

Air Field Farm Podington Appeal Statement
Public Inquiry Bedford 15 January 2010
Application No 08/2692/MAF

My name is Peter Scott and I am a volunteer for the Bedfordshire Branch of CPRE (Campaign to Protect Rural England). CPRE was established in 1926, has a national office in London and a branch in every county of England staffed almost exclusively by volunteers.

CPRE responded to both applications made by Nuon for this site.

Today I would like to offer a very brief, non-technical statement of the CPRE position regarding the current application.

CPRE is fully aware of the need to conserve energy, reduce carbon emissions and to develop renewable sources of energy generation. It supports a policy that aims to bring about an increase in renewable energy production which is efficient in terms of carbon saving and investment cost.

CPRE also has a duty on behalf of the whole nation to ensure that any loss of amenity due to adverse environmental impact on the countryside is proportionate to the level of benefit.

I will begin by paraphrasing the opening paragraph of a book on Bedfordshire, written by a prominent historian (1) of the county and published as recently as 1995, describing the area which would be affected by the windfarm proposals:

Standing on the road between the villages of Carlton and Chellington you see a great stretch of countryside spreading away to the north. Folds and undulations lead down to the river Great Ouse flowing gently through this landscape, giving life and history to the villages it passes through, with rush beds, watermills and ancient bridges. One sees the stumpy tower of Carlton church set apart from its village, the crenellations of Odell church in its knoll of trees, the graceful spire of Chellington abandoned by its village and standing in the middle of good farmland and in the middle distance the noble spire of Harrold. On the further side of the Ouse, rising up from the river valley Odell Great Wood, a tangle of trees presents a phalanx on these northern borders of Bedfordshire.

CPRE objects to these proposals on the grounds that they will devalue this landscape lying adjacent to the application site – landscape of considerable quality and one judged to be of **high sensitivity to change** in the Bedford Borough Landscape Character Assessment of the area. By the same judgment, therefore, it is a landscape deserving a high level of protection for the benefit of the local and wider community. It provides a rewarding recreational amenity for a large catchment area and the visual impact of the proposals would serve to depreciate the level of community and visitor enjoyment.

Odell Great Wood - mentioned in the earlier description - is an ancient woodland and a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) forming an attractive feature on the skyline when viewed from lower ground, – particularly from the popular Odell and Harrold wildlife park adjacent to the Ouse. The view would be dominated by the proposed turbines – a man-made intrusion disproportionate to an otherwise natural environment.

The rising land above the river now provides a habitat for the red kite, a once rare raptor, which has been re-established in the area. Reference to the RSPB has revealed that there is evidence of adult Red Kite collisions with turbine blades in Scotland and in mainland Europe.

A network of footpaths and bridleways crosses the area with 'The Three Shires Way' forming a major recreational route across the landscape. The 'Way' is an ancient and historic ridgeway dating from late Iron Age and Roman times which today provides a highly valued amenity for walking, horse riding and wildlife study for both the local population and those living in nearby large conurbations.

The area surrounding the application site contains several historic rural settlements with notable churches, and CPRE believes a degree of adverse visual impact would be sustained by some of these. In addition, although the current scheme of fewer turbines, three, would reduce the visual impact (as reported by English Heritage) on the listed buildings at Hinwick, particularly the Grade 1 Hinwick House and the designated park and gardens, CPRE maintains that some degree of impact would still remain since the

separation distance would be increased only from the former 900 to the proposed 2000 metres. The close proximity of one of the turbines to the Wold Moat enclosure also raises cause for concern.

CPRE identifies the pertinent issue in this application as:

Is the contribution to renewable energy supply and to the reduction of global warming sufficient to sacrifice the landscape amenity in this area?

CPRE strongly believes it is not. Much better returns on resource investment can be achieved elsewhere. If government targets for carbon emission reduction are to be reached, it is vital that all efforts, locally, nationally and internationally, are concentrated on achieving high levels of renewable energy output in areas where this is attainable, and avoiding inefficient developments which provide meagre results, waste public money and damage public amenity.

As the former Chairman of Nuon put it in 2008:

“Europe is still dragging its feet on adopting a single energy market for renewables in which wind energy would be developed where it makes sense instead of seeing windfarms receiving substantial national subsidies in countries where they run for barely a fifth of the year.”

Thank you

(1) *Bedfordshire* by Simon Houfe, Pimlico County History Guides 1995