

Mr A. Pegram
Planning Services
Isle of Wight Council
Council Offices
Seaclose
Fairlee Road
Newport
Isle of Wight
PO30 2QS

21st July 2006

Dear Mr Pegram,

**RE – Planning Application TCP/27774 – Wind Turbine Generating Station,
Broad Lane**

Thank you for the information on the above proposed development and invitation to receive my observations.

There has been no specific research undertaken on the island to determine the potential impact on tourism. Hence, the comments in this submission are merely observations based on research undertaken in other comparable destinations in terms of tourism assets and marketplace. In addition, it is worth considering the implications of the aspirations of the island for the future of tourism as set out in the Tourism Development Plan – Working Smarter for a Sustainable Future – that was approved in October 2005.

General

It is recognised that the issue of Wind Turbines is a highly emotive subject and generally research elsewhere has shown that amongst the resident population the views tend to be far more polarised than those of visitors to an area. Often, the latter are simply temporary ‘residents’ and turbines can often be a novelty so the views tend to be far more mixed. The recent VisitScotland Windfarm Report found that many visitors were ‘condi positive’ towards windfarm development – that is they recognised the importance of renewable energy and were positive about it’s development but they tended to qualify their statements using phrases such as ‘it depends’, ‘so long as’, ‘provided that’. The report concludes that :-

“ Most of these conditions related to the siting of the wind farms and a recognition that, for most people, they are seen as being visually intrusive. Consequently, a common theme amongst both the trade and consumers was that wind farms should not be sited in or near designated areas of outstanding scenery such as Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), National Parks, National Scenic Areas, Sites of Special Scientific Interest etc. In addition however, there was a general consensus amongst visitors that, wherever possible, wind turbines should not be located in or near popular ‘tourist areas’.

Their visual impact was generally felt to be sufficiently negative, that as far as possible wind farms should be sited in areas away from those popular with tourists – ideally there was a preference to avoid having to see them at all on their visit.”

Ref./www.scotexchange.net/research_and_statistics/scenarios/scenarioplanning_policies/windfarm_report_final/windfarm_report_conclusions.htm

The proximity of this particular development to the AONB and on an island that depends heavily on tourism leads simply to the conclusion that it runs the risk of alienating visitors.

In Chapter 9 of Terence O'Rourke's Environmental Statement it is asserted that :-

“tourists in the main tourist hotel accommodation towns along the southern coast (such as Ventnor, Shanklin, Sandown and Bembridge) will not see the windfarm.” (P.9.92)

This makes a rather unfounded assumption that once in their accommodation, visitors don't leave it or the resort. It also fails to take into account that the proposed development sits squarely between the large accommodation centres on one side of the island and the island's most iconic tourist attraction on the other - the Needles and the Needles Park. It will also be clearly visible from Tennyson Down and the Tennyson Trail one of the island's most popular walking routes. Hence, it is difficult to argue that the development will **not** be seen by significant numbers of visitors to the island.

However, it is acknowledged that there is no real evidence of a significant down turn in visitors occurring in other tourist areas where windfarms have been sited. The VisitScotland Report reviewed Cornwall, Wales and Cumbria in the UK and some overseas destinations and found no evidence of a negative impact. But it should be noted that the UK locations in particular have a topography that present a much larger opportunity to 'hide' the turbines in their respective landscapes.

Potential Local Impacts

On it's Destination Management System the Tourism Service identifies 90 accommodation establishments in what is known as West Wight. This is the geographical area that encompasses – Yarmouth, Colwell Bay, Totland, Freshwater, Brook, Calbourne and Cranmore. Of this, at least 7 accommodation operators are located in the immediate vicinity including The Orchards Holiday Park – one of the island's best Parks – and a number of high quality self catering developments. These establishments particularly trade on the beauty and tranquillity of the surrounding environment. The Orchards recently received a special award personally from David Bellamy to acknowledge the work the owners have done to improve the environment within the site itself. Chessell Pottery recently received the Business of the Year title from the Green Island Awards and have just opened a number of self catering units.

Tourism Development Plan

In October 2005 Isle of Wight Council adopted a new Tourism Development Plan that set out the key requirements for a prosperous future for tourism to the year 2020 and beyond.

It clearly establishes five Key Customer Groups that the island should seek to attract to bring the maximum economic, social and environmental benefits. These are described in terms of their particular needs and demands from which the island can then determine what products and experiences should be developed and how the destination should be marketed. The Groups are :-

- Family Fun
- Chill Out
- Close to Nature
- It's Adventure
- Sheer Indulgence

The environmental assets of the island are key to all these groups and are described in the Plan as the 'bedrock' of tourism development. The presence of large scale turbines, certainly in any significant number, may put the growth of some of these groups at risk, particularly if the conclusions of the VisitScotland study are considered relevant.

What is 'significant' ?

The Environmental Statement ascertains that :-

".....it is considered extremely unlikely that a significant decline in visitor numbers will be experienced " (P 9.92)

The Tourism Plan estimates that tourism to the island should grow, providing the recommendations of the Plan are implemented, at a rate of 2.6% net pa – this currently equates to about £9 million per year extra into the economy. Even what may be considered as a negligible downturn, say, 1% is still significant when set against the projected growth and because of the large value of tourism (£360m in 2005) still equates to a substantial amount - £3.6 million.

Summary

In the absence of specific research on the island, definitive conclusions about the impact of this proposal on the tourism economy are difficult to determine.

But it is worth noting one of the key conclusions of the VisitScotland Study :-

" Based on the results of the consumer Hall Tests, the longer term impacts of wind farm development needs to be recognised. As many as 26% of visitors claimed that they would be less likely to visit an area if a wind farm was developed there in future – 1% would be more likely to return, and 70% claimed that it would make no difference. Although it is difficult to determine the extent to which this would actually

be the outcome of a wind farm development, it does appear to offer some clear evidence that such a development would be likely to result in a reduction in the number of visits made by the existing visitor markets. This again illustrates that from a tourism perspective, the siting of wind farms is particularly crucial."

Set against the issues covered in this response with regard to the potential for visitors to see the development, the type of customer the island is aspiring to get more of and the potential value of even a small downturn in the tourism economy, it is reasonable to conclude that the development may pose a risk to the future viability of the tourism economy on the Isle of Wight.

Furthermore, it would, given the intimate nature of the island's landscape, be difficult to suggest anywhere on the island where all these issues would not be relevant.

I hope this adds to the debate in a constructive way.

Yours faithfully,

A large black rectangular redaction box covering the signature area.

NIGEL SMITH
HEAD OF TOURISM SERVICES