1km of the conservation areas of Fritwell and Fewcott. Policy EN34 of the Non Statutory Cherwell Local Plan 2011 seeks to conserve and enhance the character and appearance of the landscape through the control of development. Proposals will not be permitted if they cause undue visual intrusion into the open countryside, are inconsistent with local character or harm the setting of settlements. A 60m high mast with guy ropes spreading to 60m diameter is not an insignificant structure albeit fairly light weight in density. However the permission is for one year only. On this basis and provided that we won't be setting a precedence for any future development on this site objections are not raised. Is it possible to condition that it be promptly removed at the end of the 12 month period?

Oxford Airport states that the mast as a temporary structure does not cause any problems to the airport currently. If longer term the mast becomes permanent, it must be noted that any future radar installation at the airport may be affected requiring an in depth safeguarding survey. This will be formally reassessed on receipt of a formal application.

The Defence Estates Safeguarding Team has written to request that the application is not taken forward until they have provided a full response to the proposal. It has been requested that this be submitted prior to committee.

4. Relevant Planning Policies

Oxfordshire Structure Plan 2016	- Saved Policies	EN1
Adopted Cherwell Local Plan 1996	- Saved Policies	C7
National Policy		PPS1, Delivering Sustainable Development PPS7, Sustainable Development in Rural Areas

5. Appraisal

The assessment of this application is based on the following criteria;

- The principle of the development and national policy
- Impact on residential properties
- Visual impact
- Highway safety

Principle and national policy

Government Planning Policy Statement 22 on renewable energy is supplemented by a companion guide, which provides detailed guidance on various renewable energy schemes. The issue of temporary monitoring masts is addressed in Technical Annex – Wind, Paragraph 32, which states:

“Assessing whether a particular site will harness wind power satisfactorily entails using historic meteorological data and information derived from anemometers placed on site. Anemometer masts are normally required for at least 12 months; the longer the measurements are taken the better the prediction will be. The measurements from anemometers help to determine whether or not a candidate site is suitable and, if it is, the measurements help to determine the best position for the wind turbines within the site’s boundary. The masts should be approximately as tall as the hub height of the planned turbine. However, often when the mast is erected it is not known either if the site is suitable for wind farming or which turbine type would be most suitable. Masts are usually 25-60 metres tall”.

This proposal is in accordance with this technical advice. Whilst it is acknowledged that the data from the monitoring equipment on the mast would inform the technical suitability of the site for the operation of wind turbines, any decision to grant temporary planning permission would not prejudice any decisions that the Council would subsequently make. Should an application be received for a wind farm on the site, this will need to be accompanied by an Environmental Impact Assessment and would be considered at that time on its individual merits, having regard to adopted policy and other material considerations.

The site falls within a safeguarded area where the Ministry of Defence should be consulted on proposals for tall structures. At the time of drafting the report no formal response had been received.

Residential Impact

There are no residential properties or other buildings in the immediate vicinity of the application site. The mast will be visible from residential properties but the structure itself will not cause any adverse impact on residential amenities as it is silent in nature.

Visual Impact

The main planning issue with the proposed wind monitoring mast is considered to be its visual impact on the rural landscape. The site is within an area of generally flat open countryside. Field boundaries are often marked with a variety of trees and hedging of

various heights. There are also existing manmade breaks in the skyline caused by two telephone masts, road bridges crossing the motorway and the motorway itself. The overall impression however is an expanse of countryside characterised by openness. It is accepted that the proposed mast will be clearly seen in the immediate vicinity of the site. However, it is the officers view that this proposal, due to the slimness of the pole and the wire rope guys, would not be unduly conspicuous in the rural landscape. There is a public footpath and bridleway which pass close to the proposed position of the mast, which would allow closer inspection, but the proposal would not obstruct the use of these routes. The mast is unlikely to be any more conspicuous than electricity pylons. It is considered therefore, that the impact of the proposal upon the wider rural landscape would not justify a refusal on visual amenity grounds. The proposal therefore complies with Policy EN1 of the Oxfordshire Structure Plan and Policy C7 of the adopted Cherwell Local Plan which seeks to restrict development that would cause demonstrable harm to the topography and character of the landscape.

Access

The Local Highway Authority raises no objections as the access to the site is considered to be appropriate and the structure itself will not cause harm to highway safety.

6. Recommendation

Approve, subject to the following conditions

1. SC 1.4A (RC2)
2. That the developer shall inform the Local Planning Authority, in writing, of the date of installation of the meteorological testing mast and that at the expiration of one year from the date of installation the mast shall be removed from the site and the land shall be restored to its former condition on or before that date. Reason To enable the Council to review the position at the expiration of the stated period, in order not to prejudice the consideration of future proposals for the land.

SUMMARY OF REASONS FOR THE GRANT OF PLANNING PERMISSION AND RELEVANT DEVELOPMENT PLAN POLICIES

The Council, as local planning authority, has determined this application in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicated otherwise. The development is considered to be acceptable on its planning merits as the proposal pays proper regard to the character and appearance of the site and surrounding area and has no undue adverse impact upon the residential amenities of neighbouring properties or highway safety. It also complies with the technical guidance set out in the Companion Guide to PPS22. As such the proposal is in accordance with National Policy Guidance, Policies EN1 and T8 of the Oxfordshire Structure Plan 2016 and Policy C7 of the adopted Cherwell Local Plan. For the reasons given above and having proper regard to all other matters raised the Council considered that the application should be approved and planning permission granted subject to appropriate conditions as set out above.