

# **Horspath Parish Council's current understanding of PfR's wind turbine proposal for Horspath**

*This statement has been issued by Horspath Parish Council as a result of the changed plans announced by the wind turbine developers, Partnerships for Renewables, on 20<sup>th</sup> October 2010*

## **In brief:**

*Partnerships for Renewables (PfR), the wind turbine development company, now wants to erect a single wind turbine 425 feet tall on the south side of Oxford Road Horspath, very close by the entrance to the village. The latest proposal announced by PfR on 20<sup>th</sup> October 2010 is illustrated in a map below.*

*There is plenty of evidence that PfR and Oxford City Council, which owns the field on which the wind turbine would be built and will rent it to PfR for about £30,000 per year, have grossly overstated the potential efficiency and the benefits of such a huge wind turbine in Horspath. It will be scandalous if Oxford City Council is allowed to grant Planning Permission for such a development, in which it has such a direct commercial interest, without a public Planning Inquiry at which the concerns of the local community in Horspath could be openly and fairly evaluated by an independent Planning Inspector.*

*The overwhelming majority (70.02%) of households in Horspath indicated that they were opposed to wind turbines being erected on the south side of Oxford Road, Horspath, when they responded to a professionally designed questionnaire in 2008, so Horspath Parish Council is representing that majority by preparing to oppose the development of the single huge turbine, now to be located much closer to the village than in the original proposal.*

*Horspath Parish Council has identified absolutely no net benefits for the residents of Horspath which might come from the erection of this 425 feet high wind turbine, and has already started to review the long list of disadvantages which the huge wind turbine would inflict on the village community. Significantly, the wind turbine would tower over the cricket pitches, be highly visible from almost every house and plot in the village, would actually be 50 metres (164 feet) higher than the top of Shotover Hill, or equivalent to standing Nelson's Column on top of Shotover, and would introduce the first and most unwelcome industrial use into the Green Belt which surrounds Horspath, and on which this rural village depends to separate it from Cowley. It would also create significant noise in such a quiet village, flickering shadows when the blades rotate in direct sunlight, and would also be a potential hazard to local bats, birds and any low-flying aircraft. It would truly be an awful 'blot on the landscape' of the surrounding Green Belt, which by its rural openness and the absence of industry provides part of the attraction of living in Horspath.*

*Horspath Parish Council will use this website: [www.horspath.org.uk](http://www.horspath.org.uk) and the village notice boards to keep village residents informed of further details as they emerge, and that is the purpose of the longer explanations which follow.*



*Map to show the location of the site proposed for Pfr's giant wind turbine generator shaded in pink.*



*Aerial photo, taken looking across the Green Belt towards Oxford, with Horspath village in the lower right of the picture, to show the location of the site proposed for Pfr's giant wind turbine outlined in red.*

## **1. What we have learned from Partnerships for Renewables (Pfr), the wind turbine developers**

**About Partnerships for Renewables.** This is not a charity, but is a not-for profit private limited wind turbine development company, which is partly owned by the Carbon Trust Enterprises (51%) and partly by the commercial bank HSBC's Environmental Infrastructure Fund (49%).

**The site.** In 2008 Pfr said they planned to install at least two wind turbines located on land owned by Oxford City Council, to the north and to the south of Oxford Road, Horspath. Then the plan changed to install one very large (425 feet, or 130 metres high) wind turbine near the disused allotments and the BMW boundary at the west end of the triangular field owned by the City Council on the south side of Oxford Road. Then the plan changed again in October this year with the 425 feet high wind turbine being planned for the east end of this same triangular field, on the opposite side of Oxford Road to Horspath Cricket Club's new cricket ground, i.e. several hundred yards closer to Horspath village. The proposal has now changed radically several times, and the new location is very much closer to the village.

**The finances.** Pfr say that a wind turbine generator with a capability to generate 2.5 Megawatt will cost about £2.5 millions to install. Pfr will receive substantial income through a government scheme, known as the Renewable Obligation, which will allow Pfr to charge about 2-3 times the normal rate for any electricity generated by the wind turbine when it is sold to the electricity supply companies, who are actually obliged to buy energy from renewable sources. This will not produce any cheaper electricity for local use, but on the contrary, wind turbines will actually result in future increases in the cost of electricity to consumers. As owners of the land, Oxford City Council will benefit from an annual rent estimated to be about £30,000 p.a. Pfr has suggested that a community benefit fund should be established in a separate independent consultation, but the details of how this might result in any net benefit to residents of Horspath are unclear.

