NOTICE OF MOTION NUMBER: 36

Item: 7.1 **Ref:** WO/2023/02763
Title: Supplementary Submission on Winterbourne Wind Project Amendment Report
Author: Councillor McCoy
Attachment: No.

Background:

As advised by the General Manager, Walcha Council still has the opportunity to make a supplementary submission to the Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure (DPHI) on the Winterbourne Wind Farm (WWF) Amendment Report. This report asks Council to consider the inclusion of two additional items relating to heavy vehicle access and visual impact.

Report:

Heavy Vehicle Access

WC Submission to the Amended EIS states that…."*Whilst it is acknowledged that Thunderbolts Way represents the amended access route for all OSOM and most other heavy vehicles, it is requested DPHI considers the importance of Thunderbolts Way to the broader New England region when assessing the impacts of the proposal, noting Thunderbolts Way is the main highway in and out of Walcha.*

Thunderbolts Way represents the fastest route for emergency services to Walcha from the nearest main hospital in Armidale, serving hundreds of daily commuters and forms the only point of road access for dozens of major primary producers in the region.

Thunderbolts Way is considered relatively bushfire and flood resistant and often becomes a critical point of access for the Walcha community, in the event that the Oxley Highway is closed. In addition to this, Thunderbolts Way becomes the main alternate route between the New England and Hunter and Sydney regions whenever there is a major accident on the New England Highway.
WC considers it imperative that any use of Thunderbolts Way for the construction of the Project (and any other SSI projects) mitigates impact the to the existing community traffic access. Walcha Council firmly believes the current draft of the Traffic Impact Assessment (ERM 2024) doesn't provide enough detail in this regard."

The WWF amended EIS report "concluded that the road network is able to accommodate the expected vehicle types and traffic volumes during the construction, operation, and decommissioning phases of the Project subject to the proposed road upgrades and traffic management measures."

While this statement might refer to road capacity, alignment, width and existing traffic volumes, it does not mention the structural capacity of the road pavement to cope with the expected traffic volumes on Council's local roads - Jamieson Street corner to Emu Creek Rd and the project. While it may be possible to use Council's public road network, it doesn't mean that the WWF proposed traffic route is the best and most economical.

The WWF Report indicates that the developer is now looking at ways to limit the need to use public roads to gain access, evidenced by their plan to build and make use of a private road network to access the

construction sites. Given this approach, it may be timely to ask the developer to consider using an eleven-kilometre section of Hillview Road to gain access to the end of one of their private roads which could then be used to access the rest of their construction sites. Heavy vehicles travelling south from Uralla could then avoid Walcha Council's section of Thunderbolts Way as well as sealed sections of Jamieson Street, Emu Creek Road and Winterbourne Road.

While Hillview Road is not suitable for OSOM vehicles, with some minor widening it could be used to import the thousands of tonnes of sand, cement and reinforcing needed to build the foundations for the wind towers.

This option would amend the heavy vehicle route that currently goes from Uralla, (along Thunderbolts Way to Walcha, turns left at Jamieson St then progresses along a sealed road to the project area) and make use of Hillview Road, 22.3km north of Walcha. Hillview Rd has the potential for a more direct, less populated, more economical route to the project area.

In WWF's traffic impact study, Hillview Rd is mentioned, but is not given serious consideration. It states:

