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**OULTON PARISH COUNCIL MEETING – 22 SEPTEMBER 2020**

**DRAFT MINUTES**

At the meeting of the Oulton Parish Council held online via Zoom on Tuesday 22 September 2020, the following members were present:

Mr P Killingback (chair)

Mrs S Mather, Ms A Shaw, Mr A Windross.

**In Attendance**

Mr L Mills (Clerk of the Council)

**020/024 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Mr A Nash; Mr D Harrison (Co/Dist Cllr)

**020/025 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND REQUESTS FOR DISPENSATION**

None

**020/026 MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting of the Parish Council held on 4 August 2020, having previously been circulated to all members, were considered, and **APPROVED** as an accurate record subject to the following change and addition:

*020/020 (ii) [e]* It was **AGREED** to donate £1250 (one thousand two hundred and fifty pounds) to support *the proposed judicial review*, using Section 137 of the Local Government Act 1972

With this alteration the minutes will be signed by the Chair as soon as conditions allow.

**020/027 MATTERS ARISING NOT LISTED ELSEWHERE ON THE AGENDA**

None

**020/028 PUBLIC, POLICE, CO/DIST COUNCILLORS’ REPORTS**

None

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**020/029 FINANCE**

The following payments totalling £412.57 were **APPROVED**:

Information Commissioner, annual registration, £40.00

Administration, £372.57

**020/030 PLANNING**

1. PLANNING APPLICATIONS RECEIVED BEFORE 22 September 2020

None

1. WINDFARMS

The following update, having previously been circulated to all members by Mrs Mather, was received:

**[a] Norfolk Vanguard**

The Clerk has received an email from Vattenfall notifying OPC of their imminent intention to carry out pre-construction site investigations (SI) and that they will be using the ‘Cable Logistics Area’ (CLA) – E.F. Harrold’s Hangar site  -  as a central works compound for 8 weeks while these investigations are carried out all along the cable route.

See below an extract from Vattenfall’s email

*“For these works, which will continue for appropriately 8 weeks, we require a location for a welfare facility and a temporary storage container. It has been agreed with the relevant landowner that we will use the future Cable Logistics Area near Oulton****for the purposes of a central works compound****relating to the onshore SI campaign…”  (our emphasis)*

Although this text goes on to seek to minimise the likely disruption from *this particular use* of the Hangar site, the OPC working party members find this information significant and alarming. It serves to confirm our longstanding suspicions that this CLA is actually akin to Orsted’s **Main Construction Compound** but under a misleadingly innocuous name.

The working party would like to discuss with other councillors the need to reply to this email from Vattenfall, seeking clarification and major reassurance on several issues e.g.:

-        where is this *pre-construction* use of the CLA site secured in their DCO?

-        How will site traffic (however light) be prevented from coming through the residential northern end of Oulton Street?

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**020/030 PLANNING (ii) WINDFARMS continued**

-        How will hours of operation be controlled?

-        Would they like to inform us *now* of any further unregulated uses of this compound that they have in mind?

 The Parish Council expressed its concern at the proposed use of the “cable logistics area” and it was **AGREED** that the chairman, Mrs Mather and Ms Shaw would follow this up with them

**[b] Norfolk Boreas**

Oulton Parish Council continues to respond to current Norfolk Boreas deadlines, the ExA having changed some of the submission dates ahead of the close of the Examination on 12th October 2020. OPC will be responding to deadline 16, which is due on the 28th September 2020, and possibly deadline 17 on the 7th October if appropriate.

**[c] Equino**r

OPC submitted a lengthy response to the Phase 1 consultation via Equinor’s online consultation page, (this is available to view on the OPC website). The aim is to inform the developer of this project, at a much earlier stage in its design process, of the complete unacceptability of this further disruption to our parish’s environment and people.

 **[d] Oulton Parish Council response to the Sheringham & Dudgeon Extension project 2020**

Oulton Parish Council (OPC) note the change in the search area for the proposed cable route as shown on current maps as part of Equinor’s consultation process.