**The amount of carbon saved and electricity generated.** When the wind turbine is actually turning in the wind, it will generate carbon-free electricity, which will help to offset global climate warming, but that will not be all the time, and it may actually be very little of the time in a place such as Horspath which is not very windy. In the national map of mean wind speeds, Horspath is located in one of the least windy regions of the whole country. However, when the wind is not blowing, the same amount of electricity which would have been generated by the Horspath wind turbine, will need to be generated by burning conventional hydrocarbon fuels, or by nuclear power stations, just to meet the normal demands for electricity by consumers, which will do nothing to offset global climate warming or reduce our carbon footprint. More significantly PfR has also suggested in its advertising literature that wind turbine generators in the UK have a 'capacity factor' of approximately 30% efficiency (on a scale where a 100% 'capacity factor' would indicate that a wind turbine generator is actually generating at its maximum efficiency throughout the year), but that "30%" wind farm industry statistic is based on performance data from wind turbines in very much windier places than Oxford, and that is very misleading. Other official statistics show that less than 19% of the UK's inland wind turbines have actually generated electric power at 30% capacity, and some inland turbines, even in the more windy parts of the north of England, can achieve only 8% capacity, which is very different to what PfR is claiming to be normal in the UK. The probability that a wind turbine at Horspath will generate electric power efficiently is very low, because the annual average surface wind speed calculated for this area is barely 5 metres/second, and while PfR has stated that a turbine can be economically viable with an average wind of 5.5 metres/second (given the huge government financial support which they would receive), this is not far above the average wind speeds of 4 metres/second at which wind turbines are unviable, even with the government's financial support. Horspath is therefore a very marginal, and in real terms unviable, location for any wind turbine, especially in the 50% of the years when the actual wind speed is below the average speed. A wind turbine in Horspath will therefore be unviable in some less windy years, and barely viable in others when there is more wind. In its biased presentation of the most optimistic and unreal performance estimates for a wind turbine in Horspath, PfR (but mainly their sponsors in Oxford City Council who are clearly promoting this to enhance their own "green" credentials rather than their common sense) has shown that it is keener to promote this project than to recognise the reality that **Horspath is the wrong place for such a wind turbine**. With our public money being invested so heavily into such projects through the government's Renewable Obligation scheme, it should be important for public accountability that wind turbines are erected by PfR only in the places where they will be most efficient, such as offshore in our coastal waters or in the far north-west of the UK.

**The Legal and Planning decisions.** PfR are in a mutually beneficial commercial relationship with Oxford City Council, as Oxford City Council will be able to grant PfR Planning Permission for this wind turbine, while also receiving a substantial annual rent from PfR for the use of the City Council's land. Horspath Parish Council considers that this constitutes a very serious conflict of interest, and would instead like to see the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (Eric Pickles) ask an independent Planning Inspector to determine whether or not this wind turbine should receive Planning Permission, and to hold a public Planning Inquiry in Horspath so that local people could at the very least express their opinions to an independent Planning Inspector about the location of this very large wind turbine in the Oxford Green Belt and so close to Horspath. Wind turbines are not a legally permitted land use in the Green Belt according to the law set out in Planning Policy Guidance Note 2 (PPG2), and PfR would need to be able to prove that there exist "exceptional circumstances" to justify the location of this very large wind turbine in the Green Belt near Horspath, as an exception to the current Planning law expressed in PPG2 and also significantly in Oxford City Council's own adopted Local Plan 2001-2016, which designates the proposed wind turbine site for the development of outdoor sports.

