

Planning Committee Report Item H	25th May 2016
PLANNING COMMITTEE	

Linkage to Council Strategy (2015-19)	
Strategic Theme	Protecting and Enhancing our Environment and Assets
Outcome	Pro-active decision making which protects the natural features, characteristics and integrity of the Borough
Lead Officer	Shane Mathers
Cost: (If applicable)	N/a

ITEM H

**291m South East of
Loughnanskan,
Rathlin Island
Full Planning
E/2014/0234/F**

25 May 2016

<u>No:</u>	E/2014/0234/F	<u>Ward:</u>	Bonamargy And Rathlin
<u>App Type:</u>	Full Planning		
<u>Address:</u>	291m South East of Loughnanskan, Rathlin Island		
<u>Proposal:</u>	Erection of a Wind Turbine with a 30m hub height and a 30m rotor diameter with a maximum output not exceeding 250kw		
<u>Con Area:</u>	N/A	<u>Valid Date:</u>	26 Nov 2014
<u>Listed Building Grade:</u>	N/A		
Agent:	G M Design Associates, 22 Lodge Road, Coleraine, BT52 1NB		
Applicant:	Rathlin Development & Community Ass c/o Agent		
Objections:	0	Petitions of Objection:	0
Support:	0	Petitions of Support:	0

Drawings and additional information are available to view on the Planning Portal- www.planningni.gov.uk

1 RECOMMENDATION

- 1.1 That the Committee has taken into consideration and agrees with the reasons for the recommendation set out in section 9 and the policies and guidance in section 7 and resolves to **REFUSE** planning permission subject to the reasons set out in section 10.

2 SITE LOCATION & DESCRIPTION

- 2.1 The application site is located on the west of the Island between Church Bay and the West Lighthouse and approx. 1 kilometre west of the Kebble Nature Reserve. It is in the townland of Cleggan 250 metres north of the road and is accessed via an existing lane which serves the adjacent agricultural shed 100 metres to the west.

- 2.2 The site sits at around 100 metres above sea level. The land to the north rises to around 110 metres above sea level between the site and the northern headland and the land to the west rises to around 120 metres between the site and the nature reserve. The application site is located on a crest of land at the northern end of a rough grazing field
- 2.3 The site is located on Rathlin Island within the Antrim Coast and Glens Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).

3 RELEVANT HISTORY

E/2013/0212/F291m - SE of Loughnanskan, Rathlin Island, Co Antrim, Northern Ireland. Proposed erection of a wind turbine with a 30m hub height and a 30m rotor diameter with a max output not exceeding 250kw. Application withdrawn 25.03.2014

E/2010/0244/F - 3no. Replacement wind turbines. Approved 03.04.2012

E/1991/0084/F - Erection of 3 wind turbines, Diesel Generator Control Building and overhead and underground Electricity Distribution Network. Approved 09.07.1991

4 THE APPLICATION

- 4.1 Erection of a wind turbine with a 30 metre hub height and a 30 metre rotor diameter with a maximum output not exceeding 250kw.
- 4.2 An Environmental Statement was submitted as part of the application.

5 PUBLICITY & CONSULTATIONS

External:
None

- 5.2 **Transport NI:** No objection

Westica Communications Ltd: No technical safeguarding objection.

Arqiva: No objection

NATS Safeguarding: No safeguarding objection

NI Water: No Objection

Belfast International Airport: No Objection

Defence Infrastructure Organisation: No Objection

DOE NIEA WMU: No Objection

DOE NIEA HMU: No objection subject to conditions relating to an agreed developer funded programme of archaeological works.

DOE NIEA Natural Heritage: No Objection, no likely significant effects on the designated features.

Northern Ireland Tourist Board: No objection.

RSPB: No Concerns, subject to conditions mitigating against any potential environmental impacts.

Environmental Health: No objection subject to conditions.

