

NORFOLK BOREAS

Additional submission from Oulton Parish Council

21st April 2020

Oulton Parish Council (OPC) has discovered this week, by chance, that PINS is suddenly receiving a steady flow of “additional submissions” from *un-registered* interested parties, regarding the request made by many *Registered* Interested Parties (IPs) to temporarily suspend this Examination during the Covid-19 pandemic.

We are highly concerned that, given the currently competing and urgent calls on the attention of every tier of government and other statutory consultees, many stakeholders will be **completely unaware** of the ExA’s acceptance of this ‘evidence’. Most councils, certainly, have not the leisure right now to ‘trawl’ the Norfolk Boreas website, on the off-chance that something important might be happening, and neither will they have the resources to respond.

As IPs are not actively notified by PINS of the acceptance of new submissions into the examination, this situation does represent a significant threat to the **fairness and transparency** of the process. Covid-19 has distorted and truncated every significant function of normal society - and the planning process is no exception.

The letters submitted to PINS during the past few days would appear to have been written entirely by contractors who are all expecting work to come their way, should this project be consented. We are all aware that these huge NSIPs will bring work to several sectors of the local economy and we are unaware of any stakeholder who objects to that in itself. Certainly, none of the bodies (County Council, 3 District Councils etc.) requesting a temporary suspension of the examination has any desire or remit to curtail jobs and economic activity within their jurisdiction - quite the opposite. It is disingenuous of the writers to suggest otherwise.

The request for a delay comes from a quite different place - the need for the examination process to be completed with the proper level of dialogue and scrutiny by all registered parties.

These letters share another characteristic however: at some point they include sentences and whole paragraphs that have clearly been lifted from the same template. One wonders if the Applicant has any knowledge of the source of this template?

The Parish Council has an additional concern about the writers of these letters: none appears to be a **Registered** Interested Party.

During the Examination of Orsted’s Hornsea Project Three, there was a memorable incident when the District Councillor representing many parishes directly affected by the project (including the one in which an enormous booster station would have to be constructed) was denied the right to have his written representation accepted into the examination, because he had not understood that **he had to register** as an Interested Party during the registration window.

That rejection by the ExA was seen by many people as inappropriately bureaucratic but the acceptance by the Norfolk Boreas ExA of these recent letters falls into a different category.

We fully understand that the ExA can exercise its discretion to accept additional submissions into the Examination, but OPC queries why these particular representations have been accepted into this Examination at all.

What protocol is being used to decide on the validity of 'evidence' suddenly produced by such a torrent of completely unregistered parties - many using identical sentences and even paragraphs, and all coincidentally supporting the Applicant's position - and at such a very late stage of the Examination? Not one of these writers has taken any part, to our knowledge, in the examination thus far, and so can have no knowledge of the complexity of some of the issues that have been revealed, and the fact that many are still unresolved. Their opinions, at best, can only be judged to be utterly partisan.

To summarize - our concerns are as follows:

- 1) There is currently a vacuum at the heart of this examination, where the County, District and Parish Councils - and many other organizations (MMO, RSPB) - used to be. The Applicant appears to be filling that vacuum to its own ends.
- 2) There is a lack of transparency about the criteria being used for acceptance into the Examination, as admissible evidence, of representations from *un-registered* parties.
- 3) Many stakeholders will be unaware of these new submissions, or without the resources to respond at this time.
- 4) Covid-19 is the real emergency, and the continuing need for councils and organizations to keep fire-fighting the Norfolk Boreas examination is deflecting energy and resources from that fight.

At a time of national and international emergency, when most statutory consultees to the planning process are rightly diverting all their resources to fighting the crisis, it would appear that this Applicant is shamelessly exploiting the vacuum, to push through its own agenda.

This cannot be just or fair, or considered as due process.

Oulton Parish Council therefore repeats its request, as a matter of urgency, that this Boreas Examination be suspended now and resumed when the Covid-19 crisis is over.

Thank you for your consideration of this urgent matter.
