

MELTON BOROUGH COUNCIL

WIND POWER SUPPLEMENTARY PLANNING DOCUMENT

**BRIEFING NOTE TO PROVIDE ADDITIONAL INFORMATION ON
LANDSCAPE SENSITIVITY & CAPACITY STUDY FOR WIND ENERGY DEVELOPMENT**

The Committee will recall the recent presentation by Halcrow and landscape sub-consultant Bayou Bluenvironment on the 17th June 2013 on the progress of the wind power supplementary planning document (SPD). Three options for completing the SPD were discussed, with particular reference to landscape sensitivity & capacity and residential amenity issues. The three options were:

Option A – Completing the SPD in accordance with the commissioned brief;

Option B – Undertaking a wind energy landscape and visual sensitivity assessment to inform the SPD;

Option C – Undertaking a wind energy landscape and visual sensitivity and capacity assessment to inform the SPD.

The purpose of this briefing note is to provide additional information on the scope of the three Options, following recognised methodology. In particular it describes how the current Melton Landscape Character Assessment (Melton LCA) would be used as the basis for a detailed wind energy landscape and visual sensitivity and capacity assessment.

Option A

The Melton Landscape Character Assessment (Melton LCA) forms part A of the Melton Borough Landscape and Historic Urban Character Assessment Report, March 2006. The Melton LCA identifies 20 landscape character areas (LCAs) within Melton Borough and in doing so refines previous national and regional (County) scale LCAs. Some of the 20 areas identified within the Borough are relatively small. Some comprise several separate areas spread out across the Borough and which fall within different national/ regional LCAs.

The Melton Landscape Character Assessment is helpful in establishing areas of different character within Melton, but it does not provide the necessary description of landscape elements and features, landscape condition and value, or the visual and perceptual aspects of the landscape necessary to indicate potentially reduced or increased sensitivity to wind energy development, the Melton Landscape Character Assessment is open to interpretation and potentially a wide range of professional judgment in establishing the baseline landscape and potential effects of wind proposals.

The SPD following the Option A, methodology would provide generic guidelines for consideration of landscape and visual issues in the siting and design of wind energy

proposals, based on a limited range of criteria from the Melton Landscape Character Assessment. There is a risk that it would be too easy for developers to simply tick a box.

Option B

Option B will require further desktop study and fieldwork as necessary to assess visual sensitivity by considering views from important viewpoints and sensitive routes. The sensitivity assessments would be indicative, and would not be a substitute for detailed consideration of the effects of individual wind energy proposals on the landscapes of Melton.

The final report would identify areas of highest sensitivity and reflects those areas which ought not to be affected by wind energy development in ways that would detract from the unspoilt nature of the landscape or the view. However, identification of areas of high sensitivity should not be intended to establish 'no-go' areas in which wind energy development should be unacceptable. Rather, the high sensitivity landscapes will be those in which extra care must be taken in siting, designing and mitigating the impacts of wind energy development. Similarly, low sensitivity landscapes will not necessarily be able to accommodate any and all development. Consideration must still be given to location and site design, as well as mitigation and cumulative impact.

Option C

1. The Melton Borough Landscape & Historic Urban Character Assessment Report, March 2006.

The Melton Landscape Character Assessment (Melton LCA) forms Part A of the *Melton Borough Landscape & Historic Urban Character Assessment Report*, March 2006. The Melton LCA identifies 20 landscape character areas (LCAs) within Melton borough and in so doing refines previous national and regional (County) scale LCAs. Some of the 20 areas identified within the borough are relatively small. Some comprise several separate areas spread out across the borough and which fall within different national/regional LCAs. For example, some areas identified as *Village Pastures* within the Melton LCA lie within the *Vale of Belvoir* in the north of the borough; some lie within *The Wolds* LCA across the central part of the borough, whilst others lie within *High Leicestershire* in the south. As part of Option C the Melton LCA would be reviewed and refined where necessary by amalgamating some of the LCAs whilst still reflecting the national /regional boundaries, to provide a landscape sensitivity and capacity assessment at an appropriate scale for a strategic wind energy study.

Currently the Melton LCA describes each of the LCAs in terms of the following distinct landscape characteristics:

- Scale of the landscape;
- Land cover / land use;
- Landscape and field pattern;
- Settlement pattern and materials;

- Agricultural management;
- Historic landscape features; and
- General visibility.