6 MATERIAL CONSIDERATIONS

- 6.1 Section 45(1) of the Planning Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 requires that all applications must have regard to the local plan, so far as material to the application, and all other material considerations. Section 6(4) states that in making any determination where regard is to be had to the local development plan, the determination must be made in accordance with the plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise.
- 6.2 The development plan is:
- Northern Area Plan 2016
- 6.3 The Regional Development Strategy (RDS) is a material consideration.
- 6.4 The Strategic Planning Policy Statement for Northern Ireland (SPPS) is a material consideration. As set out in the SPPS, until such times as a new local plan strategy is adopted, councils will apply specified retained operational policies.

- 6.5 Due weight should be given to the relevant policies in the development plan.
- 6.6 All material considerations and any policy conflicts are identified in the “Considerations and Assessment” section of the report.

7 RELEVANT POLICIES & GUIDANCE

PPS 2: Natural Heritage

PPS 3 Access, Movement and Parking

PPS 16: Tourism

PPS 18 Renewable Energy

PPS 21: Sustainable Development in the Countryside

Supplementary Planning Guidance

“Wind Energy Development in Northern Ireland’s Landscapes”

Supplementary Planning Documents

Antrim Coast and Glens AONB

Other Policies and Guidance

DRDNI Rathlin Island Policy

Rathlin Action Plan 2013-2015.

8 CONSIDERATIONS & ASSESSMENT

- 8.1 The main considerations in the determination of this application relate to: the principle of the proposed development; residential amenity; nature conservation / built heritage interests; local natural resources; public access to the Countryside; visual amenity & landscape character; cumulative impact; environmental, economic and social benefits; tourist assets and; other matters.

Planning Policy

- 8.2 The site is located within the rural area as defined by NAP.

- 8.3 The principle of the type and scale of development proposed must be considered having regard to the PPS policy documents specified above.
- 8.4 PPS 18 provides a presumption in favour of renewable energy development provided it will not result in an unacceptable adverse impact on a number of criteria as set out in the paragraphs below.
- 8.5 DRD's document Rathlin Island Policy is not an operational planning policy document. However, it is still a relevant material consideration. One of the Strategic Objectives is to develop Rathlin as a carbon neutral island generating electricity from renewable sources. While this is recognised, this objective could be achieved by the use of more appropriate renewable energy technologies. This is discussed further below. The Rathlin Action Plan 2013- 2015 is silent on the specific issue of the use of renewable energy technologies and is not cited within any of the five key themes as set out in the document.

Public Safety / Residential Amenity

- 8.6 In terms of residential amenity, the area potentially affected by shadow flicker is 10 times the rotor diameter of the wind turbine for 130 degrees either side of north. There are agricultural buildings 100 metres to the west of the turbine site. However, there are no residential properties within the area potentially affected by shadow flicker.
- 8.7 The Environmental Health Department of the Council have been re-consulted with an updated noise assessment to assess the potential noise impact on nearby residential properties. Environmental Health have no objections to the proposal subject to a number of conditions.

Biodiversity, Nature Conservation / Built Heritage Interests

- 8.8 The turbine site is an area of semi improved grassland, 100 metres west of Rathlin Island - Ballygill North Area of Special Scientific Interest (ASSI) and within 2 kilometres of Rathlin Island - Kinramer South ASSI, Rathlin Island - Coast ASSI, Rathlin Island - Kebble ASSI, Rathlin Island Special Area of

Conservation (SAC) and Rathfriland Special Protection Area (SPA). NIEA Natural Heritage have carried out a Test of Likely Significance under the Habitats Regulations on the Natura 2000 features and additional ASSI features and found no likely significant effects on the designated features or sites.

- 8.9 NIEA Natural Heritage have also considered the Habitat Assessment, Bird Assessment and Bat Assessment included in Sections 7, 8 and 9 of the Environmental Statement and have not raised any concerns in relation to the proposed development. The RSPB have also been consulted and have no concerns with the proposal subject to conditions mitigating any potential environmental impacts.
- 8.10 NIEA: Historic Monuments Unit agree with the recommendations and conclusions of the submitted archaeological assessment. HMU request that planning conditions are attached to any planning approval requiring the agreement and implementation of a developer funded programme of archaeological works.

