

## Equinor's SEP/DEP project

### Oulton Parish Council: Submission at Deadline 7

Oulton Parish Council (OPC) wishes to highlight to the ExA the issues and impacts experienced to date arising from the other offshore wind farm projects which have already been granted their DCOs, namely Hornsea Three, Norfolk Vanguard and Boreas. The adverse impacts onshore of the SEP/DEP proposal, if consented, would generate *major additional cumulative impacts* in combination with these existing projects.

It is OPC's understanding that secured in a DCO is the legal mechanism which sets out the construction plan, and that Local Authorities then proceed to sign off the conditions to further secure construction and traffic plans, and to secure environmental protections.

Already Oulton Parish Council has had significant issues with the pre-construction works for both Orsted's and Vattenfall's projects.

The main contractors in each case have not initially understood the agreed traffic routes, in one case pressing hard for the right to bring all associated traffic except HGVs through the residential end of Oulton Street, contrary to the DCO. The Parish Council has had to call meetings and explain in detail to both contractors how they need to set up *effective* signage to avoid their traffic straying inappropriately off the Holt Road – including suggesting some of the wording and most of the appropriate positioning of these signs. In some cases, misplaced traffic signs on roads have caused blind spots at junctions. The plethora of signs at the junction of the old Heydon Road with Oulton Street, attempting to direct all project traffic to either Orsted or Vattenfall's respective compounds, while simultaneously prohibiting the same traffic from entering the village, is a nightmarish confusion. The southern approach to our village has been transformed *already* into an unsightly and inconvenient industrial slipway and this is before either developer has even begun to construct their cable trench, with the massive increase in all types of HGV traffic that that will generate.

Both OPC and many of the residents we represent are seriously worried about this inauspicious start to what is perforce going to be a full-time monitoring job extending over the next 4 – 6 years and possibly beyond. This is not what the DCO had led us to expect.

In addition, we have recently been notified of an imminent week-long series of overnight closures of the B1149 (Holt Road), to investigate the structural integrity of the humpback bridge near the Cawston roundabout. Apparently, this work is necessary to assess whether it is in fact **safe** for this bridge to be used as part of *the joint access route for all the construction traffic of all projects* arriving and departing from their respective Main Construction Compounds at Oulton. It appears now that, years after their DCOs have been granted, it is possible that the developers and NCC Highways might have to re-negotiate the main HGV traffic routing plans for all these projects – or else re-build a major bridge on a major distributor route from Norwich to the North Norfolk coast.

How can such an extraordinary situation have arisen? OPC has warned successive developers and successive ExAs about the limitations of the Holt Road, and especially of the humpback bridge, over a period of many years.

Oulton residents have now watched in astonishment as the pre-construction works in Oulton have made several attempts to install a Highway Intervention Scheme for Hornsea Three along The Street. These works have been started and finished, and then re-done at the request of Norfolk County Council. They appear to have now finally been completed this week, having initially been started in November 2022 – 8 months ago. Over all these months, local people have been subjected to a series of traffic delays and road closures, often at little or no notice. Traffic notices have been sent out, then work delayed or cancelled. One reason for one delay to the works was stated as being because of increased HGVs from the arrival of Vanguard/Boreas' contractors in the parish and an increase in agricultural vehicles. None of this should have been a surprise to the developers or their contractors.

We seem to be witnessing a worrying level of incompetence and the uncertainty factor for residents is unreasonably high.

There have also been issues about community liaison, with a lack of response to queries especially in recent weeks. As a Parish Council we have been contacted by residents with queries about road work delays and large numbers of lost courier delivery vans wandering into the village, and although we have been assured by the projects that contact with the Community Liaison Officers is their priority, in practice this is increasingly proving fruitless.

Now that we are coming to the end of the SEP/DEP public examination, Oulton Parish Council hopes that the ExA will take very seriously the post-consent cumulative construction issues that many communities along the length of the proposed cable route are *already* experiencing and reporting. The DCO is not the end of the planning process for us but the start of these further issues and yet more problems for the local communities and Parish Councils on the ground, with scant resources, who will have to continue dealing with all this on a day-to-day basis over many years to come. Some communities will be crushed by it.

As regards the SEP/DEP proposal however, any cumulative impacts onshore could be reduced at a stroke to the absolute minimum, if the ExA were to decide to recommend to the Secretary of State that this project be re-directed to a grid connection at Walpole.

Oulton Parish Council urges the Examining Authority seriously to consider such a recommendation.

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