Table 5: Local Road Network

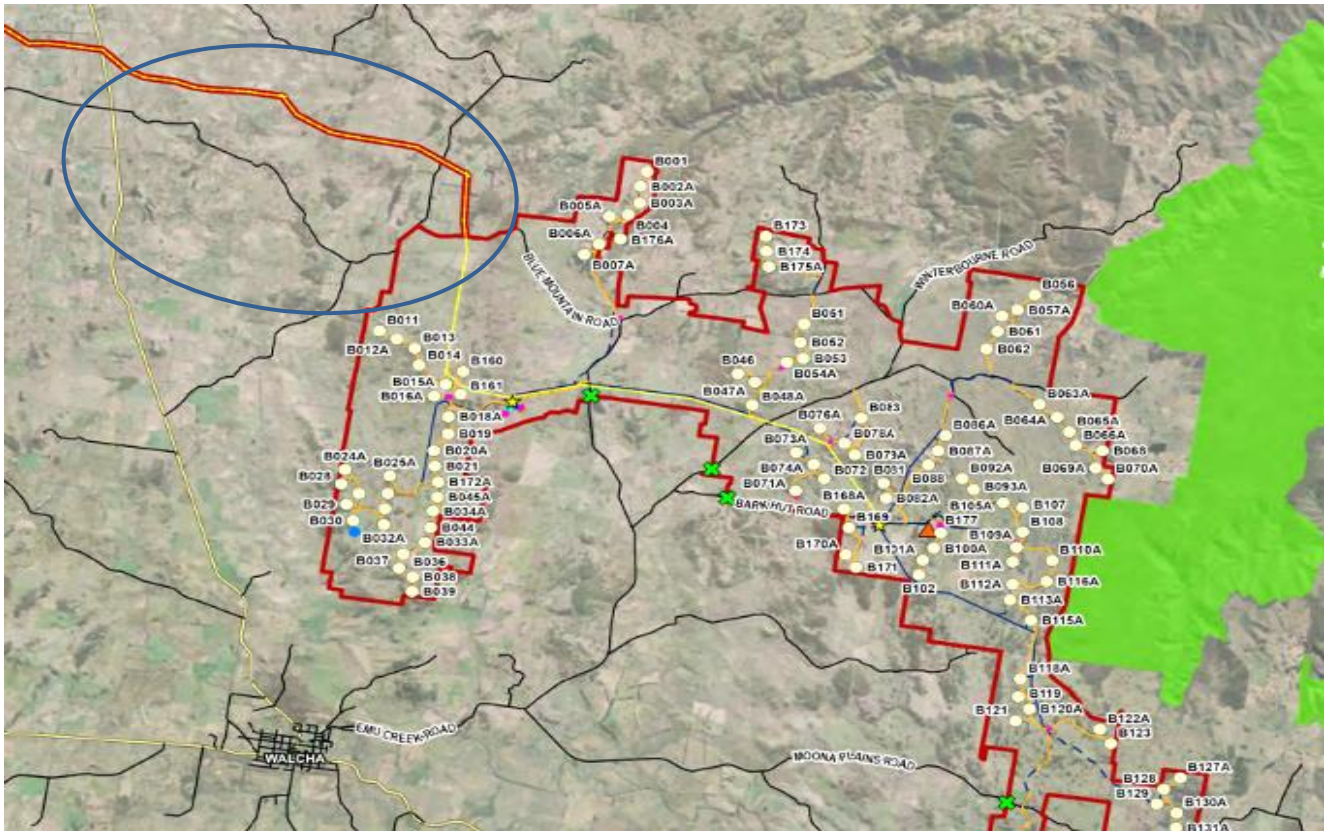
Road	Typical Surface	Typical Width	Alignment
Hillview Road	Unsealed	3.1 – 6.0m	Extends in a general northeast-southwest alignment between Thunderbolts Way and Gostwyck Road. The road width varies along the road but is generally wider toward the western side (near Thunderbolts Way) and narrower toward the east where it reduces to a single lane width.

Table 19: Local Road Network Assessment Summary

Local Road	Project Vehicles	Existing Road Width	Peak Hour Proposed Traffic (vph)	Assessment
Hillview Road	LV, HV (transmission line)	3.1-6.0m	9	Not proposed for regular use by project traffic. Existing road width is sufficient to accommodate light vehicles and low levels of heavy vehicle traffic (average 1 movement per hour) which would generally travel during the middle of the day. It is noted that no B-Doubles are proposed to utilise the road. The Applicant has advised that suitable traffic management measures will be implemented if required to coordinate vehicle movements in each direction.

Thunderbolts Way / Hillview Road	
Facing north	Facing south
	

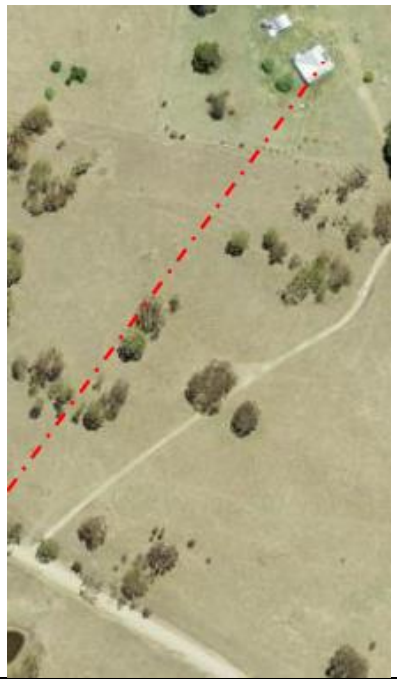
On Thunderbolts Way, 22.3km North of Walcha, the southbound lane, has a left turn into Hillview Road.



