Green Belt Justification

In line with national and local planning policy, development in the Green Belt will only be permitted where it can be demonstrated that it will maintain the openness and character of the Green Belt designation, or where very special circumstances have been demonstrated which justify the development within the Green Belt.

PPG2 Greenbelts outlines the following:
Paragraph 1.5 of PPG2 states the five purposes of including land in Green Belts:
• To check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas;
• To prevent neighbouring towns from merging into one another;
• To assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment;
• To preserve the setting and special character of historic towns; and
• To assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land.

Regarding operational development such as wind turbines, the carrying out of operations and the making of material changes in the use of land are inappropriate development unless they maintain openness and do not conflict with the purposes of including land in the Green Belt. In very special circumstances development of this nature is acceptable where it can be demonstrated that the benefits of the proposal clearly outweigh the harm to the Green Belt.

Paragraph 3.2 notes that very special circumstances to justify inappropriate development will not exist unless the harm by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm, is clearly outweighed by other considerations.

The above policy is reflected within the Barnsley Unitary Development Plan. Policy GS8 states that within the Green Belt the construction of new buildings will not be permitted, except in very special circumstances, unless it is for the following purposes:

a) Agriculture or forestry
b) Essential facilities for outdoor recreation, for cemeteries, or for other uses of land which preserve the openness of the Green Belt and which do not conflict with the purposes of including land in it.
c) The replacement of existing dwellings in compliance with Policy GS8E.

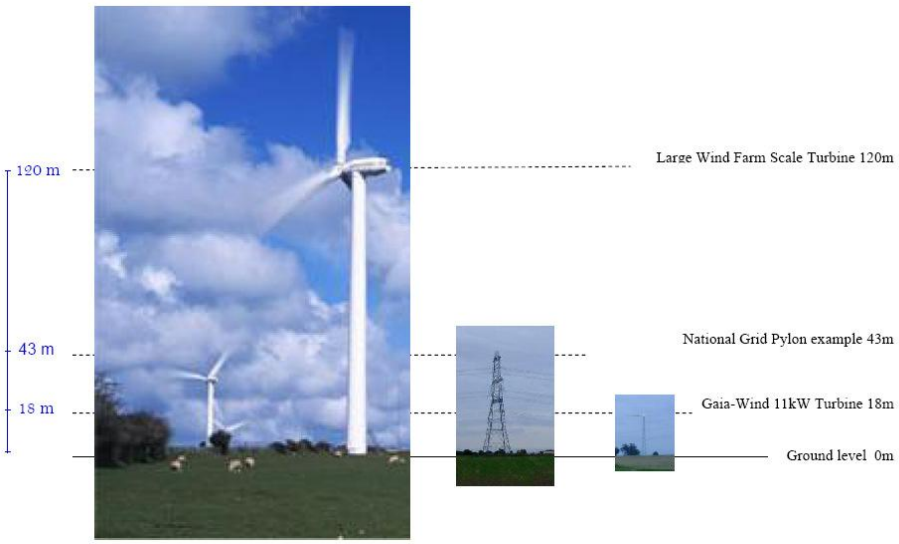
The proposed wind turbines do not fall within one of these categories but would be classed as operational development. Operational development is inappropriate development, which by definition causes harm to the Green Belt. It is therefore necessary for the applicant to demonstrate that very special circumstances exist which outweigh the harm caused to the Green Belt and justify the development in this location.

The proposal does not conflict with the purposes of including land within the Green Belt. The turbines would be located in relatively close proximity to the existing built development of the farmstead, which is located within the Green Belt to the west of Oxspring. The entirety of the site lies within the Green Belt and there is no land within the applicant's ownership on which the turbines could be located which lies outside of the Green Belt. Wind turbine developments, and indeed renewable energy developments in general, can only be developed where the resource exists. Wind turbines depend upon a frequent, clean (i.e. turbulence free) flow of air in order to produce any significant quantity of energy. Obstructions such as buildings cause turbulence, and the higher wind speeds generally associated with higher ground and exposed slopes means that rural areas tend to be more suited to this form of renewable energy than urban areas. However this results in more frequent conflicts with planning constraints such as Green Belts which often seek to protect such areas from any development. This is recognised in PPS22.

PPS22 Renewable Energy (paragraph 13) outlines that exceptional circumstances may include the wider environmental benefits associated with increased production of energy from renewable sources. The amount of clean energy that will be produced by the turbines is estimated at 47,860kWh per year, and the likely carbon saving is over 27 tonnes annually. The turbines will work directly towards the renewable energy generating capacity targets at a national level, fully justifying the development within the Green Belt. Due to the land ownership of the applicant and the fact that the turbines will serve their own working farm, the turbines cannot be reasonably sited outside of the Green Belt designation.

