

CONSULTATION

Philosophy

Consultation has been an integral component in the development of the wind farm project. WEL adopted a philosophy of consulting extensively and proactively with the surrounding landowners and key stakeholders in the community. This has enabled issues of concern to be communicated back to the project team and where possible, addressed by way of design changes, conditions or information. The final application will therefore reflect, as much as possible, the concerns of the local community.

Methods

WEL adopted a consultation strategy which involved identifying all key stakeholders and landowners located within 5 kilometres of the site. Contact was made with all parties early on in the process and well before the various technical studies were undertaken. Initial communication was via letter, which was then followed up with a phone call and a personal visit to the property involved. Approximately 30 meetings have been held with landowners and key stakeholders since May 2006. A Public Open Day was held in May to provide an opportunity for anyone to speak to project team members about their area of expertise and have their questions documented. A follow up Public Open Day (27 November) provided an opportunity for the project team to discuss their findings with local residents.

Results

The consultation has resulted in a clear understanding of the issues of concern to the parties. Local landowners have been primarily concerned with potential visual and noise effects of the wind turbines followed by effects on property values.

Transit New Zealand has been concerned with the extent of heavy traffic using the State Highway network and the safety implications of any viewing platform area. The Department of Conservation has been interested in effects on birds and the options for environmental mitigation to be undertaken. Federated Farmers were primarily interested on behalf of their members in the operational aspects of the wind farm and the route of any electricity line feeding into the wind farm. Whaingaroa Harbour Care was supportive but wished to see adequate sediment control measures in place. The Whaingaroa Environment Centre was interested in alternative energy sources in general and the manner in which WEL could engage with the Raglan community on that issue.

Actions Taken

Areas of key concern have been communicated to the project team members. The location of dwellings where the landowner expressed concern over visual or noise issues were passed onto the Consultant Acoustic Engineer and the Consultant Landscape Architect for inclusion in their studies. Visits were then made to the locality or actual property to further investigate the issues raised. The results of the both the Noise and Visual Effects studies were passed to the Valuation consultants for inclusion in their respective reports on each property.

In response to the concerns raised about the proximity of the turbines, and in particular turbine 22, this was moved away to an alternative position. Due to the general concern about the visibility of the proposal, along with economic considerations, the heavy vehicle access route was relocated to the south western corner of the site on the formed and unformed sections of Plateau Road.

Due to general concerns raised about the need to put “something back” into the Te Uku community, WEL has actively explored the issue with local people and organisations. This has resulted in a community mitigation package that will be funded by WEL and centered in the Te Uku Community.

In addition an environmental mitigation package has been agreed with the Department of Conservation to provide funding resources for environmental work in the Pirongia Forest Park.

Conclusion

As a result of the consultation undertaken for this project a clear understanding has developed of the issues of most concern to the stakeholders. These have been addressed where possible and conditions or mitigation offered where the options to avoid or remedy are not available. Ongoing communication with the Te Uku community is essential and WEL proposes to form a Community Liaison Group following the grant of consent. This group would ensure that the community could effectively communicate with WEL as it constructs the wind farm and implements the community mitigation package.