Local Natural Resources, such as air quality or water quality

- 8.11 As detailed above, the development does not appear to affect any significant designations or zonings. Due to the nature of the proposal it is unlikely to have a detrimental impact on local natural resources. NIEA: Natural Heritage have no objections in relation to nature conservation and have not identified the site as being bogland which would potentially be at risk of bog burst.

Public Access to the Countryside

- 8.12 The proposal is using an existing agricultural access off the public road and the agent has indicated on the submitted P1 Form that the access is to remain unaltered. Section 10 of the Environmental Statement includes a Traffic and Transport Assessment. Transport NI have no objections to the development but recommend that, due to the restricted width of the public road, traffic management measures should be taken to ensure the safety of road users during the construction and implementation of the development. The proposal will not result

in an unacceptable adverse impact to public access to the countryside.

Visual Amenity & Landscape Character

- 8.13 Paragraph 6.223 of the SPPS states that a cautious approach for renewable proposals will apply within designated landscapes which are of significant value such as AONBs. It recognises that in such sensitive landscapes it may be difficult to accommodate wind turbines without detriment to the region's cultural and natural heritage assets. The SPPS then follows PPS 18 in stating that development will only be permitted where the proposal will not result in an unacceptable adverse impact on 5 planning considerations one of which being visual amenity and landscape character.
- 8.14 The supplementary planning guidance Wind Energy Development in Northern Ireland's Landscapes places the site within LCA 57 Causeway Coast and Rathlin Island which has a high sensitivity to wind energy development. It is described as a high plateau coastal landscape with rocky knolls and vertical or stepped rugged cliffs. It is an open and exposed windswept landscape with a wild character as a result of its exposure to sea weathering, strong prevailing winds and lack of tree cover or topographic shelter. There are long views from elevated areas along the coast and inland. The coastal margins are in pristine condition with a high scenic quality derived from dramatic basalt cliffs, sandy bays, coastal scenery, rich wildlife and archaeological features. Rathlin Island forms part of the Antrim Coast and Glens AONB and has ASSI, ASI, SPA and SAC designations and a Nature Reserve reflecting its importance in terms of nature conservation and bird habitats.
- 8.15 This LCA 57 is highly sensitive to wind energy development due to the open nature of the landscape, its elevation, and opportunity for wide ranging views which also act as key constraints to development. The landscape is described as being of exceptional coastal beauty and a key tourist destination. Particular care should be taken to avoid adverse impacts on the extremely sensitive, visually prominent and open, exposed slopes and ridgelines and on the key landscapes, visual characteristics and values detailed in the guidance for LCA 57.

- 8.16 Section 4 of the Environmental Statement identifies the key critical views of the development from within the Island, on approach from the Ferry and from various vantage points along the coast of the mainland. From the Island itself the turbine will be visible within the immediate vicinity of the application site from the central section of the western limb of the Island and also the southern limb of the island extending south from Church Bay along the western side of the Island, approx. 4 to 5 kilometres from the site.
- 8.17 When travelling west along the public road from Church Bay towards the site, the turbine will be visible in short to medium distance views between the townlands of Knockans and Kinramer South. While these views may be interrupted as the topography of the road winds and dips, from sections of this road (see views 7 to 10 of the ES) the turbine will break the skyline with no notable backdrop or vegetation and will appear prominent and incongruous in the landscape. The proposal will also be visible from the public pedestrian path to the south west of the site close to Kinramer Wood (see view 11 of the ES) where the tower of the turbine will sit against a backdrop of the land to the north east, but the blades will project beyond the skyline. From the critical views identified above, the proposed turbine would have an unacceptable impact on the visual amenity and landscape character of the area given its strong wild character and relative lack of overt man-made features.
- 8.18 From the southern limb of the Island, the turbine will be visible in medium to longer distance views from the public road in the townlands of Craigmacagan and Roonivoolin (see views 3 and 6 of the ES), from the west coast of the Island from the cliff top section of the walking trail in the townland of Carravinally (see view 4 of the ES) and from the footpath close to Rue Point Lighthouse on the southern tip of the Island (see view 5 of the ES). The turbine will also be openly visible from the sea for quite some distance and time along the main ferry route approaching Church Bay (see views 1 and 2 of the ES). From the above vantage points the full extent of the development would be visible sitting on the headland of this relatively plateau landscape with no backdrop. Consequently, the turbine would appear prominent and incongruous in this landscape and would have an unacceptable impact on the visual amenity and

landscape character of the Island and the special character of this particular part of the Antrim Coast and Glens AONB.

