
APPLICATION NO.	P08/E1240
APPLICATION TYPE	FULL
REGISTERED	13 November 2008
PARISH	HENLEY-ON-THAMES
WARD MEMBERS	Ms Roswitha Myer Mr Terry Buckett MBE
APPLICANT	Tesco PLC
SITE	Tesco Stores Ltd, 359 Reading Road, Henley-on-Thames, RG9 4HA
PROPOSAL	Erection of 1 no. 10.6m high micro-wind turbine and associated works for a period of 15 years
AMENDMENTS	None
GRID REFERENCE	476944/181522
OFFICER	Mr P Brampton

1.0 **INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1 This application is referred to Planning Committee because the Officer's recommendation conflicts with the views of Henley Town Council.
- 1.2 The Henley Tesco store is located on a spacious site of over 2 hectares on the southeastern outskirts of the town. The store itself occupies a large portion of the site, being a predominantly single storey building of around 8 metres in height, with a gable feature at the entrance to the store measuring around 10 metres high. The car park is located to the front and side of the store, with service areas to the rear. The site is accessed from the south-west from Reading Road.
- 1.3 The site is located within a valley with the land rising noticeably to the east beyond the River Thames, which is around 365 metres away, and to the west towards Harpsden.
- 1.4 The site of the application and the boundaries of the Tesco site are identified on the Ordnance Survey extracts **attached** at Appendix 1.

2.0 **PROPOSAL**

- 2.1 The applicants propose the erection of a 10.6-metre high micro wind turbine within the car park, located around 14 metres from the western boundary and 35 metres from the northern boundary. Positioned level with the front of the store, but around 55 metres from the building itself, this is a vertical axis turbine consisting of two rotors, one above the other, mounted on a steel column supported by a concrete pad. The rotors measure 4.4 metres high and 3.3 metres wide. The structure will be coated white in colour. The applicant estimates that the turbine has a maximum capacity of 6 kW, but will ordinarily operate at 30% capacity.
- 2.2 A copy of the submitted plans, a photograph showing a turbine already in position at a sister Tesco store and the supporting statement from the applicant is **attached** at Appendix 2.

3.0 CONSULTATIONS & REPRESENTATIONS

- 3.1 **Henley-on-Thames Town Council** – Recommends refusal, Turbine is ugly, objections from local residents, long payback period and does not produce a significant amount of power.
- 3.2 **Henley-on-Thames Society** – Objection received, turbine is a token gesture and the net benefit does not warrant the imposition of a visually obtrusive structure and its potential for noise.
- 3.3 **Environmental Health** – No objections subject to conditions regarding monitoring of noise levels and requiring that remediation measures be taken if noise levels are found to be unacceptable
- 3.4 **Highways** – No comments received
- 3.5 **Sustainability Officer** – The turbine would offer a power output similar to that of other turbines within the district
- 3.6 **Neighbour Representations** – Three letters of objection received. Concerns include the harm to the visual amenity of the area, harm to neighbours outlook, noise disturbance, reduction in property values, the low levels of renewable power produced and the disturbance to local wildlife

4.0 RELEVANT PLANNING HISTORY

- 4.1 None

5.0 POLICY & GUIDANCE

- 5.1 Adopted South Oxfordshire Local Plan 2011 – Policies G2, G6, EP2, D1 and D9
- 5.2 Planning Policy Statement 1 – Delivering Sustainable Development (PPS)
Planning Policy Statement 22 and companion guide – Renewable Energy
Planning Policy Guidance Note 24 – Planning and Noise

The assessment and rating of noise from Windfarms - ETSU for the DTI (1996)

6.0 PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS

- 6.1 The main issues in this application are:
1. Whether the need for the proposal can be justified
 2. Whether the proposal respects the character of the development, the site and the surrounding area.
 3. Whether there are any issues regarding the impact on neighbouring properties, including issues over noise.
 4. Whether there are any issues regarding the impact on highway safety
 5. Whether there are any issues regarding the impact on the health of wildlife.
 6. Whether there are any issues regarding the impact on flood risk.