Hillview Road, from Thunderbolts Way to the Mirani Road intersection is 9.6km. This section of road for the most part, is already between 5m and 6m wide and is well constructed from good all-weather gravel. It passes 6 homes that are set well back from the road (75m to 320m)

Chainage	Image	Comment
0.6km		The first bend from Hillview Rd turnoff. There is no vegetation on this side of the road. These are the only trees in the vicinity. Prior to this there is open, unvegetated farmland.
0.6km 0.8km		Out from the above corner is a house. At a setback of 75m from the road, it is the closest of all the houses. A 300m section of road would need to be sealed to reduce dust This is followed by a second house set back 200m from the road. Again, dust suppression would be needed

1.6km		There is a stand of small to medium scrub with 1 or 2 larger trees. Many of the smaller trees are dead. The stand of trees goes for about 500m, much of it off to the side of the road. The road at this point is narrow and would need widening
2.3km		At the end of the above stand of trees, is a Telstra access road turnoff to the left, with a standard overhead powerline.
2.7km		The road widens out to about 6m. There is a third house which is set back 185m from the road, and a well-treed road reserve. The occasional limb overhangs the road. Dust suppression would be needed.
3.3km		There is a slight hollow, with some deciduous trees.

3.6km		The whole road has a good all-weather gravel base with flat to small rolling land. The road narrows to about 5m and becomes clear and open.
4.0km		Location of the fourth house, set back 320m from the road.
4.8km		A slight bend leading into a bigger bend with a culvert. The bends are sweeping but the narrow culvert would need widening.
5.45km		The road then crosses a causeway and cattle grid and moves through unfenced land with a slightly wider than 5m pavement. Replacing the grid with a wider grid or fencing the road reserve should be considered.

		For the next 4km the road widens out to about 6m again and crosses 3 more cattle grids. There is one corner that has a bend/cattle grid/tree combination that may need improvement. There is also the fifth house which is 180m from the road.
9.6km		The road passes the Mirani private road turnoff and a house 140m from the road.

A connection to the WWF private road would be made a further 1.4km along Hillview Road at the location where the proposed WWF transmission intersects the road.

As well as reducing heavy vehicles on local roads, the Hillview route passes only five houses. Travelling via Jamieson Street brings into play 26 houses, the preschool, school bus routes, John Oxley Sportsground, the Walcha Showground, local businesses and general residential traffic.

While using gravel roads to transport heavy vehicles to and from the development will result in slower travel speeds, the route via Hillview Road is, on average, 20kms shorter which will more that make up for the slower speeds.

The other advantage of using gravel roads for access will be the cost to the developer of maintaining the road during the project's construction as the cost of maintaining a sealed road is significantly more than the cost of maintaining a gravel road. The developer will already need to have gravel-road maintenance expertise and equipment on hand to build and maintain the extensive network of internal private roads and so it will not be necessary to hire additional sealed-road maintenance expertise and equipment.

Visual Impact

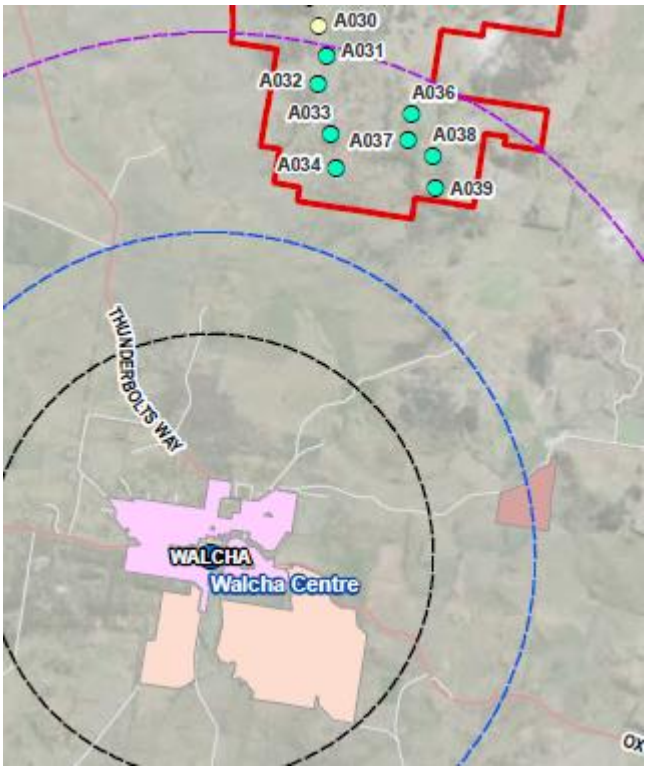
In the original EIS, Appendix E deals with Mitigation and Management of noise and visual impacts. The intent expressed on pages E3 and E4, indicates the willingness of WWF to employ various methods to overcome noise and visual impacts, including

