Tree Canopy Statement

To support a planning application for a single wind turbine on land at Higher Biscovillack Farm, Greensplat, St. Austell, PL26 8XY.

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1 Introduction

1.0 Policy G3 – Tree Canopy was introduced through the Cornwall Council Climate Emergency Development Plan Document (CEDPD), adopted on the 21st of February 2023. The policy had a phased introduction, and since the 15th of June 2023 it a required consideration for all major development applications in Cornwall.

1.1 The proposal constitutes a major application therefore triggering the requirement to consider Policy G3.

2 Policy

2.0 The policy states that *'all major development should provide, through the retention of existing and/or the establishment of new, canopy coverage equal to at least 15% of the site area'*.

2.1 The aim of the policy is to increase tree canopy cover across Cornwall, creating benefits associated with climate resilience, biodiversity, ecosystem services, and human health.

2.2 Importantly, the policy acknowledges that it's not appropriate for all proposals to reasonably accommodate a 15% tree canopy cover introduction on site. The policy highlights:
'Where there are significant ecological, historical, landscape, or operational reasons to justify a canopy requirement of less than 15% on site and this can be fully evidenced, an alternative percentage of canopy provision shall be agreed with the Council'.

3 Site Restrictions

3.0 Due to operational and spatial restrictions, it is understood that the proposal cannot reasonably accommodate the requirement of 15% canopy cover on site.

3.1 Trees within proximity to wind turbines interfere with the operation of the turbines by adversely impacting the wind flow over the site – and subsequent generation. Trees act as vertical obstructions in the landscape, usually resulting in a reduction of wind speed across the site and an increase in turbulence levels. These effects are detrimental to the wind turbines operation and will reduce power output and increase the stress on the turbine blades over the operational lifetime of the development.

3.2 Furthermore, the resultant effects of reduced energy production would contradict the aims of Policy 14 of the Cornwall Local Plan, which states that renewable energy proposals should *'maximise the use of the available resource by deploying installations with the greatest energy output practicable'* and policies RE1 and RE2 of the Climate Emergency DPD *'set out the main principles with regard to renewable energy to ensure that this significant resource is maximised, while ensuring that any adverse impacts are addressed satisfactorily'*.

3.3 The site is proposed within an agricultural field, surrounded by a dramatic landscape of the China Clay waste tips and areas of rough vegetation, characterised by open-pit mining, located within the St Austell or Hensbarrow China Clay Area (LCA17). The landscape of the site and surrounding area is heavily influenced by the surrounding China Clay works and is punctuated by tips, workings, and pits. The wider landscape is industrial and agricultural with fields intermittently enclosed by hedgebanks/hedgerows.

3.4 Due to the nature and landscape character of the site it is considered that the introduction of tree cover would not be appropriate at this location, conflicting with the current characteristics of the landscape which the site is located within.

3.5 Due to the operational, landscape, and spatial restrictions outlined above, the provision of 15% tree canopy cover is not achievable for the proposed development.

4 Biodiversity Net Gain

4.0 Notwithstanding the reasons above, the Applicant is committed to provide a significant Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) on site, over the required 10% as outlined in Policy G2 – Biodiversity Net Gain. The proposed BNG area would comprise a 10.37% net gain in hedgerow areas and a 10.57% biodiversity net gain in habitat areas.

4.1 An existing native hedgerow associated with bank (0.055km) will be enhanced on Site. The hedgerow will be infill planted with a mix of at least 5 native woody species and managed to meet the following criteria, in order to achieve Moderate condition.

5 Conclusion

5.0 Cornwall Council planning guidance introduces a strong favour towards mitigating the effects of climate change, however, in the case of the proposal, a balance must be sought between the efficient and reliable production of renewable energy and the provision of tree canopy cover to support biodiversity and climate resilience.

5.1 It is concluded that the site is not suitable to meet the requirement of 15% tree canopy cover due to operational, spatial, and landscape character constraints. It is proposed that a total of 0.055ha of species rich native hedgerow associated with bank or ditch will be enhanced on-site, consistent with the established landscape in the site area, and is an acceptable substitute to the tree canopy requirement.

5.2 The most effective utilisation of the wind resource on site is necessary to make a significant contribution to Cornwall's renewable energy generation. It is anticipated that the proposed development will generate over 11.2GWh of renewable energy annually, enough to power over 2,400 Cornish homes.