

SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

REPORT TO: Development and Conservation
Control Committee

6th October 2004

AUTHOR/S: Director of Development Services

**S/2301/02/Circular 14/90 - Stow-Cum-Quy, Fen Ditton and Horningsea
Burwell to Horningsea 132 kv Dual Circuit Overhead Line, Land in the Parishes of
Stow-Cum-Quy, Fen Ditton and Horningsea – 24 Seven Utility Services Ltd now EDF
Energy**

Recommendation: No objections

Site and Proposal

1. The above application, originally received in November 2002 was reported to the 5th March 2003 Committee – Agenda attached as an Appendix.
2. The recommendation: “Until such time as detailed plans of mitigation have been prepared and agreed, I would advise Members to object to the proposal because of its detrimental visual impact on the stretch of open fenland landscape, which is designated Green Belt and Area of Best Landscape in the County Structure Plan and 1993 Approved Local Plan” was agreed.
3. In addition to this Council's objection, East Cambridgeshire District Council, together with Cambridgeshire County Council, both objected because of the detrimental impact on the open landscape.

Up-Date 1

4. Following the above objections Cambridge Landscape Architects were instructed to prepare proposals for mitigation for consultation with Council Officers and Landowners. The Environmental Statement (ES) submitted with the application had identified the significant variation in adverse visual impact according to distance from the line and the characteristics of the area. Although the E.S. had predicted that the adverse effects would be most significant within a distance of 500m from the line where there would be oblique views of the line and/or the towers would break the horizon, no schemes of mitigation had been submitted.
5. Cambridge Landscape Architects looked at a range of planting configurations to suit local conditions and to achieve variety and visual connection with existing features. This led to the conclusion that new planting areas would be most effective if established as linear features on field boundaries roughly parallel to and between 300m to 1000m from the line.
6. This strategy was illustrated and discussed with officers of all 3 authorities in March and May 2003 and generally endorsed, but confirmation was sought that, not only was the strategy feasible in terms of land ownership, but that its planting and future maintenance could be safeguarded.
7. Following the appointment of a firm of surveyors to act for EDF Energy, the scheme was discussed with all landowners, tenants and neighbours. Several of the original

planting sites were omitted because of constraints (machinery access, ditch clearance etc) whilst others have been added.

8. All the sites are subject to the final agreement of owners and the preparation of detailed plans and schedules identifying the dimensions of the site, the number of plants and their sizes. In the majority of cases the formal agreement both to planting and subsequent maintenance would be achieved under a permanent easement in the form of a Deed of Grant. Many of the landowners and tenants are the same as those over which the line is actually going; however, there are some landowners accepting planting sites who are not affected by the tower line.
9. The current schedules identify approximately 12,000 metres of field boundaries to be planted either with randomly positioned individual trees or with groups, hedges, hedgerows or plantations. (NB The overall length of the line from Burwell to Horningsea is approximately 10km for which 12km of field boundaries will be planted. 2.55km of the line will be within the South Cambridgeshire District.)

Up-Date - 2

10. Cambridgeshire County Council, at its meeting of the Development Control Committee on 13th September 2004, agreed to withdraw its previous objections subject to the Secretary of State imposing a condition requiring the implementation of the Mitigation Planting Proposals.

Up-Date - 3

11. In the second week of September two public exhibitions (12.00 noon – 8.00pm) were held in Burwell and Horningsea. These were manned by representatives from EDF Energy and Cambridge Landscape Architects. Written comments were made by some of those who visited the exhibitions and a breakdown of same will be made verbally.

Up- Date - 4

12. On 21st September both parties made a presentation to Members. It was explained that an underground alternative would not be feasible along the line of the present overhead line because of soil conditions, a high water table, existing waterways and lodes. There would be greater harm to the landscape and archaeology. Repairs would also take significantly longer than repairs to an overhead supply. If underground the route would have to be closer to the villages and more likely go along the present road system ie the B1102, Quy to Burwell.
13. The only other alternative would be a new overhead line from Burwell, cutting to the south-east of Swaffham Prior and Bulbeck and both Great and Little Wilbraham. Such a route would be substantially longer, affecting a greater number of the public, and be more visible crossing, as it would have to, the A14. A greater length would also be within the Green Belt. This route would be totally unacceptable.
14. The Landscape Mitigation Plans were fully explained by Cambridge Landscape Architects and it was confirmed that a Deed of Grant would be entered into by all parties. This would require, amongst other things, that all agreed planting would be fully maintained by the applicants for a period of five years and, for the next fifteen years, the landowner would be responsible. A pro-rata payment to the landowners from the applicants would go towards routine maintenance for such a period.

Planning Comments

15. The importance of the future development of the Cambridge sub-region is recognised in both regional planning documents and the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Structure Plan. The latter sets out a strategy to make provision for considerable levels of growth in and around the city (Policy P9/1) and also identifies the need for infrastructure provision, including utilities (Policy P9/8) as a key element in implementing the strategy.
16. Policies of the current South Cambridgeshire Local Plan, 2004 (HG1 and HG2) refer to some of this growth, but policies of the imminent Local Development Framework will refer to Northstowe, Cambridge East, Cambridge South etc.
17. It is vital that the electricity supply is augmented for existing residents and businesses and to enable the planned growth of the Cambridge sub-region to take place.
18. What is the alternative? Irrespective of the actual cost in economic terms, the cables cannot be put underground on the proposed route, - there are too many physical problems and the damage to the landscape, archaeology, wildlife, ecology etc. would be huge. If put underground, the line would probably have to follow the B1102, or somewhere close. I would anticipate that there would be far greater objection to this solution.
19. Likewise overhead to the south-east of the Swaffham and Wilbrahams is out of the question. With the "clock ticking" on the present supply system, this application is the only real solution.

Recommendation

20. That the District Council's objection is withdrawn subject to the Secretary of State imposing a condition requiring the implementation of the Visual Impact Mitigation Planting Proposals dated August 2004 or any variation to that scheme which may be agreed in writing by the Local Planning Authority.

Background Papers: the following background papers were used in the preparation of this report:

County Structure Plan 2003
South Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2004
Application File ref S/2031/02/Circular 14/90

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