

Dear Neighbour,

We are writing to all our neighbours, near & far, to let you know about our nursery plans for setting up a renewable energy project on Kirton Farm, just above the Rack & Manger pub on the B3049 (Stockbridge to Winchester road). We are applying for planning permission very shortly for three 'small' wind turbines on the hill above our nursery site, to enable us to generate up to 80% of our electrical energy needs. The site is actually in the parish of Sparsholt, but close to the boundary with Crawley and within sight of a few houses in Up Somborne village.

Although we are excited about the possibility of generating our own clean renewable energy, we are very aware that nationally wind turbines have attracted some negative reactions & press coverage. Therefore we would like to take this opportunity to give some advanced notice of our proposals, to keep the local community informed of our intentions and hopefully generate some positive feedback.

Development summary

We are **not** planning to install a wind farm, but instead we are simply aiming to reduce/replace our nursery electricity mains consumption with our own renewable wind generated supply. We plan to install three 11KW turbines in a row above the nursery at approx 90 degrees to the prevailing wind. They would follow an existing line of wooden poles carrying electricity to the top of the hill. We will be removing these old 12m poles, burying the cable and replacing the poles with the turbines (in different positions). The turbines are classified as 'small' and are specially designed for inland power generation; the turbine masts are 18m tall and the blade diameter is 13m. Other than the turbines themselves, the only other kit needed is a small control box at the bottom of each tower, the new cable running underground from the turbines to the nursery and a new import/export meter to replace the current meter. This allows us to export surplus energy into the national grid. The turbines are estimated to produce between 75,000 & 90,000KWhr per annum, approximately 90% of our current consumption. In addition we are also aiming to reduce our overall consumption on the nursery, to reduce the balance.

The site has several excellent features making it especially suitable for a project of this type. The topography is excellent, there are very few local interruptions to the airflow approaching the site from most directions (buildings, trees & windbreaks etc), the electric supply connection point is close enough to be viable and we have a very local 24hr demand. Despite the open site, the turbines will not be overlooked by many residencies, in fact the nearest occupied residence is our own house. Site access through the nursery entrance would be relatively easy for the small amount of construction traffic needed.

Site history

We started the nursery business in 1984, it covers approx 10 acres and currently employs 22 permanent staff (13 full time) increasing to 32 employees during peak periods. We currently produce for 3 main markets, a large contracted range of plants for supplying a well-known DIY multiple, a range of perennials and herbs grown in coir fibre pots for supply to garden centres in central southern England and a range of young plants produced in our own micropropagation laboratory for supplying other growers around the UK.

The micropropagation laboratory is the unit that uses the majority of the power with air conditioned growth rooms and electrical lab equipment. We have a 24hr demand for power to run the growth rooms, although usage is higher during the working day. The unit is amongst a select few in the UK specialising in the bulking up of perennial crops for nurseries that wish to introduce new varieties to the market.

The wholesale ornamental horticultural sector has experienced challenging trading conditions over the past 7 years with very tight margins and low returns. In response, over the last 6 years, we have been developing our own specialist market, aiming to be far more eco friendly. We introduced waxed card marketing trays, now superseded by our new reusable/returnable wooden trays, we moved from growing in plastic pots to coir fibre pots and introduced our own in-house printed wooden descriptive and price labels. These major production changes have gone hand in hand with a drive to try and become more sustainable within the company as a whole. We recycle a huge proportion of our waste, have built ponds and planted hedges to encourage wildlife and natural predation of crop pests. The installation of the wind turbines is part of our continuing efforts to make a positive contribution to our community and environment within the constraints of running a viable business.

Local benefits

In a district where the carbon footprint per head of population is particularly high, this project would make a significant local difference, saving over 50 tonnes of carbon dioxide production each year.

As one of the most progressive suppliers in our market, promoting more eco-friendly ways of doing things, we would really like to encourage a wider uptake of the sustainable opportunities available to our local communities. With this in mind, we are offering each of the three surrounding parishes, an annual donation for ten years, to be put towards a community sustainability project of their choice. For example, investing in renewable energy, energy conservation or another area of environmental concern. There are also many opportunities around to add more value to this contribution, such as interest free loans, grants and Feed In Tariffs, encouraging renewable energy schemes that often greatly favour community projects. These could provide ongoing cost savings and create a positive influence on other local sustainable developments.

We are proposing a donation of 0.5p for every KWhr, which would amount to an estimated £450pa for each parish, if the turbines perform as predicted (90,000 KWhrs).

More information

The easiest way to see the full details is to download them from the internet at the following address;

www.kirtonfarm.co.uk/renewableenergy.htm

Or you can access this page through a link on one of our websites;

www.kirtonfarm.co.uk (Link to turbine plans is on the home page)

www.hairypotplants.co.uk (Link to turbine plans is on the right hand side of the home page)

From here you can print off any paper copies you may need and copy the files to disc if required.

There are two files, the project description and site notes with lots of text detail with a few images (approx 1.3MG) and the second is a series of photos from the surrounding area of the views to the site including scaled images of the turbines incorporated into some shots (approx 9MB). These are the support documents put together for the planning application.

Your parish council should be able to supply copies on paper or computer disk of the documents. We can also supply these ourselves although we are trying to keep the amount of printing we do to a minimum (there are a lot of pages!) We can be contacted by email on nurseries@kirtonfarm.co.uk or by phone on 01962 776493 and fax on 01962 776246.

We would be happy to arrange to show groups of people around the nursery & potential turbine site, by appointment. Visits can be arranged either during the week, or at the weekend, just let us know and we will check the diary. The company who would install the turbines do have a similar installation already operating on a farm near Banbury (same model except it has a pylon style tower rather than a single post, and there is only one turbine there at the moment). They have said that they would be happy to organise a viewing if requested. It is about one hours' drive away. We have visited the site on a windy day ourselves and it is interesting to see, but there is always the chance that the wind might not blow!

On a practical point, from our position it would be helpful if any questions, visit requests or responses were channelled through your local parish council contacts who should have been informed of the proposals and will, I'm sure, be able to organise a coordinated response. There is a lot of detailed background information in the support documents that should hopefully answer most questions. Should you wish to make direct contact we would be happy to deal with any questions, although we may at times be tied up running the nursery, so please bear with us.

We really believe that renewable energy generation will play a vital role in the future as the world attempts to move away from burning fossil fuels. We are fortunate to have access to a prime site, and the opportunity to set up a local, renewable, clean energy source, as well as promoting further sustainability projects in the local community. We hope you will see this as an opportunity for positive progress not to be missed and take an active role in supporting it.

We look forward to hearing from you.

Regards

Derek & Caroline Taylor