## ***2. What has guided Horspath Parish Council in determining its policy towards the PfR proposal for a 425 feet high wind turbine to be erected near the village.***

**Getting the opinions of Horspath residents.** When the initial proposal for two wind turbines was first announced in 2008, the volunteers of the Horspath Parish Plan Steering Group, supported by SODC, carried out a professionally designed and analysed Parish Plan Household Questionnaire Survey of all households in Horspath. The results of this survey, which are still on the website [www.horspath.org.uk](http://www.horspath.org.uk), show that in answer to a question about developments in the Green Belt near Horspath, only 21.3% of residents supported the project to erect two 125 metres high wind turbines near Horspath, while a massive majority of 70.2% were opposed to this, and only 8.6% expressed no opinion. This survey has determined Horspath Parish Council's cautious policy in opposition to having wind turbines in Horspath during the past two years while PfR's proposals have been changing. When there is a specific proposal in the form of a submitted Planning Application from PfR which specifies exactly where the single wind turbine is planned to be erected, Horspath Parish Council will ensure that all Horspath residents know about it in time to make their opinions known to Oxford City Council, and the Parish Council will provide advice for Horspath residents and will take action according to the details of exactly what is proposed.

### **Possible effects of a nearby 425 feet high wind turbine on Horspath residents.**

The principal impact is expected to be the **enormous visual impact upon the rural landscape and the openness of the Green Belt surrounding Horspath**, which is currently without any industrial or commercial developments. The 425 feet high wind turbine would dominate the views of everyone approaching Horspath from Oxford, and would be very highly visible from almost every house or plot in the village. Whereas Horspath is currently remembered as a village in the minds of its visitors for its long curving road around the Green to the Bridge, with a glimpse of the ancient St. Giles Church and the beautiful cricket grounds along the way, when a huge wind turbine is erected at the entrance to the village, it will inevitably become “the village by the wind turbine” in most people’s minds. At present there is no industrialisation of the narrow strip of Green Belt fields along the road between Horspath and Cowley, and the installation of this huge wind turbine could be the beginning of a trend to industrialise the open fields which are currently farmed by a Horspath farmer. Whereas house values in Horspath are currently high because the village is highly regarded as a very attractive location in the Oxford Green Belt, they may well drop if a turbine is erected here. No one can be totally sure when or whether, or by how much the value of properties in Horspath might fall if the giant wind turbine is erected so close to the village, but the financial losses which might be incurred by the owners of houses in Horspath close to the wind turbine could be very high.

Apart from the unwelcome visual impact of the proposed wind turbine, it will produce some **noise**, which will be significant at night when Horspath is a very quiet village and people are hoping to sleep undisturbed. The rotating wind turbine blades will tower over Horspath Cricket Club’s new 2<sup>nd</sup> cricket ground and cause such a **serious visual distraction** to bowlers and batsmen that it is unlikely that high class cricket would be permitted here if the wind turbine is built. The **flickering shadow** from the wind turbine’s large blades moving across the sun will be cast across a large part of the village at different times of day and in different seasons of the year, which is a serious distraction to anyone experiencing it. There will also be some very **adverse impacts on the life of the birds and bats** which we know from long observation fly low over the site of the proposed wind turbine. In terms of the Parish Council’s **Health & Safety concerns**, it is not unknown for wind turbines to malfunction and very occasionally collapse onto the ground, scattering heavy debris over a wide area, and the Parish Council believes that the proposed site for the turbine is not sufficiently clear of vulnerable assets for the operation of the turbine there to be considered safe. Apart from which, light aircraft, sport aircraft and helicopters of all kinds frequently cross over the site for the proposed wind turbine at very low altitude, and Horspath Parish Council is concerned that there will a high risk of a **collision between one of these aircraft and the wind turbine in conditions of poor visibility**, which might even inflict an air crash on the village.

### **Summary**

**As the huge wind turbine proposed for this location near Horspath offers no net benefits to the residents of Horspath, and is likely to bring only disadvantages to them, in both the long and the short term, Horspath Parish Council is prepared to oppose any Planning Application to erect it, when that is submitted by Partnerships for Renewables for determination by Oxford City Council, and is assured of support by South Oxford District Council in any campaign to protect the Green Belt surrounding the village.**

**Horspath Parish Council will be using this website: [www.horspath.org.uk](http://www.horspath.org.uk) to publish any new information on this matter, including the details of any Planning Applications submitted by Partnerships for Renewables, as soon as this information is known to the Parish Council, and it will welcome support from any other interested parties or organisations who will join Horspath Parish Council in its opposition to any plans to erect any very large wind turbine in this very sensitive area of the Oxford Green Belt.**