- 8.19 In this respect, the development is contrary to the guidance which recommends that turbine development within this highly sensitive LCA is closely associated with and reflects the scale of farmsteads and sheltering woodland and that particular care should be taken to avoid adverse impacts on the extremely sensitive, visually prominent and open, exposed slopes and ridgelines and on key landscapes. The proposed turbine is not sensitively sited or closely associated with a farmstead or sheltering woodland. While the development would be in proximity to an agricultural building, there is no visual linkage with this building from the majority of the vantage points identified above and at 45 metres to tip, the turbine would be disproportionate in scale. Due to the sensitivity of the site, it is unlikely that any reduction in the height of the turbine would overcome the above concerns.
- 8.20 The zone of visibility detailed in the Environmental Statement indicates potential views of the turbine from the north coast of the mainland as an 8 kilometre stretch of the coast between Ballintoy Harbour and Clare Park including short sections of the coastal road (between 8 and 10 kilometres away) and from pockets of the countryside from Ballyallaght to the northern edges of the Antrim Hills (between 10 and 20 kilometres away). The turbine will be visible from publically accessible areas along sections of the North Antrim Coastal Path from Benbane Head to Carrick-a-rede (around 10 kilometres away), from the western end of Whitepark Bay beach and dunes in the vicinity of Ballintoy Harbour, Larrybane Head, Carrick-a-rede Rope Bridge and Kinbane Castle (around 8 kilometres away), from sections of the Causeway Road (around 15 kilometres away), from sections of Whitepark Road from Ballyallaght to Carnmoon (between 9 to 15 kilometres away), from the road from Ballycastle to Collier Bay (around 11 kilometres away), from Fair Head from the scree slopes and the cliff top (around 11 kilometres away) and from the northern slopes of the Antrim Hills including Knocklayd, Coolaveely, Oghtbristacree, Crockanore and Cushleake (around 12 kilometres away). The applicant argues that the areas identified above have a small degree of public accessibility and that the turbine will only be visible on the clearest of days so the visual impact of the

proposal would not be significant and would be inconsequential in the overall vista.

- 8.21 The Agent submitted additional photomontages, Views 14 to 18, taken from view points along the coast from Ballintoy to Ballycastle. Photomontages can be unrealistic and do not show the full extent of the turbine with the moving blades. While the views of the turbine from the north coast of the mainland will be long distance and may be obscured on occasions, weather dependent, nonetheless the turbine will inevitably be visible, particularly during fairer weather and in the summer months which attract more tourists and visitors to the north coast. At these times the turbine will appear prominent on the headland of the Island and these views should therefore be afforded appropriate consideration.

Cumulative Impact

- 8.22 In terms of cumulative impact, there are three approved wind turbines (yet to be constructed) 22.5 metres to hub and 31 metres to tip, approx. 2.3 kilometres east of the application site. These 3 no turbines were approved in replacement of 3 approved in 1991, which are currently on site. The proposed turbine will be intervisible with the existing turbines when viewed from the west of the application site (see view 11 of the ES) where the existing turbines will be viewed to the right hand side of the proposed turbine but set further in the distance, elevated on a ridge of higher land. They will also be intervisible approaching on the ferry and from southern parts of the Island (views 1 to 4 of ES). Although there is a separation distance of 2.3 kilometres between the proposal and the existing turbines, both developments will be intervisible given the vast openness of the landscape from these views and the lack of vegetation or other such features between the two developments. While the three approved turbines are considered acceptable, the proposal would introduce a new visually intrusive man made element of much larger scale on a site remote from this location. Collectively, this would appear as a chaotic pattern of development on this sensitive island landscape.
- 8.23 The proposed development, when considered with the three existing turbines on the Island would cumulatively have significantly detrimental visual impact on the visual amenity and

landscape character of the area and on the special character of this part of the Antrim Coast and Glens AONB.