PPS7 Sustainable Development in Rural Areas draws attention to the Government's objectives for the countryside and sets out the key principles of raising the quality of life in rural areas, encouraging more sustainable use of land, and to diversify and promote growth in rural areas. Paragraph 16 states that amongst these are promoting good quality, sustainable development that support development that provides for the sensitive exploitation of renewable energy sources in accordance with the policies set out in PPS22. Since the proposed turbines will produce energy to be used at Sycamore Farm and the farming activities at the site, it will be directly supporting a rural enterprise in line with PPS7. The income generated from the production of this electricity and the offsetting of energy costs will help to support future operations at the farm and can therefore be classed as a form of farm diversification.

In terms of the siting of the turbines within the Green Belt, it seems the main issues will be the impact of the installation on the openness and character of this designation. The proposed turbines are relatively small scale in comparison with wind turbines found at wind farms, and other prominent vertical features in the British countryside such as electricity pylons. The figure below shows this comparison. The 11kW Gaia turbine model was chosen because the form of this turbine is considered to best suited to this landscape setting and the purpose for which it is intended. The mast design, which tapers towards the top, and the colour which is proven to blend in with the sky and surrounding landscape, result in reduced visibility over both mid and long range distances. The nacelle of the turbine is small which reduces the bulk of this section of the turbine and helps again to minimise its impact on the landscape.



In terms of the impact of the turbines on the 'openness' of this Green Belt designation, it is not considered that two small scale turbines, which are of a slender design, will adversely impact this designation. As stated above and as demonstrated in the photomontages in the Design and Access Statement, the Gaia turbines taper towards the top to give reduced visibility over distance. The blades of the turbines are equally slim, and

the pale colour of the whole installation is designed and proven to blend in well with rural surroundings and with the sky in order that the turbines present a limited and non-material effect on the landscape.

With regards the character of this Green Belt designation, it should be noted that the application site is closely related to the farm, and there are other man made features including electricity pylons in the immediately surrounding area. The turbines are intended to serve Sycamore Farm, which is a working farm and will have clear visual links with the built form of the farm complex. In a typical quarter the farm uses approximately 12,250kWh of electricity. This means that the annual electricity consumption of the farm is in the region of 49,000KWh per year.

At a time when energy prices are rising dramatically, with such a high energy usage it is vitally important to the applicant's business to reduce the exposure of the business to such price rises. The applicant has already taken steps to reduce the energy consumption, including investment in energy saving devices and reviewing operational practices, however the most effective way of combating the impact of rising energy prices is to generate electricity on site for supply directly to the farm. The applicant has examined and considered the range of technologies available, including solar panels, and it is clear that wind turbines are the only feasible means of doing this. There are few south facing roofs on buildings at the site, meaning that a roof mounted solar PV system is not a feasible option, and a ground mounted array would take up a significant amount of usable agricultural land. Furthermore the high energy demands of the farm mean that a vast quantity of solar panels would be required to produce any meaningful contribution towards the onsite requirements.

The site benefits from a good wind resource and the proposed turbines would make a significant contribution towards the electricity demand at the site. In addition to the important financial contribution that the development would make to the applicant's business, the applicant is also increasingly aware of the need to demonstrate a commitment to reducing the carbon footprint of the farm and considers this as key to the future success of the business. There is increasing pressure on businesses, particularly in the food industry, to demonstrate environmental good practice. This is being driven by both demanding Government targets and consumers seeking to reduce their own carbon footprints directly by purchasing local produce from carbon neutral producers and suppliers. The UK Low Carbon Transition Plan sets out the carbon reduction requirements for different parts of the economy, and for agriculture this means reducing emissions by the equivalent of 3 million tonnes of carbon dioxide by 2020. It also requires food processing, retail and distribution sectors to play their part by reducing their own emissions but also through influencing emission reductions up the supply chain. As a result both commercial operators and the public are scrutinising the carbon footprints of food producers such as the applicant.

Carbon labelling was introduced to the UK in 2006 by the Carbon Trust and now accounts for £2 billion in annual sales of goods. In addition, the Government have already announced a new scheme to highlight the carbon footprint of food produce on food labels, and this is the direction in which the food industry is inexorably heading. As an energy intensive business, it is therefore vital for the applicant to reduce the carbon footprint of their business if it is to be able to survive and compete successfully in the future.

As explained above, the turbines will help to support this rural business by providing a clean and renewable source of energy, and by providing an additional source of income for the farm. The turbines should therefore be viewed as modern pieces of farming technology which are wholly in keeping with the character of the landscape in which they are set.

In summary, the installation of the turbines will have a limited and non-material impact on the openness and character of the Green Belt. Very special circumstances have been demonstrated which outweigh this limited harm to the Green Belt and justify this development. In summary these are:

- The clean, renewable electricity that will be produced by the turbines, which will work directly towards meeting national renewable energy generation targets;
- The amount of carbon emissions that will be saved by the operation of the turbines;
- The turbines will work directly to produce electricity for a rural enterprise. The additional income generated and the savings in fuel bills will be used to support future operations at the farm and can therefore be classed as a form of farm diversification in line with national planning policy.
- The absence of any land outside of the Green Belt on which the turbines could be located.