

Meera Smethurst Closing Statement:

Almost everybody now recognises the need to move away from fossil fuels, as their continued use is destroying the ecosystems on which we depend. We must ensure that in turning to green energy, we do not make the same mistakes: kelp forests are the lungs of the ocean; putting the wind turbines on the sea bed where regenerating kelp beds are just regaining a hold, and choosing a location for the substation where maximum damage to carbon storage in fields and trees occurs, and special habitats are destroyed, just does not make sense.

Healthy, naturally functioning ecosystems and coherent ecological networks will be more resilient and adaptable to climate change effects. Failure to address this challenge will result in significant adverse impact on biodiversity and the ecosystem services it provides. This proposal will have a devastating impact on the resilience of this precious ecosystem and its ability to adapt to the effects of climate change. In assessing the impact, consideration must be given to the alternatives available.

There must be an obligation on all of us to find the least damaging solutions to the undoubted energy crisis, both to communities and the environment itself.

Yes, there must be a focus on decarbonisation and a rapid move to renewables but to do this at the expense of the natural environment is contradictory and wrong. **The climate crisis cannot be solved by destroying our environment.**

The Rampion proposals are wrong for so many reasons with regards to the choice of substation location, and unnecessary, as the alternatives were only 'marginally less preferable' even before so many other factors were exposed during the Examination.

When choosing the substation, they cannot possibly have taken into account the meadowland, badger setts, reptile habitats or green lane, because for many of these, they are still refusing to accept their existence, despite clear evidence, and say they will apply for badger licences, deal with reptile habitats, conduct meadowland surveys, and so on, post consent if necessary. They know what they will find, and were very effectively made aware by a local resident from the earliest days of the consultation. There is no excuse; it can only mean they choose to ignore these things in the quest of what they perceive to be a cheaper, simpler solution. As a result, our wildlife suffers and pays the price.

The meadowland surveys at Cratemans which Rampion have done, and their assessment of the importance of the green lane, are both shown by independent surveys to be wrong and to seriously downplay their ecological importance. Most recently, their minimalist traffic surveys of Kent Street and Michelgrove would appear to be either wrong or misleading. All of this makes *all* their 'evidence' highly questionable and doubtful.

It is clear from the way they are thinking on their feet, from deadline to deadline, that they did not adequately consider the consequences of needing to access the haul road via Kent Street either. Early discussions between Rampion and WSCC made it clear that WSCC did not view Kent Street as suitable for HGVs and this is the narrative that Rampion were telling residents, almost to the end of the consultation. They switched fairly last minute, as they realised there was no other way to reach the cable route. I do not understand why WSCC now seem so unconcerned about the use of Kent Street.

I suspect they may deploy similar tactics at Deadline 6; when nobody can scrutinise or comment on changes made, they will suddenly adapt the proposal 'in response to submissions at deadline 5' and make significant changes.

When Rampion submitted the DCO, so many aspects were still sketchy and poorly thought out, as a result of failure to properly engage with communities and landowners during Consultation. They have continued to be sparing with information, preferring to leave far too much to be decided post consent. They have consistently failed to give straight answers to direct questions during the Consultation or Examination. How can the benefits and harms be properly assessed without accurate details of what they will do?

The fact that even now, so few landowners have signed Heads of Terms agreements is a stark reflection of how badly Rampion have handled the consultation and engagement with landowners and communities, and their lack of co-operation with affected parties.

It has become very clear during the examination that much destruction of trees and hedges will be required on Kent Street, the substation site and the A272. Even now, it seems Rampion are unable to tell us how much.

They chose not to engage with Cowfold residents until after it was too late for us to influence the choice of substation site. This means that they did not understand the extent to which the site flooded until after they had chosen it. This in turn means the landscape and visual impacts of the need to raise the ground will be much more significant than they originally led us to believe. When this effect is added to the devastating vegetation loss described above, it will be impossible to adequately screen the substation from Kent Street, the A272, PRowS or the Grade 2 listed Manor House. All of this would not be an issue at the other alternative locations.

The choice of a location on the very busy A272, so close to the Cowfold AQMA and the congested mini roundabouts, means that there will be far more impact on traffic, pollution, and the local economy than at the other locations also. The small businesses on the industrial estate will be severely affected, yet so little attention has been paid to this during the examination.

The terrible impacts on Kent Street residents, the amenity value of the lane and the ecological damage to it were not considered by them during the consultation. It is so unnecessary as a ready-made road exists at Wineham Lane.

Rampion need to revisit the choice of substation location: it seems to me it would actually be simpler and easier for *them*, as well as less harmful to so many people or damaging to wildlife.

It cannot be acceptable to the public purse to allow this wanton destruction in a choice driven only by perceived ease and cost limitation for the applicant. Rampion answer every question about serious impact with 'it is the national interest'. It cannot be in the national interest to destroy habitats and wildlife or impact the economy, beyond what is absolutely essential to development; not simply what is convenient.

Steve Reed MP The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs said at the conclusion of the recent Green Belt debate in parliament: *"Nature underpins all the Government's missions. Without nature, there is no economy, no health, no food and no society. Nature is at crisis point.....This Government are committed to the legally binding environmental targets set under the Environment Act 2021—targets that the Tories missed, but that this Government will meet ..."*

A crucial question during the examination, and which is explicit in the NPS and wider body of national-to-local policy including the NPPF and Local Plans, is whether Rampion 2 risks undermining the achievement of *sustainable* development in the south rather than advancing it.

It is clear from the evidence provided regarding the economic impacts, the damage to communities and the destruction of marine and land ecosystems, that it *does* undermine the development towards sustainability. If we destroy habitats and endanger species, we ultimately reduce the resilience of the planet to climate change, not increase it.