BGA WIND TURBINE POLICY

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1 Background

1.1 Gliding as a sport and recreational activity has developed over the last 100 years and is now well-established in the UK and many other countries. The Sports Councils recognise the sport of gliding and the BGA as the national governing body for the sport. In the international sporting context, British pilots based at UK clubs have over the last 50 years been successful in competitions and the UK is recognised as a leading nation in the sport.

1.2 The BGA is the governing body responsible for the conduct and safety of the sport of gliding in the UK. It currently operates from over 80 sites and has around 7,000 flying members owning between them some 2,300 gliders, which make over 320,000 flights a year. In a good year UK glider pilots fly between 1 and 1.2 million kilometres on planned 'cross country' flights, during which pilots travel between 50 and 750 kilometres in one flight. In addition to the 7,000 flying members of UK clubs, there are a further 2,000 club members who fly only occasionally or contribute through non-flying roles. There are also some 27,000 people each year who take a glider flight, either as a one-off experience or as an initial step to deciding to take up gliding.

1.3 In March 2013, the Government published its Aviation Policy Framework, which included the following comment: "The business and general aviation (GA) [sector] is important to the UK. The sector delivers vital services, including search and rescue, mail delivery, …. as well as underpinning the training of future pilots, ground-based aircraft engineers and technicians. The sector also covers a wide range of activities, from corporate business jets and commercial helicopter operations through to recreational flying in small private aircraft, including gliders."

2 Statement of Intent

2.1 As the national governing body of the sport, the BGA supports its member clubs' interests and the interests of gliding as a whole in all matters relevant to the sport nationally or to individual clubs locally.

2.2 The BGA will always seek to help and support its member Clubs and will, where appropriate, respond robustly to planning applications.

2.3 Although affiliated to the British Gliding Association, each member Club is a separate legal entity and may therefore have a different policy in relation to Wind Turbines.

3 Purpose of the Policy

3.1 Clubs typically establish their operations in rural areas at existing airfields or on specially developed sites. There are numerous areas which would potentially be suitable either for gliding or for wind turbines. This leads to inevitable potential conflict at some sites.

3.2 The BGA is aware that the prime sites for wind turbines, which are well away from conflict with other activities, have largely been used, so the developers are now likely to be looking at sites that are closer to conflicting activities such as aviation.

3.3 This policy has been produced to set out the BGA's position in relation to renewable energy, potentially detrimental planning proposals and the way that the BGA will seek to assist in the resolution of issues where there is potential for conflict with gliding activity.

4 Policy Statement

4.1 In the context of climate change, the BGA recognises the need for renewable energy and for sustainability.

4.2 Where possible, the BGA encourages clubs to negotiate with developers and planning authorities in order to reach a mutually acceptable outcome which allows the development to proceed in some form without prejudicing the safety of the club's operations or causing loss or inconvenience to the club.

4.3 The BGA will encourage clubs to mitigate the risks arising from planned turbine developments in the following ways:

- Mitigation through modification of the development proposal – work with the developer to remove, resite or minimise obstructions;
- Operational Mitigation – changes to gliding clubs' operating patterns, briefings, training practices, or emergency procedures, provided that such changes are practical and safe in the particular context;

4.4 However in some cases, there will be no mitigating action that can be taken to reach an acceptable level of risk.

4.5 Where appropriate and necessary, the BGA supports its member clubs in objecting to potential developments. This will usually be in situations where the development could cause danger or where pilots experience, or perceive, an increase in difficulty when using a club site, or where significant inconvenience to gliding activity or flying operations could lead to a loss of utility at a club site, or elsewhere.

5 Principles

5.1 The BGA recognises that each case is different and will consider each according to the potential impact on gliding activity or club flying operations.

5.2 Gliding clubs are run by volunteers and it is rare for them to have members with expertise in planning or related matters. They may, in critical cases, have to engage professional experts to advise and assist. Dealing with and responding to planning applications therefore creates significant workload and cost to the clubs.

