



**BLACKBURN**  
*with*  
**DARWEN**  
BOROUGH COUNCIL

# **Wind Turbine Development in Blackburn with Darwen**

**A Guide for Developers**

**May 2013**

# 1 Introduction

- 1.1 Blackburn with Darwen, in common with most authority areas in the south and west Pennines, has areas which experience highly favourable conditions for wind turbine development. The combination of large areas of open upland, consistent wind conditions and relative proximity to core infrastructure presents opportunities for turbine development on all scales, from small scale individual generators supplying electricity to a single farm, to large scale commercial wind farms providing significant amounts of power to the national grid.
- 1.2 The Council recognises the environmental benefits that wind energy offers, notably in reducing carbon emissions by lessening the requirement for fossil fuel-powered generation. However it is also the case that wind turbine development can bring environmental disbenefits, in the form of visual and other impacts on the countryside, and impacts on neighbours living close by.
- 1.3 The Blackburn with Darwen Local Plan, adopted in 2002, contains a policy framework for assessing proposals for wind turbine development in Saved Policy ENV9. The principles underpinning this policy, and the issues which it invites the decision-maker to consider, remain broadly in line with those set out in the National Planning Policy Framework.
- 1.4 The Council wishes to ensure that planning applications for wind turbine development are dealt with as predictably and as transparently as possible. This document is a “Developer’s Guide” to wind turbine development in Blackburn with Darwen, and sets out how the Council will approach the following key issues in applying Saved Policy ENV9:
  - Landscape impact, in particular the sensitivity of the landscape to wind turbine development
  - Cumulative impact
  - The impact of turbines on near neighbours, with particular regard to the distance between turbines and residential properties
  - Strategic views in the Borough
  - The environmental benefits offered by a turbine installation