"controlling the location of different turbine types, densities, and layout geometry to minimise the visual impacts", and forming "the lines of turbines ..[so that they]..reflect the contours of the natural landscape as best as possible".

Various factors in the project layout and design were considered "to achieve a visual consistency through the landscape". These factors included "uniformity in colour, design, rotational speed, height, and rotor diameter.

Council's response to the WWF Amended Report stated at point 4 that
"WC acknowledges some reduction in visual impact of wind turbines from the original EIS to the amended Project, however notes that the Project remains within 7kms of the township of Walcha. WC's position is that this distance is still too close and requests that further consideration be given in regards to the Project's proximity to town."

The valley shape of the township of Walcha means that different parts of Walcha have different visual exposure to tall objects and different effects from sound as it echoes across the valley, especially in the cool night air. While a distance of 6.5km should not be a noise issue, it is expected that the tops of the wind turbines will be visible from the hills in the township. It is actually noted in the WWF preliminary visual assessment that "Elevated residential areas offer broader views across the landscape".



It should also be noted that the distance of 6.5km was measured from the centre of town, which means the first turbine location reduces to a distance of approximately 5 km from residents on the northern edge of town.

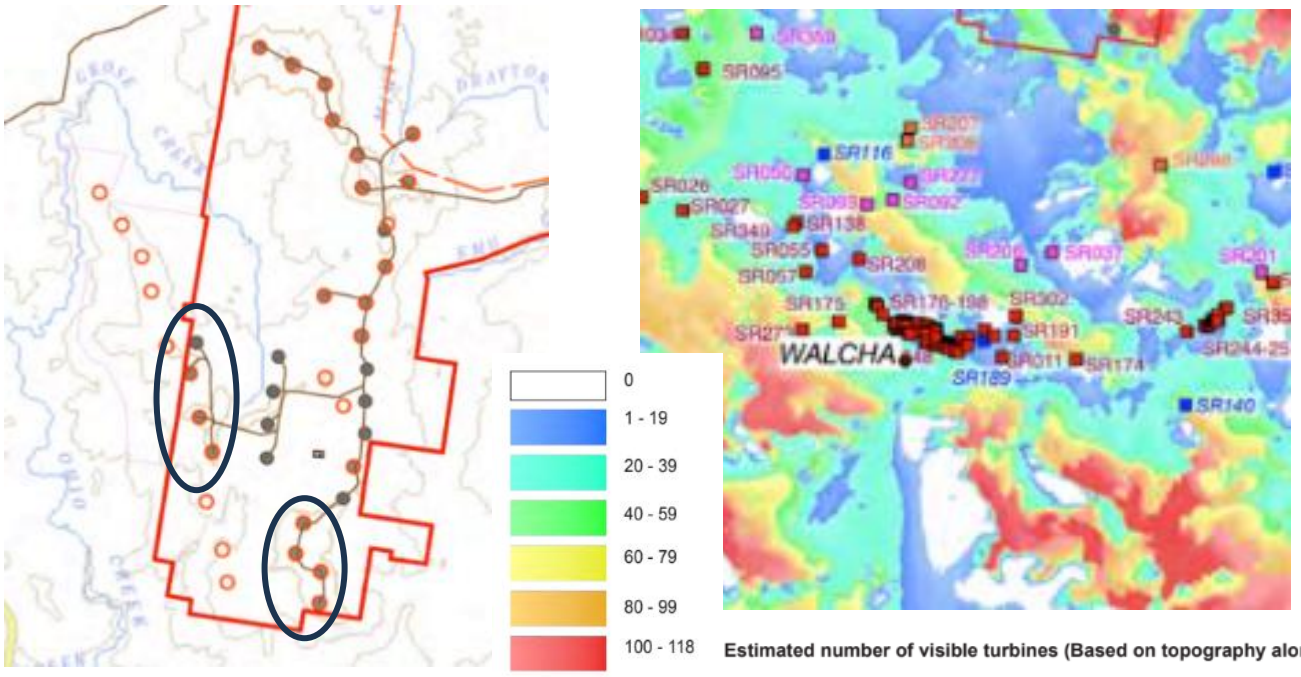
The attached image is from the original project layout, with the distance rings being:
Purple = 8km
Blue = 4.95km
Black = 3.4km