5.3 The density of gliding activity tends to be higher around the site where the gliders launch from and land. Gliders are launched at the start of a flight by a winch, by being towed by a light aircraft or by using an integral stowable engine. After launch, gliders need to find sources of rising air if they are to remain airborne. If found, flights can cover great distances. Flights of several hundred miles are quite usual. At most sites, a higher concentration of gliders may be found within a range of 5 miles, with pilots undertaking training flights, or simply choosing to fly in the local area, rather than undertaking a flight across country.

5.4 Risks from wind turbines affecting gliding and glider towing operations are likely to be in the following areas:

- Physical Obstruction
- Turbulence
- Cumulative effects
- Effects on other aviation, where other types of aviation re-route to avoid a hazard, increasing the volume of aviation traffic and creating choke points.

Turbines and associated anemometer masts are most likely to be an issue if near a gliding site, but may also be an issue en route, for example in mountain areas near 'ridge runs', where pilots use the rising air associated with hills, to fly for long distances, sometimes at low level and high speed.

5.5 There are aggravating factors that can significantly increase the risk arising from obstacles. These include:

- Adverse weather conditions: for example reduced visibility from showers or low sun; or low cloud base increasing aviation traffic density below the cloud;
- Low experience pilots or visitors to a site, who may not have the local knowledge and experience to be capable of dealing with the associated risks;
- Competitions, where glider density is likely to be high, or other high performance flights. In these contexts, gliders often descend to land at a site on a straight, shallow glide from many miles away. CAA Policy and Guidance on Wind Turbines CAP 764, Issue 6, para 4.4 provides further details on the level of risk and the BGA's policy in this context. See link.

These factors are further aggravated by the legal requirements of the Air Navigation Order and Rules of the Air, which include regulations regarding safe distance from ground level obstacles.

5.6 There are areas at a distance from club sites which may be used by gliders. It is important to understand the reasons why there may be potential conflict in these areas:

- Gliders may use lift on or above mountain ridges anywhere outside controlled airspace;
- Gliders may fly below a ridge and upwind of it in the rising air;
- Gliders flying along a ridge line may be slightly upwind or downwind of the ridge line and need a safety margin from any turbines.

Therefore the BGA is likely to:

- oppose any development where turbines are proposed close to any ridge line that is known to be used by glider pilots;
- advise clubs near ridge-top developments to carry out a risk assessment and develop procedures, training and pilot briefings accordingly.

5.7 The BGA concurs with comments made in CAP 764, Issue 6, para 2.65 (see link) about the visibility of anemometer masts and the need, in some locations, to equip them with aids to increase their daytime visual conspicuity. Therefore, for safety reasons, the BGA strongly recommends that all anemometer masts, erected for the purposes of the wind turbine industry within 5k of a gliding site, should have visibility markings.

6 Summary of Responsibilities

6.1 The BGA Executive Committee is responsible for ensuring that this policy exists, is kept up-to-date and is followed, and for dealing with any actual or potential breaches.

6.2 The BGA Chief Executive has the overall responsibility for the implementation of the Wind Turbine Policy.

6.3 The BGA Development Committee Chairman, as designated by the BGA Chief Executive, has the overall responsibility for ensuring that the policy is effectively implemented.

6.4 The policy will be implemented immediately following BGA Executive Committee agreement and will be made available to:

- all BGA Member clubs;
- members of the public by publication on the BGA website.

6.5 Further information is available from the BGA website www.gliding.co.uk

7 Review

7.1 Once approved, the policy will apply for 3 years before a formal review takes place, unless any proposal to the BGA Executive Committee, or legislation change, or change in available data requires an interim review and/or amendment.

7.2 The effectiveness of the policy will be reviewed by the Chief Executive and the Development Committee Chairman on an annual basis, with the results being reported to the BGA Executive and publicised as appropriate.

Signed

Dave Latimer

Chairman BGA Development Committee and Member BGA Executive