## 2 Key Planning Issues

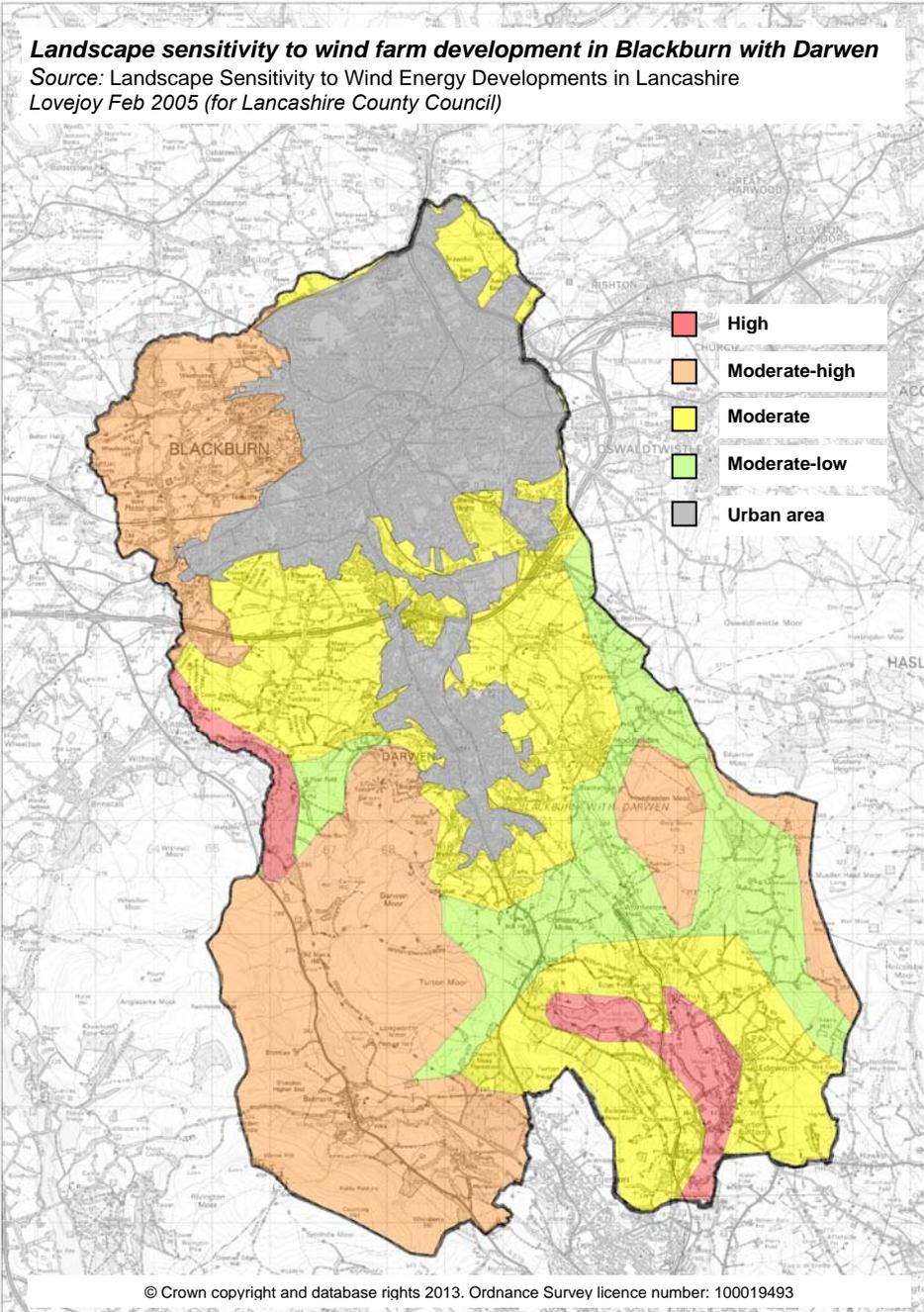
### Overall approach

- 2.1 In general terms, the local and national policy framework for wind turbine development invites the decision-maker to determine the balance between the environmental benefits of wind energy development, and any disbenefits arising from the presence of the turbines and associated infrastructure.
- 2.2 In making this assessment, the Council will use the most up-to-date and accurate information available, both to characterise any impact, and to determine the level of environmental benefit offered by a development.
- 2.3 Irrespective of any guidelines or benchmarks set out in this Developer’s Guide, the Council will always determine any proposal for wind turbine development on its own merits, having regard to the specific circumstances of the case.

**Landscape Impact**

*Saved Policy ENV9: “no unacceptable adverse visual impact and does not unacceptably undermine the character of the landscape”*

2.4 A key consideration for the Council in determining applications for wind turbine development is the impact of the proposal on the landscape. This will always depend on specific circumstances, but a key starting point for the Council’s consideration will be the evidence that is available on the sensitivity of particular landscape areas to turbine development. The diagram below and illustrates the general pattern of landscape sensitivity in Blackburn with Darwen. Turbine development is more likely to be acceptable from a landscape perspective if it is in areas of lower sensitivity. Turbine development within or affecting areas of high sensitivity will rarely if ever be acceptable.



## Cumulative Impact

*Saved Local Plan para 12.37: "The Council will in any case be concerned about the cumulative impact of similar developments and this will be a material consideration..."*

- 2.5 Consideration of cumulative impact will form an explicit part of the Council's assessment of landscape impact under Saved Policy ENV9. In addressing this issue the Council will consider the "in combination" effect of a turbine proposal along with others already constructed or benefitting from planning permission, both within the Borough and outside as appropriate.
- 2.6 In order to facilitate this assessment, the Council may require applicants to supply a Zone of Theoretical Visibility plan showing the proposed turbines and others complete or with planning permission; and will require any photomontages or other illustrations to incorporate all other proposed or existing turbine developments, including those not yet constructed.
- 2.7 What constitutes an unacceptable cumulative impact will depend on the specific circumstances of a case; but issues that the Council will consider include whether there is a perception that an area is dominated by wind turbines, the extent to which one or other turbine development is always in view, and whether a development will extend the extent of the landscape in an area that is affected by wind turbines.
- 2.8 Turbine proposals which create an unacceptable cumulative impact will be considered to have an unacceptable adverse visual impact and therefore to conflict with Criterion 1(i) of Saved Policy ENV9.

