

NORFOLK BOREAS

Oulton Parish Council's response at Deadline 7

Oulton Parish Council (OPC) regrets that this submission is late but, in the context of the current coronavirus crisis, most of our energies have had to be deployed elsewhere. The Council hopes that the ExA will exercise its discretion and choose to accept this submission into the examination.

OPC responded to the ExA's revised timetable on 21/3/20 requesting that, in view of the current crisis, the ExA should re-consider the revised timetable, and suspend the Examination, allowing for it to be resumed in full at a later date. The Council is disappointed that such a decision has not so far been reached.

OPC notes the publication of letters from Norfolk County Council and three District Councils, all requesting a postponement of D7, and a further postponement of the end date of the whole examination. Oulton Parish Council urges the ExA to give serious consideration to this request, in light of the unprecedented circumstances in which all tiers of local government currently find themselves, with depleted resources and ever-expanding demands on their services.

In the meantime, the Council would like to have responded fully to the ExA's Written Questions but, in present circumstances, we are only able to respond to the question below:

Q3.16.0.4

All interested parties

Effects on local community

Interested Parties are invited to submit any additional information to assist the ExA in reaching its recommendation to the SoS not covered previously in the Examination, or in the responses provided above.

OPC put this question to the inhabitants of Oulton parish, and what follows are some of the responses we received (names and addresses can be supplied):

"I feel very strongly about these proposals, the impact they will have over a protracted period on day-to-day life in and around Oulton Street and the fact that, in the middle of a lockdown process, applications currently appear to be being pushed through without the opportunity for proper public scrutiny.

The roads in and around Oulton Street are quiet and most of the traffic that does exist is based around agriculture. Additional, large, heavy transport will likely interfere with this traffic, which will have to either compete with construction traffic or be displaced onto other routes, so having a wider impact. Not to mention the additional background noise in an area that is by and large peaceful and not noise-polluted.

Further expansion of the onshore cabling routes into other areas risks opening these up to further extension and development, with other routes coming onshore. There is a risk that the disruption caused could be for much longer than just the period of the current application.

Why is the opportunity of alternative designs not being properly considered? There is the offshore ring main idea which has been mooted in the past and would limit the need for multiple onshore cable connections and the disruption that their installation causes to many communities along their route."

“The thought of the long-term disruption that this will cause, if given the go-ahead, fills me and my family with dread. Oulton Street and the surrounding roads are narrow with no pavements and already busy with farm and other traffic – so it just doesn’t seem plausible that such a major long-term development could be given the go-ahead without having a major impact on residents’ right to quiet enjoyment of their homes and on the safety of pedestrians and other road users. The offshore ring main option – which I understand is being vigorously lobbied for by mid-Norfolk MP and former science minister [REDACTED] – seems the obvious solution if the lives of ordinary people are truly to be taken into consideration.”

“I’m writing to express my concerns over the plans re Norfolk Boreas’ construction site near Oulton. Particularly worryingly I feel this process is being hurried through while the country is at a standstill and distracted because of Covid-19, with only written responses being heard. Any plan which will transform the daily lives of a rural area for an entire decade (as is expected) should surely have a thorough examination.

Clearly the project will have a huge and negative impact on the local environment, population, traffic, pollution and wildlife. Given there are offshore alternatives to this elaborate and disruptive scheme I urge the authorities to consider carefully before granting permission.”

“Surely, the sensible approach to this is for all three supply companies to get together and design a proper ring main instead of acting independently and causing mega disruption all round....

I know this has been put forward before, but it bears repeating!”

“My wife and I would like to register our objection and distress at the very idea that these compounds should be built and operated in this village. Our lovely village and community are going to be decimated should the go-ahead be given to allow this to carry on. Just the logistics of these compounds being set up will have a severe impact with traffic movements to and from, noise and light pollution. This is just to set up the compounds. Once the compounds are up and running that impact will intensify. We would beg that the Examining Authority and others take heed of our plea to take note of our very real distress, and put an end to what is an absurd situation.”

“I understand the need to move into green power and wholeheartedly support this, but I am concerned that the current plans for our area aren’t the best for lessening the impact to the environment. The detrimental effect of the construction work will mean that many years of electrical output will have to be generated before it cancels out the construction impacts and the project becomes genuinely neutral to the environment.