Environmental, economic and social benefits

- 8.24 As directed by the SPPS, the wider environmental, economic and social benefits of all proposals will be given appropriate weight in determining whether planning permission will be granted. Paragraphs 3.33 and 3.34 of the Environmental Statement outline the potential socio-economic benefits of the development as a significant on-going income for the Rathlin Development Community Associations (RDCA) which is a non-profit organisation. The Additional Supporting information received 7.12.15 states in paragraph 5.3 that the aim of the project is not to make the island's electricity consumption cheaper but to offset island usage and to produce revenue from the sale of generated power. All the profits from the turbine project will go into community investment through the RDCA. Assisting in the development of island business and services. It will also help run the RDCA office and staff. They predict the turbine will generate electricity worth £122k per annum which will assist in financing future island projects relating to health and welfare, community and youth, energy and water supply, waste management, communications and the ferry service.
- 8.25 Taking the above into consideration there is no site specific reason for the turbine to be on the island. The possibility of a wind turbine on the main land supported by the community association with direct payments going to it may be a possibility that should be considered.
- 8.26 The Additional Supporting Information document in paragraphs 6.1 – 6.6 addressed other alternative forms of renewable energy. In summary it states that the RDCA found that other options such as wave, tidal and solar are too expensive or at the prototype stage. They also stated that Anaerobic Digestion would not have enough waste product on the island to fuel it or the road infrastructure to transport it. The information argues that wind energy is technically and commercially proven.
- 8.27 While the benefits of such a venture for the Island and its community are material, these benefits must be given appropriate weight to balance the significant adverse visual

impacts of the development. There seems to be no doubt from the submissions that a wind turbine would be the easiest option. However, the cost to the landscape character of this unique island setting is thought to outweigh the gain from a wind turbine at this location. Planning would still contend that other alternative means of renewable energy development which could deliver these socio-economic benefits with a significantly lesser visual impact upon the Island's landscape should be explored further.

Tourism Assets

- 8.28 Planning considers Rathlin Island and this part of the Antrim Coast and Glens AONB to be tourist assets of intrinsic interest to tourists within the definition of paragraph 7.39 of PPS 16.
- 8.29 Most of the surrounding LCA, including Rathlin Island, is within the Antrim Coast and Glens AONB designation because of its high scenic quality which is described as being of exceptional coastal beauty. The intrinsic character of this particular part of the AONB and a key component of the areas tourist value is its relative unspoilt wilderness which makes the Island a popular destination for recreational walking and cycling.
- 8.30 Rathlin Island is Northern Ireland's only inhabited offshore island and is identified as a key tourist destination by Northern Ireland Tourist Board (NITB). The Island forms part of the Causeway Coast and Glens 'key tourism area', one of nine identified in strategic tourism policy. The Island has a wealth of ASSI, ASI, SPA and SAC designations and a Nature Reserve reflecting its importance in terms of nature conservation and bird habitats. The Islands rich history, traditional culture, stunning landscapes, seascapes and diverse wildlife make it an inspirational retreat for walkers, artists, writers, musicians, bird enthusiasts, divers, photographers or generally for those who enjoy the peace and tranquillity of island-life.
- 8.31 The public road which passes by the application site is the main route to the nearby Keble Nature Reserve and the RSPB Sea Bird Visitors Centre. All of the above are important tourist assets of intrinsic interests to tourists.

- 8.32 The RDCA carried out a three week questionnaire among tourists and island visitors in August 2015. It consisted of 4 questions. See Section 9 of the Additional Supporting Information Documents. The findings show support in relation to Question 1 'that the use of a turbine would help the community achieve their long term goals', Question 2 'that a Rathlin Wind Turbine funding community projects would add interest and value for tourism'. Question 3 asked if a wind turbine would spoil the look of Rathlin Island, the majority of those questioned did not agree with this statement. The final statement polled was that 'the potential social and economic benefits of a Rathlin Island Wind turbine should outweigh any concerns about the visual impact' also had a majority support for a turbine.
- 8.33 The questionnaire is not conclusive it shows a majority support for renewables on the island which would be supported by Planning Policy subject to criteria. However, the statements directed at the visual impact of the turbine are inconclusive. The majority of people visiting for the first time may not be aware of the location of the turbine, or the visualisation of a 30m hub and 45m to the tip turbine, or the cumulative impact of the three with extant permission and the application site.
- 8.34 The siting and scale of the development is not sympathetic to the special character of the Antrim Coast and Glens AONB, contrary to criteria (a) of Policy NH 6 of PPS 6, and will have a resulting adverse impact upon its tourist value contrary to Policy TSM 8 of PPS 16.