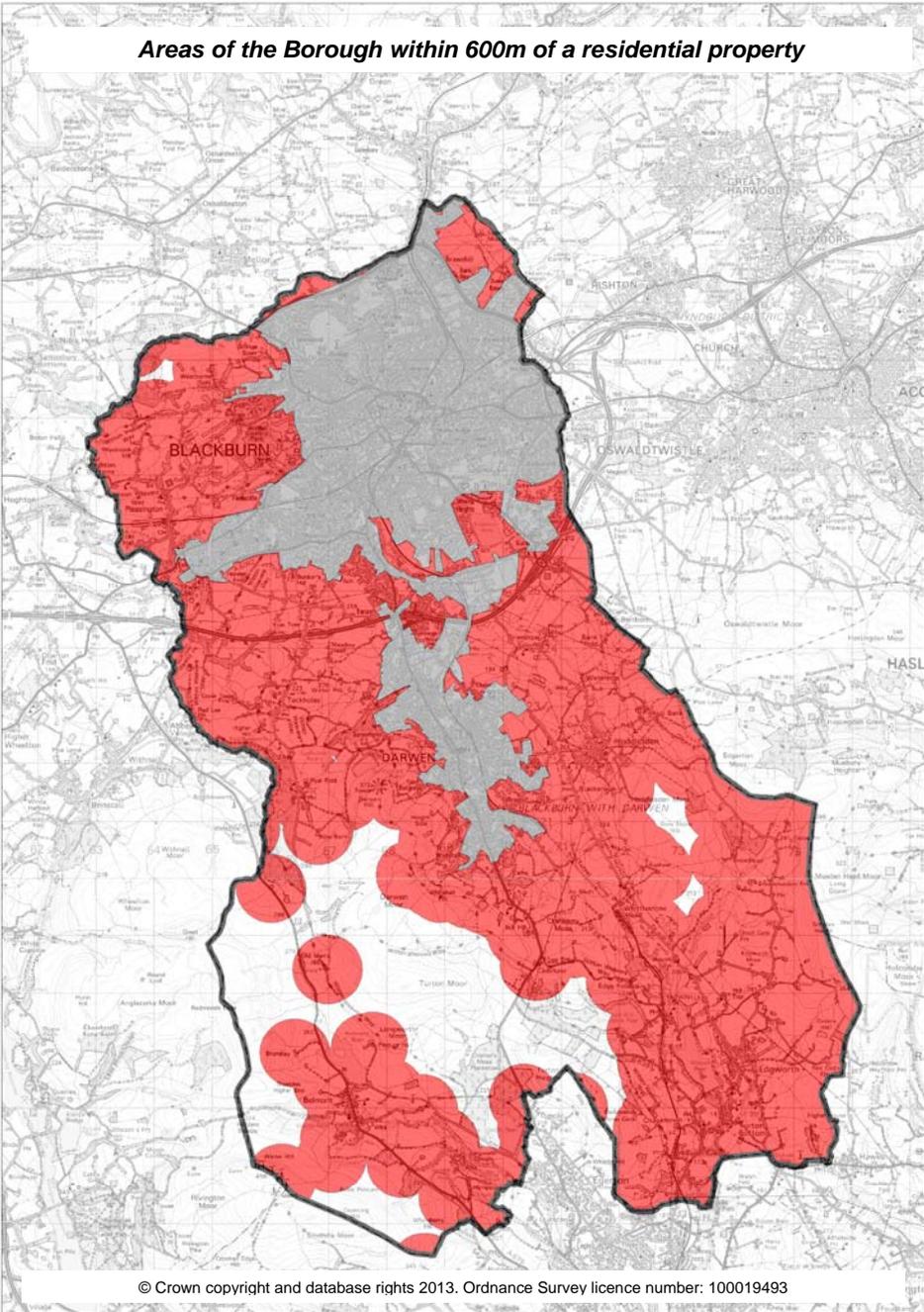
## Relationship to Residential Properties

*Saved Policy ENV9: "no unacceptable adverse impact on the amenity of neighbouring occupiers"*

