

Ladies and gentlemen!

Good afternoon! Thank you for giving me this opportunity to share my thoughts with you today.

I'm Mike Caplin, Chairman of the Friston Parish Council. I'm one of a team of residents who find themselves engaged in boring repetitive tasks which are to do, largely, with the review of planning permissions, seeing to the access, or the lack of it, to footpaths, bridleways and pavements in and around the village and parish, ensuring that grass on the green is cut, culverts and ditches are vegetation free and that hedges do not limit access to public access ways. This was a not unhappy rural task until development arrived in the shape (if it has one) of electricity.

I don't know much about this great invisible force. You'll know, from my accent if not my reputation, that I emanate from an area of London in which electricity was welcomed as a gift from heaven bringing nothing but positive benefit to its users following WW2 (with its bombs, blitz, destruction and chaos to life). In 1997, my wife and I made the largest move of our lives and purchased a property in Friston alongside the A1094 at [REDACTED] opposite the junction of the Sloe Lane bridleway with the "motorway" running from the A12 to Aldeburgh. In 1997 it wasn't a motorway. Traffic was less in size and volume and traffic speed was slower (even in the summer). Our reason for selecting the house was that it was affordable and it put us into the area we had come to love after 13+ years of sharing a week's annual summer holiday with our children and close friends and neighbours from where we lived previously in Barking (Essex). My wife retired from her teaching post in Redbridge and involved herself with issues at Aldeburgh Baptist Church and became a governor at the primary school in the town. I continued to commute to London occasionally to pursue my professional role in "The Smoke" and was aided in this by the provision of the bus route from Aldeburgh to Ipswich station via [REDACTED]. I stood on the porch, waited to see the bus approaching and waved it down at my gate, had a pleasant conversational hour with fellow travellers and staff and repeated the journey in the opposite direction later in the day. However, I was fooled by this pretension of paradise. The transport franchise moved from Suffolk Coastal Transport to "Last Buses" (they call themselves First but I call them "Last" with good reason – for the same reason that I've termed our local rail franchise Lesser Anglia) and I was faced by the choice of an unpredictable local dial-it bus service, local taxis (usually busy with unpredictable school runs), driving to Woodbridge (where I could usually be guaranteed a space in the car park at the station) or a 1.5 mile walk along the stream (sorry – bridle path) to Knodeshall for a bus to Saxmundham!

However, this was not the only pretension of paradise afforded me by the area. Soon after accepting the role I now occupy, my colleagues and I were informed that we were to experience the delights of a twelve year period of intense construction within the Friston parish and its neighbours to cope with the electrical supply from off shore wind farms, Euro cabled electricity, and a massive increase in nuclear generated power from Sizewell. Three massive power initiatives during the same period focussed primarily on one parish in Suffolk.

Now, how massive is this area in order to accommodate all this developmental technology? Does it rival the Russian steppes, the mid-west prairies, the Argentinian pampas or the Sahara desert for accommodation size? Well, actually, no: it doesn't. Friston is a small (though opinions vary as to whether it is delightfully formed or not) space squeezed along the Alde and bordered by four or five other parishes. The village itself lacks just about every facility for normal living (it has no shop, post office, bank, GP service or school. It has a (P/T) public house (The Chequers) and two churches St. Mary the Virgin and the Strict Baptist chapel (both architecturally winsome but hardly overcrowded). It has a (disused) windmill and that is Friston. However a number of people call it "home" and love it dearly. They adore its narrow crooked lanes and the limitations in its rural layout (some even find romance in the easy flooding of paths, lanes and tarmacked narrow roads)

because, well, if you're giving way to an oncoming trailer of sugar beet, you have time to enjoy the sun's beams and the incredibly beautiful cloud formations

However, much of this is to disappear if power planning has its way. Rare wild life habitats will disappear, ancient woodland will be lost, the ethos of years of natural development will be catastrophically overturned and replaced by a constructors wilderness. This is the kind of thing you can see at many major developmental sites. It is the kind of vision that faced the residents at Dungeness, Whitstable and Herne Bay when wind and nuclear power was introduced in Kent (although not in such a concentrated manner as is planned for us in East Suffolk). Surely, and this is the purpose of these initial meetings this week, such intensive activity is not necessary in such a concentrated manner in an area which houses vistas of outstanding natural beauty and conservation that bring calm and peace to the busy and overwrought lives of many thousands of people annually who live and work in and holiday in the area.

So why here and why now? Well, we've not been offered any explanations so I'm left to speculate somewhat thus. According to the 2011 Census, 311 adults are numbered as residing in Friston. The area in which the parish stands encompasses some 1871 acres which include 5 acres of inland water, 10 acres of tidal water and 124 acres of foreshore. This means that 311 residents occupy a parish of 9,152,440 sq. yards (i.e. 1 resident to each 29,429 sq.yards – approximately equivalent to the area of 6 football pitches or 3 envisaged SPR wind generated electricity converters/transformers). This makes observation of the parish area for signs of development or unknown and unrecognised activity very difficult and makes the parish, therefore, an ideal site for the kind of development that most people do not desire in the plot next door to where they live (or indeed even a hundred yards or two away). The land contours of the parish are not conducive to “easy build”; the liability of flooding has been amply illustrated this year as has the poor quality of many road structures which will not cope with the friction of the size and weight of much of the vehicular traffic which will wish to use them over the 12+ year build period envisaged.

Looking at the real total cost of the project makes one realise how much money in real terms will be spent on this venture which is designed really to please only the constructing organisations and their shareholders. It must also be born in mind that this venture is only vaguely “stand alone”. Other organisations in similar energy areas are also already actively planning expansions to their operations in the area and, at the moment, there seems to be no cohesive wish to share expertise, operation or user end delivery in order to reduce the potential anti-social and flagrant environmental risk that appears to be being totally ignored by the developers or concealed beneath the label of “mitigation”. Were the envisaged cost of genuine mitigation to be calculated, it would undoubtedly exceed the build cost of the development and, bearing this in mind, would it not be a good idea to take a step back and give interested parties a real opportunity to pool resources and expertise so that an efficient, cost effective power installation of lasting quality and capacity that would meet national, industrial, domestic and environmental requirements could be constructed without the dreadful disunity which the current plans with all their limitations are sure to cause?