Other Matters

Comparable Cases

- 8.35 The Additional Supporting Documentation details other turbines approved that the applicant feel are comparable to this case.
- 8.36 The Scottish turbines were approved under a different planning policy context. It would be difficult to comment fully without knowing the sites and the planning reasons. However, it should be noted that since the approval of the turbines for example on Gigha, the planning policy context in Argyll and Bute has changed with the Adopted Plan in 2015. As part of the Plan

preparation an Energy Capacity Study was commissioned. The report has some similarities with the Landscape Character Assessments that we would use. However, it is more detailed and prescriptive for example, highlighting areas such as headlands on the island of Jura where wind energy proposals would not be permitted. Conversely it also identifies areas where it would be suitable and to what scale.

- 8.37 The application again in Eigg, Scotland provides energy directly to the island inhabitants, their system consists of solar, hydroelectric and four small wind generators. Each of these sources has been sensitively sited to cause minimum visual and physical impact upon the island. The wind turbines used are small and at a domestic scale with an output of 6kw. This is a good example of the use of renewable energy provision at sensitive landscape to the direct benefit of all the islanders.
- 8.38 In reviewing the cases cited as relevant to this proposal the aims are slightly varied but are all examples of a community approach to renewable energy. Rathlin differs in some aspects in that this proposal is for a wind turbine on an exposed headland visible from two Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, on Northern Ireland's only inhabited island itself and within an AONB. It is also within a Landscape Character area that has been defined as highly sensitive to wind energy. The electricity produced will be sold to the grid and the monies raised will be ploughed back into the community through grants and start of loans and to pay for the staff of the RDCA. This business venture may not benefit the whole of the community directly and would not outweigh the adverse visual impact.

Electromagnetic Interference

- 8.39 A significant level of consultation has been carried out in relation to a number of issues including the impact on communications installations, telecommunications equipment, as well as aviation and defence authorities and no significant issues have arisen.

9.0 CONCLUSION

- 9.1 Given the prominent location of the turbine on this sensitive plateau landscape and the fact that there will be critical views of the development throughout the Island, on approach from the

Ferry and from various vantage points along the coast of the mainland, the proposed turbine will have a significantly detrimental impact on the visual amenity and landscape character of the surrounding Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty as well as the tourist assets which the Island has to offer. While the development will have socio-economic benefits for the Island and its community, there are alternative means of renewable energy development which could deliver these benefits with a significantly lesser visual impact upon the Islands unique and sensitive landscape and tourist assets. Refusal is recommended.

10 Refusal Reasons:

- 10.1 The proposal is contrary to paragraph 6.223 and 6.224 of the Strategic, Planning Policy Statement for Northern Ireland, Policy RE 1 of Planning Policy Statement 18: Renewable Energy and Policy NH 6 of Planning Policy Statement 2: Natural Heritage, in that the development would, if permitted, have an unacceptable adverse impact on the visual amenity and special character of this Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty through the size, scale and siting of the proposed turbine.
- 10.2 The proposal is contrary to Policy RE 1 of Planning Policy Statement 18: Renewable Energy, in that the development will be viewed with existing wind turbines and cumulatively will have a detrimental visual impact.
- 10.3 The proposal is contrary to Policy TSM 8 Safeguarding of Tourism Assets of Planning Policy Statement 16: Tourism, in that the site lies within Rathlin Island and the Antrim Coast and Glens Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and the development would, if permitted, damage the intrinsic character and quality of these tourist assets by reason of unacceptable visual impact.