- 2.9 Wind turbines have the potential to impact on occupiers of nearby residential properties in a variety of ways. These include visual dominance, noise, shadow flicker and light reflection. The nature and extent of these impacts is site-specific, and the Council will always consider the merits of a specific proposal. In doing so the Council will use the most up-to-date information based on accepted best practice, new research and relevant guidance.
- 2.10 In general terms, the larger the turbine or turbines proposed, the greater the distance that will need to be provided between it and the nearest residential property. The minimum acceptable distance in practice will also be influenced by a range of other factors including topography, orientation and the design of the turbine, and may need to increase or decrease in response to these factors.
- 2.11 As an indication only, the following table sets out benchmark minimum acceptable distances between wind turbines of different sizes (measured to the blade tip at its highest point) and the nearest residential property. These distances may be relaxed significantly if the residential property in question is occupied by the owner of the land on which the turbines sit.

*Indicative minimum acceptable distances between wind turbines and residential properties*

<b>Height of turbine</b>	Up to 50m	50-70m	71-85m	86-99m	100-130m	131-c.150m
<b>Indicative minimum separation distance</b>	275m	440m	490m	540m	600m	700m



## The Expected Benefits of the Proposal

*National Planning Policy Framework Paragraph 98: "When determining planning applications, local planning authorities should: • not require applicants for energy development to demonstrate the overall need for renewable or low carbon energy and also recognise that even small-scale projects provide a valuable contribution to cutting greenhouse gas emissions"*

- 2.12 The Council is clear that any environmental disbenefits of a wind turbine proposal must be weighed against the benefits of the development in terms of reduced carbon emissions. In order to make this balanced judgement, as well as comprehensive information about the effect of the development on the landscape as described above, the Council will also need to be able to accurately assess the magnitude of the environmental benefits likely to arise.
- 2.13 A key issue in this regard is the quantity of electricity that the specific development under consideration can be expected to generate. This can vary significantly as a result of site-specific issues including wind speed and frequency, and any constraints on operation such as a requirement to stop the blades in order to prevent shadow flicker.
- 2.14 As a result, in determining applications for wind turbines, the Council will require applicants to set out both the rated capacity of the turbines, and also the level of efficiency expected to be achieved on the specific site being applied for. Developments where a very low level of efficiency is expected to be achieved will be considered to offer less environmental benefits, and it is this reduced level of benefit that will be considered in the planning balance against any negative impacts.

## Strategic Views

*Saved Policy ENV9: "no unacceptable impact adverse visual impact and does not unacceptably undermine the character of the landscape" and "has no unacceptable impact on ... historical sites / landscapes..."*

- 2.15 Darwen Tower is a Grade II listed building and a key landmark in Blackburn with Darwen. As well as being highly visible from within the urban area of Darwen it is also seen from many more distant locations in the Borough, and contributes significantly to the area's sense of place.
- 2.16 Wind turbine development which interferes with or dominates views of Darwen Tower, either local or distant, will be considered to be contrary to Saved Policy ENV9 by virtue of their impact on landscape character and on the public's appreciation of the heritage asset.

## 3 Community Involvement

- 3.1 Applicants for planning permission for wind turbine development, particularly "commercial" development which will supply power to the National Grid, are encouraged to make early contact with the communities likely to be affected. The Council can assist with this via its Neighbourhood Managers; and applicants should also consider early contact with ward members to explore issues.

- 3.2 The Council is keen to encourage renewable energy developments to come forward in a way that gives communities a greater stake in them. Prospective operators of wind turbine developments are strongly encouraged to explore options for community ownership and similar models. The Council will work with partners to facilitate such partnerships where there is interest from all sides.

## 4 Further Information

- 4.1 Applicants are strongly encouraged to make early contact with the Council to discuss their proposals via the pre-application advice service. This guarantees that applicants are provided with all the relevant information at an early stage, and increases the prospect that a subsequent planning application will be determined rapidly and positively. Information on this service is available on the Council's website via <http://www.blackburn.gov.uk/Pages/Planning-advice.aspx>
- 4.2 The Council has adopted a local validation checklist which sets out the information that is required to be submitted with a planning application. The checklist is available via <http://www.blackburn.gov.uk/Pages/Planning-permission-applications.aspx>
- 4.3 The saved Local Plan and the Council's Core Strategy are available via <http://www.blackburn.gov.uk/Pages/Planning-policies.aspx?>