

Planning Committee
29 March 2021

At a Special Meeting of the Planning Committee of North Ayrshire Council at 2.00 p.m. involving participation by remote electronic means.

Present

Tom Marshall, Timothy Billings, Robert Barr, Ian Clarkson, Robert Foster, Christina Larsen, Shaun Macaulay, Ellen McMaster, Ronnie McNicol and Donald Reid.

Also Present

Ian Murdoch

In Attendance

J. Miller, Chief Planning Officer, K. Gee, Technician (Planning); A. Craig, Senior Manager (Legal Services); and A. Little and H. Clancy, Committee Services Officers (Chief Executive's Service).

Also in Attendance

H. Boyle, M. Grosvenor (Skelmorlie Community Council); F. Campbell (Burcote Wind); C. Wicks (ERG); and S. Winter (Hirst Planning).

Chair

Councillor Marshall in the Chair.

1. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest by Members in terms of Standing Order 10 and Section 5 of the Code of Conduct for Councillors.

2. 20/00248/PPM: Site To East Of Fardens Skelmorlie Ayrshire

Righill Wind Farm Ltd have applied for planning permission for the erection of 10 wind turbines with a maximum blade tip height of 149.9m with associated access and infrastructure at the site to East of Fardens, Skelmorlie. 186 objections and 39 comments of support were received and summarised in the report.

Ms Boyle and Mr Grovesnor representing Skelmorlie Community Council and Councillor Murdoch addressed the Committee in support of the objections.

Ms Boyle provided background information on the proposed site and the surrounding area highlighting nearby caravan park, the nursing homes within Skelmorlie, SSSI Site, Wild Land on the moors and the Roma fortlet. She asserted that the ultrasound low frequency noise would be unbearable and a health hazard to the Village and surrounding areas, standing in Muirshiel Regional Park, which was the only untouched land in North Ayrshire.

Mr Grovesnor advised he worked closely with Dr Yeland and Professor Alves-Pereira, experts in wind farm noise and infrasound and read out a statement they provided. The applicant's position statement advised that low frequency noise and

infrasound associated with wind turbines were below the level at which adverse health impacts occurred but, he advised, this ignored an abundance of evidence to show otherwise. Infrasound and low frequency noise had been an issue of public health for several decades and the infrasound emitted by wind turbines was in no way comparable to that which existed in the natural environment. Health Protection Scotland claimed there was no evidence of harm but this was contradicted by the WHO 2018 report. Mr Grovesnor also referred to Environmental Health officer comments and Skelmorlie Community Council objections in respect of the application.

Councillor Murdoch advised his main concern was for his constituents and the local environment and asserted that an alarming amount of concern around the proposed development had not been alleviated by the offer of community benefits. North Ayrshire Council had declared a climate emergency which would support clean energy generation however there were no operational turbines of this size in the UK. Councillor Murdoch advised that there were no operational turbines higher than 125m to blade tip or 2.5 to 3MW maximum and 4.2MW turbines would be the largest onshore turbines ever installed. He suggested that turbines of this size and output should be placed far away from populated areas and should be considered for offshore installation. The proposed development was around 1km from Skelmorlie, but the setback distance should be much greater than the proposed distance for turbines of this size. There was concern about the health effects of audible and inaudible noise, particularly from infrasound and traffic safety concerns. He advised the proposed development did not comply with the Local Development Plan and was within the Muirshiel Regional Park.

Mr Campbell of Burcote Wind then addressed the Committee on behalf of the applicant, in response to the objectors.

Mr Campbell gave some background information on ERG Ltd who have been operating in the energy sector for almost 80 years, actively contributing to the fight against climate change by investing in green energy, with over 250MW under construction in the UK. He advised that Righill Wind farm was the right development in the right place and would generate the equivalent to power almost 35,000 average households each year, roughly half of the households in North Ayrshire. The carbon payback period was estimated to be 1.4 years when compared to traditional carbon-based generation. Mr Campbell advised that nationally and locally we were transitioning to net zero emissions to benefit the environment, with North Ayrshire Council's target of achieving net zero carbon emissions by 2030. Renewable energy development would have a significant role to play in meeting climate change objectives, with wind energy development being the most cost-effective renewable energy technology. He advised there had been extensive engagement with the local community and there was strong evidence of support. A local procurement policy would be created to offer local contractors a 5% price advantage when tendering for contracts related to the wind farm and community ownership programmes also being explored to invest in the wind farm and share in the profits and returns. He also highlighted that the National Planning Framework and Local Development Plan both predated the climate change emergency declared by North Ayrshire Council.

He contended that in terms of the Reasons for Refusal, SP2 was not relevant, the proposal accords with Policy 29 and that the Landscape Capacity Study was too strategic to support the reasons for refusal.

The objectors then had an opportunity to make brief final comments. Mr Grovesnor advised that the research undertaken for the applicant was not suitable or supported by facts. Councillor Murdoch also highlighted that there were no operational turbines of 4.2MW or above in the United Kingdom.

Members then asked questions of the objectors and applicants' representatives in respect of public support, nearest residential properties to the proposed site, community benefits, transport management plan, impact of noise and infrasound.

The Chair agreed that the meeting be adjourned at 3.15 p.m. for a comfort break. The meeting reconvened at 3.30 p.m. with the same Members and officers present and in attendance.

The Chief Planning Officer then outlined the terms of the planning report and planning officer's recommendation.

Members asked questions and were provided further information in relation to Environmental Health comments on noise, landscape impact, shadow flicker and the Scottish Government Planning Policy on wind farms. Members were also advised that community benefit is not a material consideration for the planning determination process.

Councillor Foster, seconded by Councillor Barr, moved to refuse the planning application for the reasons set out in the officer's report.

There being no amendment the motion was declared carried.

The meeting ended at 4.25 p.m.