

Speech to represent Essendine, Village Hall, regarding Compulsory Acquisition

When the news broke that a huge solar installation was planned for this area, many of my family friends and neighbours were in total shock and disbelief at the size of the development planned around our village and others nearby. That day, Mallard Pass developers changed our lives monumentally! It is nearly two years since that news broke and in that time, it has taken a huge toll on many of our lives, as we have given up so much time, effort and money to fight what we believe could be apocalyptic for this beautiful countryside.

No guarantees, assurances and 'legal speak', we find in all the documentation which we have read over the many months, gives us any confidence that this will bring jobs, prosperity and renewable free energy, (which we are assured is needed), to provide the UK with energy security for the future. The price we will pay in this area for these 'pie in the sky' plans is intangible.

So imagine, more than 15 months into the consultations, discussions and protestations over this planned development, to find suddenly that Compulsory Acquisition, a term which many of us had no idea what it meant and how it could affect us, suddenly reared its ugly head deep, out of the documentation! Not content with destroying the local land surrounding our houses, which we spent a great deal of time during lockdown, using as our headspace whilst walking and participating in other outdoor activities, to ensure that our mental well-being was catered for during the pandemic; the developers then wanted to cause traffic chaos and disruption of our everyday lives, by proposing to dig up large swathes of the curtilidges of residents property along the A6121, to bury a 330 KV cable, to transfer the electricity generated from solar panels to the substation!

All the information that has been available in documentation, plays down the impact that this work will have on our village as a whole. The daily disruption of traffic trying to get to and from work, the businesses who need to get the workers at their desks and the school children who need to get back and forward to school and all this to a timetable. Add in the larger volume of traffic from construction workers to the equation and the dangers of children crossing an even busier road and you can surely see the problems this will cause!

There is a huge danger that during trenching and cable laying, that there will be disruption to the utility services. We are assured that there are plans of where cables and pipes have been historically laid, but we know that often it is the case that these plans are not accurate and that cables and pipes are unearthed in different places, usually with the devastating consequences of being fractured, leaving home workers without their fibre internet connections, as has been the case over the past few weeks with Anglian Water, who have cut water supplies, and in at least one case severed a fibre internet connection to a property here in the village.

In our quest for more information on CA to gain a better understanding, Mallard Pass developers have been less than honest about their intentions, often trying to fob us off with poor and vague responses to our questions and have played a clever game of ensuring until just last week, they did not have to face an audience of villagers en mass, to answer their questions, about how CA would affect us. As the Planning Inspectorate, you need to know that it has been a challenging time to

extract the information from them, in an honest and straightforward way using plain English terms that we could all understand! Let us be under no illusion that Mallard Pass have on the subject of CA, tried to bury further bad news!

For the village hall, if this work gets approval, it would have a highly detrimental affect on the access to it, and because of the difficulties of more difficult and slower journeys, would certainly deter people from booking the hall for activities and parties. The constant noise and disruption would make access to the hall difficult and dangerous, particularly for children crossing the road to access the green spaces and the play area, adjacent to the hall. No amount of reassurances, (all dressed up as false promises to make us feel that developers will have our best interests at heart), give me any hope that the cable laying will be anything other than many, many weeks of total mayhem for residents and hall users. I for one, am not at all convinced by their rather optimistic time frames for this work to be completed and feel we will experience problems for a long time.

Finally, I would like to say that all residents will be seriously affected by this cable laying work and the village hall will see a huge drop in hall use and revenues for a long time. It is likely that we may never recoup these losses and regain our hiring potential moving into the future. At the meeting held last week in the village hall as a presentation to the village by the Mallard Pass team, ( held in this format at our insistence and well attended, because of the promoting done by the Parish Council and by the action group); when asked what would the level of compensation per household for huge disruption over many weeks for the cable laying, was likely to be, we were told the miserly sum of £50 per household. This is a complete insult to us, to be offered such a paltry sum for the suffering we will endure! The Mallard Pass applicants have a scant disregard for the wrecking of lives and they seem to feel we can be bought off cheaply!

Throughout this whole process, you should be under no illusion that the applicants have schemed and played an underhand game with information that we required, to understand the true magnitude of this proposal, which will impact the residents of the village and change the countryside forever.