6.2 The need for the development

PPS 22 offers advice to Local Planning Authorities considering applications for renewable development stating that *“The wider environmental and economic benefits of all proposals for renewable energy projects, whatever their scale, are material considerations that should be given significant weight in determining whether proposals should be granted planning permission”*

6.3 It also offers guidance as to whether the amount of power produced by a renewable source is a material planning consideration, stating, *“Small-scale projects can provide a limited but valuable contribution to overall outputs of renewable energy and to meeting energy needs both locally and nationally. Planning authorities should not therefore reject planning applications simply because the level of output is small.”*

6.4 Several objections have been received, including from the Town Council and neighbours, that the wind turbine is merely a token gesture and will not generate sufficient power to make a worthwhile contribution to renewable energy. Whilst Officers do not dispute that in this location it is highly unlikely the turbine will operate regularly at or close to its 6kw capacity, it will consistently produce a small amount of power that will be fed directly into the adjacent store, with a corresponding reduction in carbon emissions. Thus, given that the Government guidance is clear that a refusal of planning permission cannot be justified purely on the level of power the turbine will produce, Officers are satisfied the need for the development is justifiable and in accordance with national planning guidance.

Design Issues

6.5 PPS22 also states, *“Development proposals should demonstrate any environmental, economic and social benefits as well as how any environmental and social impacts have been minimised through careful consideration of location, scale, design and other measures.”* This advice feeds into Policy D9 of the Local Plan, which states that proposals for renewable energy development will be permitted if they do not have a significant adverse effect on the landscape, heritage and biodiversity of an area, traffic generation or the amenities of local communities.

6.6 Given its location on the southeastern edge of Henley, the Tesco’s site is quite prominent in the area, particularly given this is a busy site visited by a large number of people on a daily basis. However, the store is well set back from Reading Road and well screened by existing development and vegetation on its boundaries, greatly reducing the visual impact of the site on the character and appearance of the wider area.

6.7 The turbine will be positioned beyond the store itself, located a reasonable distance from site boundaries within an area solely allocated for car parking. Consequently, the turbine, which is undeniably functional in appearance, will be set within part of the site that is already characterised by street furniture such as lampposts and trolley parks. As such, given its surroundings, Officers do not feel that the turbine would appear unacceptably out of place, due to its limited impact on the character of the building and the site.

6.8 One of the main objections to the application from the Town Council and neighbours is the visual harm the turbine will cause to the character of what is a sensitive edge of town location. However, Officers do not consider that the turbine would be unacceptably intrusive into the landscape for a number of reasons.

6.9 Firstly, the turbine would be positioned nearly 200 metres from the entrance of the site, which will offer one of the clearest public vantage points of the turbine. As discussed, looking across the site the turbine will appear as one of a number of

functional features serving the car park, at a comparable height to the existing lampposts, albeit a more top heavy structure.

- 6.10 The second area that will have clear vantage points of the turbine is the sports ground to the immediate south of the site. However, mature planting offers reasonable screening of the car park from this area, which is not widely open to the public, and the use of the sports facility will not be compromised by development within the Tesco site. Views across the sports ground to the car park beyond from Reading Road are limited by mature hedging fronting the road itself.
- 6.11 In the wider area, Officers are satisfied that the turbine is well screened from most public vantage points. The Tesco store is shielded from Mill Lane, which runs along the northern boundary by dense planting. Crucially, there will be no views of the turbine from the railway bridge, which is the highest point of Mill Lane. Similarly, existing buildings offer significant screening of the Tesco site from Reading Road to the west, whilst the change in land levels means that there will be no views of the turbine from the River Thames itself to the east.
- 6.12 Therefore, Officers consider the only vantage points where the turbine will be seen from beyond the immediate area surrounding the site are where the land slopes upwards from the river, namely Remenham Hill to the east beyond the Thames and the area around Harpsden Court to the west. However, from these vantage points, any views would be distant and looking down on the site ensuring the turbine would be set against the existing Tesco complex, greatly reducing its visual impact and so Officers are satisfied that the turbine will not materially harm the character of the landscape in accordance with the requirements of Policy D9.

