

SUMMARY

- 1.1. I am Jeffrey Stevenson. My qualifications and experience are set out in my main proof.
- 1.2. I rely on the ES, my main proof, the appendices to my main proof and a number of core documents in presenting my evidence to this Inquiry. The purpose of the visual and landscape section of the ES is, principally, to confirm whether significant visual and landscape effects would arise and, if so, to describe their occurrence. I have read the Alnwick Planning Officer's Report to Committee along with the various Statements of Case and letters of objection. Nothing has emerged which would cause me to reject the conclusions set out in the ES.
- 1.3. The link between climate change and landscape is particularly important and I address this subject within my main proof.
- 1.4. The most sensitive visual receptors (viewers) would be residents and those enjoying the countryside for various recreational pursuits. Residential and recreational locations are indicated in the ES and referred to in my proof of evidence.
- 1.5. The site is located within Regional Landscape Character Area 2 - the Northumberland Sandstone Hills and within the Foothill Farming and Estates landscape identified in the landscape capacity study which underpins the North East's Renewable Energy Reports and the emerging RSS. It is located on the North Charlton Ridge (Unit 11 in the AXIS Study). Landscape capacity and wind energy development is considered in the AXIS LCA (final draft) and the Arup Study for the NE Assembly. There is a very large degree of independent concordance that the North/South Charlton area is, in landscape terms, an area 'of least constraint' and capable of accommodating medium scale wind turbine development (i.e. up to 20-25 turbines).
- 1.6. The site is located within an Area of High Landscape Value. The nearest boundaries of the National Park and the AONB are some 13 km and 7 km respectively from the nearest turbine.
- 1.7. The principal elements of the wind farm would be 18 turbines assessed at 80m to hub and 125m to blade tip. Wind farm development is one of the more unusual forms of land use in that its anticipated effects prompt a broad spectrum of response from the strongly positive to the strongly negative. This is encountered across the UK as a whole.
- 1.8. The proposed wind farm would exert a characterising influence to the effect that a wind farm landscape would be established within and perhaps up to c800m from the turbines. Beyond this range, the landscape would be read as one which accommodates the wind farm with local landscape sub-types established. Locally significant effects (defined as the limit where the wind farm would give rise to a localised landscape sub-type) would occur within the range of up to c3-4 km of the turbines.
- 1.9. Although strongly influenced by it, the wider local landscape would not be transformed by the wind farm. Its broader underlying character whether in terms of its role within the RLCA's or the more sub-regional/local landscape types would not be compromised. As such, it is considered that the landscape at the broader scale is sufficiently robust to be able to accommodate the proposed wind

farm without significant adverse effect arising. At the scale of the Local Landscape Character Areas the landscape would be judged reasonably sensitive within the Charlton Ridge area but 'sensitive' does not equate to 'unacceptable'. Acceptability depends upon other criteria, and conclusions in that regard were set out in the ES and referred to in my proof of evidence based on the extent to which a range of basic criteria would be met. I consider that the Middlemoor proposal substantially meets them.

- 1.10. When and where seen, that the proposed turbines would be read as consistent with the spirit of an exposed and windswept location where signs of human intervention are clear and obvious. The wind farm would be consistent with the scale of the host landscape and would not have a significant effect upon its openness. In unconstrained views, the turbines would appear as a controlled, reasonably balanced and coherent grouping which would be responsive to the landscape rather than being read as an imposition upon it. For the reasons given in the ES, although prominent and dominant when close by, the turbines would not look out of place nor would they overwhelm perceptions and the wind farm would be capable of engendering a positive response from observers or at least a proportion of them.
- 1.11. In visual terms, assuming open viewing positions with unobstructed views to a reasonable proportion of the wind farm and assuming High sensitivity viewers: the magnitude of effects is likely to be High locally dropping to Medium at or around a distance of c5-7 km of the turbines. This would give rise to potentially significant visual effects within this range and would be relevant to an unspecified number of residents (nevertheless greater than low) and those enjoying informal recreational activities for whom the visual enjoyment of the landscape within the outdoors environment is a primary focus. It should be noted however that not all residents and/or recreational participants would be significantly affected since there are many locations within the range up to c5-7 km of the turbines that would not offer open views to a high proportion of the proposed wind farm. In other words, if significant effects are to be found, they would be located within that range but not all effects within that range would be significant. Further, it is important to note that those subject to a significant visual effect cannot be assumed to be wholly adversely or positively disposed. It is reasonable to conclude that a proportion would be adverse, a proportion indifferent and a proportion positively disposed towards the wind farm.
- 1.12. In the immediate context, this is particularly relevant to a number of local residents, users of the minor roads in the area, walkers on local footpaths and bridleways and open access land passing through and in the vicinity of the site.
- 1.13. Whether judged positively or negatively, the proposal would give rise to significant effects in a *part* of a landscape valued highly at the District level but not so at the County/Regional/National level. No significant landscape effects would arise with respect to either the National Park or the AONB. The proposed wind farm would be discernible from parts of both the Park and the AONB. Significant visual effects would not arise. Their special qualities would not be harmed. The Natural Beauty of the AONB and the Park would be conserved.
- 1.14. The development of the wind farm would introduce strong impressions and give rise to significant visual and landscape effects in the local context. For those adversely disposed to the wind farm, the proposal would be felt to alter the attributes of this part of the wider landscape through the addition

of elements which they may regard as being uncharacteristic with the genius loci. As such, they would consider there to be a significant adverse effect upon landscape character and local amenity with landscape value and quality being compromised.

- 1.15. Those viewing the wind farm positively would consider that that which is valued in the local and wider landscape would not be materially harmed - rather the converse would occur and this is my opinion albeit based on professionally informed subjectivity. The wind farm would appear reasonably balanced, controlled, visually permeable, well-related to the broad scale and grain of the landscape and, as such, would introduce a positive image which would add to the landscape experience. When sufficiently distant so as to be capable of being read as a single feature, the wind farm would demonstrate an horizontal emphasis. Such effects would be of long-term duration given their substantial reversibility at the end of the wind farm's working life.
- 1.16. The wind farm would, in my professional opinion, introduce a strong, sculptural quality to the landscape. As such, it would add to the atmosphere, add to the sense of place and add to landscape identity and distinctiveness. The scheme would achieve a high degree of openness, would substantially avoid perceptions of densely massed turbines, would maintain suitable distances between turbines and dwellings so as to preclude overwhelming effects, and would do so within a landscape that is typical of the wider area.
- 1.17. The proposal would result in an alteration to the environment whose attributes could quickly be substantially recovered through rapid decommissioning and site restoration. Judgements concerning significant effects must be tempered in that light. Whilst influential for their lifetime or for any period that they may be in operation, visual and landscape effects arising from the proposed wind farm, whether regarded as adverse or positive, can be substantially reversed.
- 1.18. If considered to give rise to harm, I do not believe that it would be serious, i.e. unacceptable harm.
- 1.19. As such, I consider the proposed wind farm development to be acceptable and sustainable from a landscape resource and long-term visual amenity perspective and that planning permission may be safely granted.