However, to indicate potentially reduced or increased sensitivity to wind energy development with Option C a more detailed assessment is required. This would identify the following key characteristics of each of the refined LCAs:

- Landform (the nature of the underlying geography, whether simple and consistent or more complex);
- Enclosure (closely related to scale, but providing more detail on the way in which landforms and woodland enclose the landscape, or opens out into other landscapes);
- Landscape features and elements (natural features, and man-made features including industrial or commercial buildings and infrastructure, tall vertical features such as masts, and linear features such as railways);
- Landscape condition (the physical state of the landscape, and its visual and functional intactness);
- Landscape value (including landscape designations such as Areas of Particularly Attractive Countryside; Conservation Areas, listed buildings, historic gardens and battlefields; relative historic value using the Leicestershire, Leicester & Rutland *Historic Landscape Characterisation Project*, 2010; associations with artists and writers or events in history that contribute to perceptions of the natural beauty of an area);
- Landscape distinctiveness (the extent to which a landscape is representative of the Melton landscape, or contributes to a sense of place);
- Landscape rarity (the relative frequency of a landscape's general type within the borough, to establish landscapes with rare or unusual characteristics and which merit protection in the interests of sustaining good representative examples of the Melton landscape);
- Perceptual aspects of the landscape (including visible movement in the landscape, and consideration of remoteness or tranquillity i.e. an indication of the general level of human influence, depending on factors such as noise, and views to man-made features);
- Recreational use (evidence of regular recreational use of a landscape, such as long-distance footpaths, visitor facilities, parks and gardens and other landscape-based tourist attractions); and
- Visual aspects of the landscape (discussed in more detail in section 3 below).

Without providing the necessary level of description to guide development, the Melton LCA is open to interpretation and potentially a wide range of professional judgement in establishing the baseline landscape and potential effects of wind energy proposals, for example as part of landscape and visual impact assessment accompanying applications for wind energy development.

2. Visual Aspects of the Landscape

Wind turbines have the potential to create significant visual impact, even without effects on other key landscape characteristics. The Melton LCA only addresses the visibility of the LCAs

in general terms, but in order to assess visual sensitivity to development under Option C a more detailed assessment of visual amenity (which is the overall pleasantness of the views people enjoy of their surroundings) and sensitive views from visual receptors (that is views as experienced by people living, working, recreating, visiting or travelling through an area) is required. Together these are referred to as the 'visual resource'.

Although not a detailed landscape and visual impact assessment (which would still be required with any application for wind energy development), a strategic wind energy landscape and visual sensitivity and capacity assessment should consider (via a combination of desk study and field work) the following:

- Skylines (visual horizons can be very simple and predictable generally in areas of simple landform and land cover, or more complex where woodland and other features interrupt the view);
- Views and landmarks (including views from popular viewpoints, and views to and from landmark cultural and natural features); and
- Intervisibility (depending largely on enclosure, landscapes may be visible across a wide area, or may be secluded and difficult to see from the outside).

Clearly it is impractical to visit all potential visual receptors. Members and officers would be invited to identify locally important views and representative viewpoints for inclusion within the sensitivity and capacity study.

Careful consideration would be given to the appropriateness of defining any important landscape features and, where appropriate, the essential area needed to protect the integrity and / or context of the feature (i.e. its 'zone of visual sensitivity'), without imposing unreasonable constraints to development.

3. Study Outputs

Using the Melton LCA as a basis for the study, each landscape character area would be assessed against identified landscape and visual criteria based on current good practice guidance. Professional judgement is used to record and map separately the assessment of, firstly, landscape and visual sensitivity and secondly, landscape and visual capacity, as either *high*, *moderate* or *low*. The assessment would be made to a range of turbine scenarios (i.e. different heights and groups of turbines) which would be agreed at the start of the study as being most appropriate to the type of applications being submitted for wind energy development within the borough. Mapping would use a traffic-light approach to identify areas of *low* capacity (red), *moderate* capacity (amber) and *high* capacity (green).

Identification of areas of *low* capacity should not be intended to establish 'no-go' areas in which wind energy development would be unacceptable. Rather, the *low* capacity landscapes will be those in which extra care must be taken in siting, designing and mitigating the impacts of wind energy development to avoid harm to key landscape characteristics and sensitive views. Similarly, although wind turbine development should generally be favoured in *high* landscape capacity areas, they will not necessarily be able to

accommodate any and all development. Consideration must still be given to location and site design, as well as mitigation and cumulative impacts.

In identifying the visual sensitivity and capacity for the landscape to accommodate wind turbines of different heights and groupings, the study will feed into the wind power supplementary planning document. Option C would include recommendations on turbines likely to be unacceptable within various distances from residential dwellings in accordance with their potential visual impact. Such separation distances between turbines and dwellings would be established in order to preserve the residential amenity of the residents of the nearest properties and to minimise any impact from noise and shadow flicker.