Neighbouring Amenity

- 6.13 Policy EP2 states that proposals, which would due to noise, have an adverse effect on existing residents will not be permitted, unless effective mitigation measures are implemented. There is a group of four properties, Nos. 1 – 4 Mill Lane, positioned immediately to the northern boundary of the Tesco's site, and objections have been received from three of these neighbours.
- 6.14 PPS 22 recommends the use of "*The assessment and rating of noise from Windfarms*", to guide Local Planning Authorities in assessing the noise levels produced from wind turbines. This recommends that noise levels produced from a turbine, when measured at the nearest residential property, should not exceed 35 decibels. The nearest neighbour is No.4, around 45-50 metres from the site of the turbine, and the applicants have provided evidence to suggest that the likely noise level at the boundary of this property would be 33.4 decibels, in accordance with Government Guidance.
- 6.15 Consequently, the Council's Environmental Health team have raised no objection to the scheme, subject to conditions requiring that the noise produced by the turbine is monitored and that appropriate remediation measures are taken if the noise level exceeds the stated 35 decibels.
- 6.16 Neighbours along Mill Lane have also raised objections that the turbine would harm the outlook from their properties, particularly to the rural landscape beyond. Whilst Officers recognise that the wind turbine will clearly be seen from these properties, it is felt this outlook has already been compromised by the Tesco development and it would not be possible to single out the turbine as causing significant harm in comparison to the other features of the site such as lampposts. Finally, the impact on property values is not a planning consideration and so Officers are satisfied that,

subject to the discussed conditions, the amenity of neighbouring occupants would not be so materially harmed by this proposal that a refusal of planning permission is warranted.

Highway Safety

- 6.17 The plans submitted in support of the application indicate that the proposed turbine would necessitate the loss of four car parking spaces. Given the size of the site and the level of parking provision that would remain, this is not considered significant. The turbine is also a reasonable distance from the access road, ensuring that there will be no significant highway safety impacts from this proposal.

Wildlife Issues

- 6.18 Two neighbours have raised concerns that the turbine will disturb local birdlife. However, discussions with the Councils Countryside Officer have confirmed that the height of the turbine is not so significant that birds would be likely to collide with it, whilst larger groups of migrating birds would be more likely to follow the course of the river to the east. Therefore, Officers do not consider there is a significant risk to the local bird populations from this development.

Flood Risk Issues

- 6.19 Given the proximity to the River Thames, the application site lies within a Flood Zone 2, and adjacent to a Flood Zone 3. However, discussions with the Environment Agency have revealed that the development is of such a small scale that the flood risks are minimal. This is in line with advice submitted in support of the scheme by the applicants' agent and so Officers are satisfied there is no significant flood risk with this proposal.

7.0 CONCLUSION

- 7.1 Overall Central Government has adopted a permissive stance towards renewable development provided it does not harm the character of the surrounding area or the amenity of nearby residents. This stance is reflected in Development Plan Policies and Officers consider that, given the limited opportunity to view the turbine in the wider area and subject to the attached conditions, the proposed development would be acceptable in terms of its relationship to the character of the site, in terms of its impact on neighbouring properties and in terms of its impact on the surrounding area. It is also acceptable in terms of its impact on highway safety, local wildlife and on the risk of flooding.

8.0 RECOMMENDATION

- 8.1 **That planning permission be granted subject to:**

1. **Commencement three years.**
2. a) **Noise levels at the boundary of any residential accommodation shall not exceed 35 decibels, at wind speeds up to 10 m/s measured at a height of 10 metres. Measurements shall be in accordance with the guidance provided in "The Assessment and Rating of Noise from Wind Farms"**
 - b) **Notwithstanding a) above, noise arising from the proposed wind turbine shall not be clearly audible at the boundary of any residential accommodation**

- c) **In the event of unacceptable noise or vibration being caused by the installed wind turbine, the persons responsible shall investigate and undertake works to resolve the problem to the satisfaction of the local planning authority.**

**Author: Peter Brampton
Contact Tel: 01491 823751
Contact e-mail: planning.east@southoxon.gov.uk**