

MELTON BOROUGH COUNCIL**POSITION STATEMENT ON THE LANDSCAPE CAPACITY AND SENSITIVITY STUDY: WIND ENERGY****INTRODUCTION**

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) places a presumption in favour of sustainable development in general and encourages local authorities to support the delivery of renewable and low carbon energy associated infrastructure. Reflecting this position and the need for action whilst the Local Plan is being prepared, Melton Borough Council has prepared a Landscape Capacity and Sensitivity Study (LCSS) for the Borough. For purposes of efficiency and cross boundary impacts and opportunities a joint LCSS has been prepared in partnership with Rushcliffe Borough Council.

BACKGROUND

The Landscape Capacity and Sensitivity Study is technical evidence that the Borough Council will use it to inform its assessment of wind energy proposals.

The LCSS assesses the potential impacts on any landmark landscape features. It also includes an assessment of visual sensitivity of the Borough considering views from important view points and sensitive routes. Maps are included which show the landscape and visual sensitivity and capacity of each of the Boroughs landscape character areas and the study looks at their ability to accommodate different scales of wind development.

Landscape capacity and sensitivity is perhaps the most high profile and challenging issue, but one of a number that feed into the assessment of wind energy developments. Other issues include, noise, electromagnetic interference, aviation implications and ecology impacts and several others which are not addressed by the study and will remain to be considered under the NPPF and other recognised guidance.

APPLICATION

At present, in the absence of an up to date Local Plan and following the content of the NPPF (para 215), the policy context for wind energy proposals is set principally by the NPPF and National Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG) which contains policies on accommodating low carbon energy, 'valued landscapes', etc. The saved policies of the Local Plan remain applicable and are also a material consideration.

The NPPF establishes a presumption in favour of sustainable development unless any adverse impacts would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits (NPPF, para. 14) and "a positive approach by identifying suitable areas for renewable energy generation and its supporting infrastructure."

This study will provide the evidence base upon which these decisions can more readily be made. The NPPF states that planning authorities should "take account of the different roles and character of different areas, promoting the vitality of our main urban areas, protecting the Green Belts around them, recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside and supporting thriving rural communities within it".

The NPPF also promotes good design and suggests that "Permission should be refused for development of poor design that fails to take the opportunities available for improving the character and quality of an area and the way it functions" (para. 64, NPPF). This study will provide guidance on design which will assist in clarifying what is considered by landscape professionals as good design in relation to the landscape.

The LCSS will be used as evidence to support decision making within the above context. The tool will be used in informing and justifying the Council's decisions on renewable wind energy proposals with regard to landscape impact, capacity and sensitivity.

The evidence will also be used to prepare renewable energy policies as part of the new Melton Local Plan. This study will assist the Borough in understanding the most appropriate locations for wind energy developments helping it make its contribution to mitigating climate change through this source of renewable energy where it is feasible.

The LCSS will provide evidence and will be a material consideration when determining planning applications for renewable wind energy.

The main aims of the study are to provide:

- an assessment of the landscape sensitivity of each landscape character area in Melton
- maps showing the landscape sensitivity of each landscape character area
- guidance for the siting and design of potential wind energy proposals in each landscape character area

The Study presents the characteristics of wind energy development, including the landscape character baseline and the method for assessing sensitivity to wind energy development; Chapter 7 presents landscape sensitivity matrices for each Landscape Character Area, and Chapter 8 summarises the results of the landscape sensitivity assessment. The Study provides a user guide to provide assistance designing and assessing proposals and provides generic guidelines for siting proposals.

The study concludes that within the same LCU wind energy developments should be of a similar scale and design (in terms of siting, layout, scale, form and relationship to key characteristics) to maintain a simple image and reinforce links between landscape characteristics. The overall aim should be to make sure that wind energy developments do not become a key characteristic of the landscape of the LCU or have a defining influence on the overall experience of the landscapes of the two Boroughs.

The Council, will expect proposals for wind energy development to demonstrate how they have taken into account the content of the study in the formulation of proposals and will use the study as part of the assessment of proposals.