

From: MILNE, John
Sent: Monday, October 28, 2024 7:45 PM
To: MILIBAND, Ed <ed.miliband.mp@parliament.uk>
Cc: REED, Steve <steve.reed.mp@parliament.uk>
Subject: Rampion 2 DCO decision

Problems with Oakendene substation site in Rampion 2 DCO

Dear Sirs

I write with regard to the construction of an onshore electricity substation to serve the Rampion 2 offshore windfarm development which is currently with the Inspector for decision under a DCO process, due shortly. The Examination phase ended on 6th August.

The cable route associated with Rampion 2 is proposed to pass through the South Downs National Park and connect to the main grid substation via a new 6 hectare, 12m high substation.

A number of sites were considered for the substation. The site recommended for approval is at Oakendene in Cowfold, a small village in my constituency of Horsham. This is 5km away from the existing substation which is on Wineham Lane in Bolney.

The proposal to build at Oakendene has received very significant public objection. While I am very supportive of the government's renewable energy agenda, and I accept that sacrifices may be required to advance it, I agree with local residents that the Oakendene site has many flaws and should not have been shortlisted:

- Consultation as conducted under the DCO process was inadequate because it misnamed the site in question. Residents in Cowfold were given the impression that the sites under consideration were at Bolney, 5km away. As a result they largely did not engage with the process. By the time residents understood that the favoured site was in Oakendene/Cowfold, the decision was too advanced to affect. Ironically, one of the reasons for choosing Oakendene was the apparent lack of local objection.
- 5k is a considerable distance from the existing substation. As a result it creates an additional, unnecessary connection challenge from Oakendene to Bolney.
- Almost all the ecological evidence used to inform the site choice was desk-top, although Natural England cautions that these are often not accurate. This is particularly important in this case because the area of land affected by the route has never been surveyed. It consists of ancient, untouched meadowland and hedges and fields which remain medieval in their layout. Of all the sites considered, Oakendene is the most negative from an ecological point of view.

- The developer's own ecology studies were mainly completed *after* the substation site was chosen. They showed that a majority of the important or protected habitats and species are associated mainly or exclusively with Oakendene. This includes 8 of the 14 Important hedgerows, and 3 of the 7 veteran trees plus 3 near-veteran. It is the only location to have hazel dormice or otters, together with a high proportion of the Great Crested Newts, and one of the few to have water voles. It is home to one of the most significant nightingale habitats in Sussex, denser even than the famous Knepp Estate rewilding centre which is also in my constituency.
- When Oakendene was first proposed it was assumed the site could be accessed directly off the main A272, rather than by Kent Street which was assessed as unsuitable for HGVs. But after they had committed to the site it was realised the A272 access was not practical. Instead of revisiting the decision to select the site, as should logically have happened, it was decided to use Kent Street against their own advice.
- Kent Street is a tiny one-way lane, barely more than a track. To make it usable by HGVs will require the removal of several hundred metres of tree and hedge and the widening of a 1km stretch. Overall, the Oakendene site requires the removal of almost 650m of mature hedges and over 100 important oaks.
- Oakendene is the only site with a flood risk, which again was not factored in at the start and is likely to raise costs unforeseeably.
- Lastly, the traffic implications for nearby Cowfold are significant because this is an AQMA location, the only one in my constituency.

No clear proposals have been offered to mitigate the harms that have been identified. Local councils have voiced major concerns about the landscape and visual impacts of this choice and the failure to take hedge and tree loss or meadowland destruction into consideration.

Rampion themselves have said they have only a 'marginal' preference for Oakendene. Given the negative evidence that has emerged since, this decision should be revisited.

The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs has stated that: "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. The Tories left Britain one of the most nature-depleted countries on Earth. A third of our bird and mammal species face extinction....this Government is committed to the legally binding environmental targets set under the Environment Act 2021—targets that this Government will meet by working in a new partnership with the nature non-governmental organisations".

It would be unnecessarily damaging to the government's overall environmental agenda, which I strongly support, to do so much ecological harm in the very act of developing a new renewable energy project.

If the Inspector is minded to approve the Oakendene site, I urge you to use your authority as Minister for Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero to reconsider the environmental and practical implications of such a choice.

I attach a file giving more detail of the environmental impact supplied by local residents.

Best regards

John

John Milne MP

Member of Parliament for Horsham

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