

Written Submission from Weybourne Parish Council

We did not attend the Open Hearing on January 17th, in large part as we were rather daunted by the idea of speaking in such an imposing and public arena, lacking as we do the expertise of the wind farm businesses and their PR departments. However, having watched a recording of the event and seeing that there was no representation of the views of the landfall end of the cable corridor, we feel it is essential that our views and experiences are heard. This is the reason for this submission.

Like a number of the Parish Councils who spoke at the Open Hearing, Weybourne Parish Council has found itself battered for years by the impact of the planning and construction process for offshore wind farms. Weybourne has already suffered the construction of the original Sheringham Shoal and Dudgeon wind farm projects which came ashore at Weybourne. We are currently witnessing the preparatory works for the construction of the Hornsea 3 project, which also comes ashore at Weybourne. And now we are in the planning process for yet another set of trenches and the disruption to our rural way of life, in the shape of SEP and DEP.

Weybourne lies in an **Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty**. Some of the qualities of an AONB are:

- landscape quality, where natural or man-made landscape is good quality
- scenic quality, such as striking coastal landforms
- relative wildness, such as distance from housing or having few roads
- relative tranquillity, where natural sounds, such as streams or birdsong are predominant

(Source: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/areas-of-outstanding-natural-beauty-aonbs-designation-and-management>)

The industrial scale of the construction of wind farm cables is in direct opposition to these qualities. The movement of HGVs along minor roads will cause enormous disruption, particularly in the holiday season, upon which much of the employment in the area is dependent. Even if these HGVs are mostly confined to the haulage routes, they will create noise and dust and increase the level of air pollution, whereas many people have retired here or spend their holidays here for peace and quiet or the quality of the air. The machinery used to dig the trenches or to carry out horizontal directional drilling is again of an industrial scale. The impact of this will be detrimental both to those who live here and to the livelihoods of many.

Weybourne is a working fishing village, with the fishermen launching from the beach. This is one of the unique characteristics of the village. While the fishermen may be compensated for their loss of fishing during the offshore and landfall construction phases, the lack of activity **risks the long-term future of the fishing industry**, threatening the market for local fishermen's produce. This would not only destroy a traditional local industry, but also change the character of the beach.

Landowners report adverse impacts to agricultural land from previous wind farm construction. The effects of damage to underground watercourses and drainage, and soil compaction, **reduce the viability of farming** at an already precarious time, and at a point when national food security is under the spotlight.

Nor should the psychological impact of these wind farm projects be underplayed. Parish councillors are exhausted and demoralised. We have seen wind farm proposals rejected by the Planning Inspectorate but promptly approved by the Secretary of State of the moment. This undermines faith in the system and makes engagement with the process seem pointless. We are volunteers with no professional knowledge of these highly complex matters, but have worked hard to grasp the issues, but we have no power to control any of this. There is a huge power imbalance, and when we ask questions about key issues that concern us, Equinor's response tends to be simply to state that the

changes we are seeking are not in line with its plan or its timeline, with the company proving intransigent and unprepared to look at novel solutions.

Local residents have suffered **extreme levels of stress** due to the worry about cable construction activity near their properties and concern about the cumulative impact of electro-magnetic fields as more and more cables run near where they live. Each time a wind farm is proposed, there are five or more years of anxiety, uncertainty and frustration, before a single spadeful of soil is shifted. This takes a huge toll on the wellbeing of the community. The community feels unheard and undervalued.

Weybourne Parish Council is a very environmentally aware parish council, and we are entirely supportive of the expansion of renewable energy supplies to help to slow climate change. However, we are also very conscious that the environment faces a double threat – from climate change on the one hand and from **biodiversity loss** on the other. There is a risk that the focus on replacing fossil fuels with renewable energy from offshore wind loses sight of the fact that the destruction of the countryside in the course of the construction of these projects is contributing to further declines in biodiversity, in direct contradiction of the government's own Biodiversity Strategy. It is naïve to imagine that the impact of the cable construction will only be felt in the actual cable corridor (though even this would result in a significant impact in terms of acreage). Weybourne has a number of important features for wildlife:

- Beach Lane is a County Wildlife Site. Its close proximity to the landfall site makes it vulnerable.
- The pond/reedbed is an important and locally scarce habitat.
- Weybourne and the Muckleburgh area form an important landfall/take-off site for migratory birds, which birds can use for resting/foraging on arrival or prior to leaving. There are few other similar features on the North Norfolk coast.
- Spring Beck is a chalk stream, an internationally rare habitat.
- There is a risk that the felling of trees in Weybourne Woods may result in habitat fragmentation, even if the trees themselves are of "low wildlife value" (and we wonder how this designation has been arrived at!).
- We believe this project is detrimental to the Marine Conservation Zone offshore. The Cromer Chalk Reef is the largest in Europe, and the chalk beds are a rich home to seaweeds and static animals as well as a nursery to juvenile species and an important part of the food chain.
- Weybourne Cliffs and Weybourne Pit are both designated as SSSIs.
- The cliffs and fields behind them, to the east of Weybourne, are important sites for a number of species of birds, as well as invertebrates. North Norfolk is an internationally important location for wintering Pink Footed Geese, which are AMBER-LISTED on Birds of Conservation Concern and are extremely sensitive to disturbance; in addition to the harm done to the birds by disturbance, it also risks dispersing the birds from the beet tops to sensitive crops elsewhere, with financial impact on farmers.
- Weybourne has several significant bat roosts.
- Both Water Voles and Otters use the Beck and surrounding area.

In addition to the negative impact on biodiversity of the construction of the cable corridor, it also risks damage to the local economy as the area's wildlife importance attracts a significant number of visitors to the village and its surroundings, providing vital income to local businesses, particularly in the autumn, winter and spring when other holidaymakers are absent.

For all the above reasons we are therefore strongly opposed to the SEP and DEP cables making landfall at Weybourne. However, this is not a case of NIMBYism – we don't want this in someone else's back yard either, and the fact is, there is no need for it to be built in anyone's back yard: there is a better way.

It will come as no surprise to the Panel that we are referring to **connection to the national grid at Walpole via an undersea cable**, rather than connecting to Norwich Main using a radial onshore cable corridor across 60km of countryside. Clearly an alternative radial onshore connection to Walpole via landfall at Weybourne must be ruled out at the outset. The capacity for transfer of the electricity generated by SEP and DEP to its end users already exists at Walpole, in contrast to the Norwich Main connection, which would require the construction of the hugely controversial East Anglia Green scheme to allow the electricity to reach the end user. Equinor has consistently refused to engage with this idea, reiterating simply that it has a connection point at Norwich Main. It has continued doggedly with its original plans even as circumstances have changed all around it, and the longer it has persisted on this path, the more financially invested it has inevitably become, and the more strongly espoused to this course of action. The company has shown an astonishing lack of ambition following the launch of the ONTR, which could have allowed it to be a true industry leader.

This brings us on to an additional issue about which Equinor has proved totally uncooperative: a commitment to concurrent construction of SEP and DEP rather than the sequential construction of first one and then the other. Equinor boasts about being a pathfinder company, highlighting the fact that it is proposing to consent the two wind farms together, but it has consistently refused to make a commitment to constructing the two cable corridors concurrently. Inevitably, this undermines the local community's trust in the company and its PR efforts. If, despite the strong protests of the local community, the Planning Inspectorate approves the radial connection of SEP and DEP via onshore cabling from Weybourne to Norwich Main, we urge you to put in **a proviso that rules out sequential construction of the two cable corridors**.

We also urge the Planning Inspectorate to consider the issue of **statutory compensation**. The current system where community groups have to bid for money from the largesse of the wind farm companies leaves a very bitter taste in the mouth. It involves yet more work for weary parish councillors and local groups. The current community benefit schemes allow the wind farm companies to dictate what the money can be used for, meaning that some schemes that would be beneficial to local communities are not able to benefit from the fund. However, if a fund were set up for each parish, the genuine needs of individual communities could be met. There is a precedent for this in the solar farm at East & West Beckham where a fund was set up that the parish was able to use as it felt fit for the actual needs of the local community. This has been a successful fund that has been used for a broad range of benefits for the residents of East & West Beckham (for details of this fund, see [REDACTED]). Not only would such a system be better at delivering meaningful benefit to local communities, but it would also enable communities to feel more valued and listened to, and would significantly reduce the level of resentment that currently exists towards the wind farm consenting and construction process.

Thank you for taking the time to read this representation.

Val Stubbs, Weybourne Parish Council

Weybourne, Norfolk

19th February 2023