As the member of Parliament for Lancaster & Fleetwood, I represent over 35,000 people who will live within 3 miles of the site of the proposed Halite Gas Storage facility.

I would start by pointing out the huge opposition to the proposals amongst local people. I realise that in situations like this the size of opposition cannot always be considered by planning bodies. However, I believe it is nonetheless important to recognise that the vast and overwhelming opinion of local residents is against the Halite plans. I am sure that you will have already been made aware of this fact either from residents making contact with you directly or collectively through the Protect Wyre Group.

Turning to the validity of the application itself, there are a number of reasons why I believe that it should be refused:

- Previous attempts to gain permission for Gas Storage in the area were refused due to the instability of the geology and also the special nature of the environment and local wildlife. These factors have not changed since the last application was refused.

- The geology of the local area is unsuitable for Halite’s plans. At about 300m, this proposed underground gas storage scheme would be the shallowest in Europe. The Preesall salt bed is split by numerous faults, any one of which could be a route along which escaping gas might migrate. These factors combined give rise to genuine safety concerns.

- There is a fault line under the River Wyre which brings the salt bed next to the porous sandstone bed, which underlies the town of Fleetwood. If the stored gas were to escape into the sandstone it could build up, travelling miles and miles along faults, cracks, pipes and sewers, eventually rising up to the surface in and around properties. In short, the scheme could potentially affect an area far larger than the footprint shown in the plans.

- Similar faults occur on the Over Wyre side of the estuary. Here there is added concern because the gas could escape into the network of old brine wells, abandoned pipes and the old salt mine where for 100 years ICI have put water down shafts and pumped up the dissolved salt. This area of salt is riddled with huge holes resulting in the ground collapsing over much of the area. Yet it is so close to the site of the caverns, which raises concerns about how far escaping gas could migrate eastwards towards the Over Wyre villages including Preesall and Knott End on Sea.

- I am also extremely worried about the effect of discharging over 50 million tonnes of brine into the Irish Sea. United Utilities are spending hundreds of millions of pounds trying to clean up the seas around my
constituency, the last thing we need to be doing is pumping yet more waste into it.

The current application by Halite Energy is very similar to two previous applications submitted by Canatxx which were refused by Planning Inspectors and the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government. Halite is the successor company to Canatxx, based in the same local offices with many of the same personnel. I believe that it is fundamentally unfair that yet again the local community has been forced to battle this application, when it has already been refused twice. It is not fair that tens of thousands of my constituents have had this application hanging over them for the last decade. This repeated application process in an attempt to wear down opposition is a tactic used by many major energy companies and skews the system against local residents.

Finally, I would like to stress how important it is that applications of this nature are not viewed in isolation from each other. As Greg Barker MP, Minister of State at the Department of Energy, confirmed to me in a debate on shale gas extraction on 22nd May, the Government will consider the collective effect of numerous energy infrastructure applications. To quote:

“No one could suggest that Lancashire is not taking more than its fair share of the burden of the energy economy. However, there are many opportunities to be gained. Each of the points that he raises bears serious consideration. Let me assure him that my Department not only looks at these things individually, on their own merits and in their own right, but takes into account the wider picture that is created by these individual interventions.”

The projects I had listed were: the large number of onshore wind farms and turbines, especially along the M6 corridor; offshore wind farms in Morecambe Bay and the Irish Sea; exploratory drilling for shale gas which could be massively expanded if given the go-ahead; the Halite gas storage proposals; the proposed new nuclear reactor at Heysham; and the need for National Grid to connect all these schemes to the mains via large pylons and substations. Taken together these would significantly affect the landscape and environment of large parts of Lancashire. To that end I am pleased to see one of the geological questions asked by the examining authority relates to the possible effects of nearby shale gas drilling on the Halite proposals – a serious question that needs to be considered very carefully.

In summary, I do not believe the application by Halite has altered significantly from the previous refused Canatxx applications and that the geological and associated concerns are still valid. I hope that the application is rejected and a line can be drawn under this matter once and for all.

Yours sincerely,

Eric Ollerenshaw OBE
Member of Parliament for Lancaster and Fleetwood

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