Please work with Norfolk residents to find a better plan, the proposed ring main being actually better for the environment than what these foreign energy companies are proposing currently. “

“My wife and I live alongside Oulton Street in the penultimate cottage at the southern end of the village. We have lived in the village for over fifteen years. During this time we have noticed that the number of farm vehicles using Oulton Street has increased substantially, both in size and volume. The Street has not only become an extempore slip road for vehicles used by the principal farm in Oulton, it now features increasingly as a short cut for industrial farm traffic serving surrounding farms. In addition, during pertinent periods in the annual calendar, this traffic is boosted by a peripatetic work force using their own HGVs for specific harvests. The everyday use of domestic vehicles, both by residents of the village and supplementary passing traffic, has meant that hedgerows along the street have been gouged out to become unplanned passing places. At present there is no point along the village street where a farm vehicle and domestic car can pass each other in safety - one has to give way to the other at all times. When two agricultural vehicles meet, then a dangerous reversing manoeuvre frequently has to be undertaken.

Additionally we have seen a flurry of planning applications from the aforementioned farm, for uses other than food production. One notable application, for an anaerobic digestion plant, went to a comprehensive appeal in 2014. It was refused principally on the grounds of the perceived increased traffic serving to degrade much of the fabric of the village. As no widening of any part of the street has taken place since that hearing, I assume such published protocol remains pertinent to the present planning discussions.

With the present applications citing additional vehicular use being restricted to the southern end of the village - which will provide no tangible respite to resident's own access and egress southwards - it fails to recognize the volume of displaced farm vehicles which will inevitably turn northwards through the built structure of the village in order to avoid potential traffic jams at the southern end.

There is no pavement for individual pedestrians or safe walkways for the many families and young children dispersed throughout the village, and it would be a courageous cyclist trying to traverse Oulton Street if this scheme proceeds. It appears that recreation, exercise, vital communal interaction and the desired reduction to a carbon footprint within the village will succumb to further social compromise due to the pursuit of non-agricultural, short term commercial income.

There must surely be a better planning solution to the necessity of alternative energy provision than the undermining of communal wellbeing within our county."

"I think these plans will have a massive impact on a village that is already having problems with increased size of farm vehicles. The additional long term Heavy Goods Vehicles will cause noise, pollution and damage to hedges, verges and wildlife. Cumulative effects of ALL the various schemes - proposed to be at around the same time - have not, I feel, been adequately considered.

The piecemeal approach to getting 'green offshore' energy ashore seemingly without a proper and efficient plan for connection requires firm decision-making and investment from Government and the National Grid."

"Living as we do on The Street, this disruption of extra traffic would be horrific. The traffic of tractors already shakes our windows; the prospect of a decade of displaced farm traffic causing disruption (plus whatever precedent that sets for allowing huge volumes of traffic through the village in perpetuity) is terrifying. I have a nine year old who likes to ride her bike down the road – that would be impossible due to the very real increased danger from high volumes of traffic. In fact, this prospect means it will last for the rest of her childhood, which is heart-breaking."

*"We all need renewable energy but the choices made as to how it is provided and distributed, should **not** be at the expense of everything else, least of all when you have options.*

Offshore wind energy is a very important part of providing for our energy needs, but how we bring it onshore is equally as important.

It should not be necessary to repeatedly dig up large parts of the Norfolk countryside (so precious to us all) over many years, when there is a viable alternative now and going forward.

All I ask, as a very concerned resident of an area that will be directly affected, is that the detailed proposed alternatives that have been put forward are given very serious consideration, and a fair and transparent process is followed, and due time and attention is given to that, before any decisions are made."

Conclusion

Oulton Parish Council would like it to be noted that many residents expressed their astonishment that they were being asked to respond to these offshore wind farm proposals...*again!* Many have attended consultations, special parish council meetings, Open Floor Hearings and have submitted written representations to PINS on **three** such NSIP proposals over the past **three years**. We are grateful to our residents for responding again to our appeal for their support in our continuing effort to represent their interests.

However, these efforts are produced at considerable cost. The Parish Council resents the huge amount of time that has been taken away over this extended period from its proper duties of improving playgrounds, consolidating footpaths etc. and promoting social cohesion.

But a much greater toll is being taken on residents, who have been living for years now with the high anxiety created by the continuing uncertainty over whether the quality of their lives is about to be damaged for the foreseeable future.

The stakes are high and there is no end in sight – far from it. This is only the first wave, as the recent publication of Equinor’s Scoping Report for the Dudgeon and Sheringham Shoal Extension Project proves. Our residents are appalled, frustrated and fearful.

Oulton Parish Council is saddened to put on the record that these proposals have *already* damaged the emotional wellbeing of our community.