Note that turbines A 031, A032, A033 and A034 have been relocated at a further distance in the amended proposal.

An improvement to the visual amenity of the project could be to revisit the factors (listed previously) that were believed to improve visual amenity. Specifically, the belief that the height of the turbines needs to be the same to be pleasing to the eye. Generally, this is true, but the current layout of the turbines may

lend itself to lowering the height of the turbines closest to Walcha and that are most likely to have an impact on its visual amenity.

The amended project layout



Estimated number of visible turbines (Based on topography alone)

There are 30 turbines in the collection of turbines along the closest hills to Thunderbolts Way or the Walcha township. Eighteen of these are within the radius of 10km from town. Four of these are in a row closest to Thunderbolts Way and 4 more turbines are bunched together in the radius of 8km from the township and a further 12 in the two strings within the radius of 10km from town.

The current specification for the WWF turbines is the V162 – 6.2MW model with a 149m hub height, 230m to tip height, and a production capacity of 6.2MW of electricity.

A reduction in height of the above 4 + 4 "frontline" towers would soften the impact of the project. and lead the eye gradually into the larger turbines which the community are not used to seeing, as up until recently, towers of this size were considered to be somewhat futuristic. The V162 – 6.2MW turbine model also has a version with a hub height of 119m, 30m lower than the proposed turbines, with the same blade sweep and MW capacity.

If the next 12 turbines were also reduced in height, then the visual impact within 10km would be greatly reduced. However, the choice of which turbines to lower, should be determined by the topography of the ridgelines, to maintain the best overall visual impact.

Clearly, WWF has designed the height of the wind turbines to make the optimum use of the wind profile. However, given that these models have a cut-in windspeed as low as 3 m/s, the difference in electricity production of these reduced height turbines would only be determined by the geophysical and meteorological differences at the two heights. If the lower models only produced, say 5MW, which is what many of the older, smaller towers expected, instead of the current rated 6.2MW, then the total project capacity would be reduced from 730MW to around 720MW for the 8 frontline towers or around 706MW if the whole 20 were changed.

MOTION:
That Council make a supplementary submission to the Department of Planning, Housing & Infrastructure (DPHI) on the Winterboune Wind Farm (WWF) Amendment Report asking that the developer consider:

1. **using Hillview Road for all light and heavy vehicle access to the development; and**
2. **lowering the height of the 8 to 20 turbines located within a 10km radius of Walcha**

FURTHER THAT this supplementary submission be supported by appropriate extracts from this report.

Clr SC McCoy
3 December 2024

Management Response:

In accordance with Code of Meeting Practice clause 3.11 the following implications apply to the Notice of Motion as proposed:

Council see the value in the contents of this report and are happy to support the Motion largely as it is written. Additionally, and specifically in regards to the proposed use of Hillview Road which is not in the Walcha LGA, Council reached out to the staff at Uralla Shire Council (USC) who are generally supportive.

USC would further request the following in Walcha's supplementary submission:

1. Hillview Rd is sealed and made appropriate for the type of traffic that it will receive.
2. Intersection of Hillview Rd and Thunderbolts Way is upgraded to suit the expected vehicles turning in and out.
3. Impacted residents are notified and consulted with.

Strategic Implications
This Notice of Motion will allow Council to deliver on the Community Strategic Plan themes noted above.

Policy Implications
There are no policy implications arising from this Notice of Motion.

Legal Implications
There are no legal implications arising from this Notice of Motion.

Financial Implications
Nil.