Equinor must be aware that Oulton, Cawston, Heydon and Salle areas are already going to be impacted by Hornsea Three, Norfolk Vanguard and Boreas over a period of 8-10 years. The residents of these areas dread the prospect of further disruption from yet another offshore wind farm impacting onshore.

There has been a commitment by the government this year to review how offshore wind is connected to the grid, as well as the offshore industry itself stating that the current system of point to point grid connections in the UK is no longer fit for purpose. This system was only appropriate during the early years when the wind farms were small scale and close to shore. There is plenty of evidence that a more coordinated (meshed) system to join offshore wind is about to be implemented in Europe with several schemes progressing (the North Sea Wind Power Hub being one such scheme) with other ‘Energy Islands’ also being planned in other parts of Europe. The offshore wind industry as well as the oil and gas sector are repurposing infrastructure, and are treating the integration of offshore projects seriously.

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**020/030 PLANNING (ii) WINDFARMS continued**

OPC therefore would urge Equinor to consider a better way to connect to the grid than the proposed point to point system onshore. Shared infrastructure has economic benefits both for the developer and the end consumer, along with huge reductions in environmental impacts onshore and even offshore. These must be major considerations for the near future.

It is OPC’s understanding that the DEP/SEP project will construct sometime in 2024, with an assumption that Equinor will bid for the CfD auction at round 5. There is therefore time to reconsider now and choose another method of connecting to the grid, by means of an offshore ring main or equivalent, which would massively reduce the impact onshore.

We assume that Equinor are fully aware that on July 15th this year the Energy Minister announced the launch of the Offshore Transmission Network Review (OTNR) which states in the preamble to its terms of reference:

“…in the context of increasingly ambitious targets for offshore wind, constructing individual point to point connections for each offshore wind farm may not provide the most efficient approach and could become a major barrier to delivery, given the considerable environmental and local impacts, particularly from the associated onshore infrastructure required to connect to the national transmission network."

With such a government and industry sector review now in process, it would seem irrational of Equinor to persist in trying to develop a project with an out-dated and inefficient method of connection to the grid.

We therefore encourage Equinor to make, as a matter of urgency, a significant contribution to this OTN Review and to request strongly of the government that the DEP/SEP project be included in the new integrated offshore transmission networks under discussion.

Oulton PC cannot stress too highly to Equinor the depth, strength and momentum of opposition to the current method of grid connection being contemplated in the DEP/SEP proposal. This opposition has developed over recent years in communities up and down the cable corridors for both Orsted’s and Vattenfall’s projects, and this 4th project is just the final straw. As people all over Norfolk are now realising, the whole north of the county is going to be devastated for the next 8-10 years by construction impacts if these projects go ahead in their present onshore configuration.

Oulton residents do not object to the use of offshore wind to help the UK achieve its net zero targets - quite the opposite - but we would like to see this major transition being carried out properly in a planned and integrated way. We most certainly DO object to being severely impacted unnecessarily in this process - and inland onshore grid connections are unnecessary.

As the current proposals stand, however, OPC would like to make the following observations:

1) We note that Equinor's cable route will cross Vanguard/Boreas cables and that Vattenfall currently will not be considering this cumulative impact as part of the Norfolk Boreas examination. This is unacceptable and means that there is currently no proper assessment of the true impacts of multiple projects over a protracted number of years.

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**020/030 PLANNING (ii) WINDFARMS continued**

2) These so-called ‘temporary’ construction projects have resulted in Highway Intervention Schemes (HIS), one of which affects the southern end of The Street, Oulton. This will necessitate Orsted and Vattenfall agreeing to share costs in a "first to construct, last to decommission" arrangement.

OPC now question how Equinor fits into this scenario, when there is every possibility of Equinor becoming the last project to finish but potentially requiring the HIS to be in place during their construction period?

3) Cumulative traffic impacts have been a major concern for the areas impacted by the HOW3/Vanguard/Boreas projects. The number of HGVs required for each project has been influenced by HVDC/HVAC cabling decisions and sizes of cable drums, as well as siting of Construction Compounds and storage areas. Equinor have stated that their project would be using HVAC cables, as are Orsted, and we know that these cables usually are transported as AILs. Therefore the proposed AIL routes, construction compounds and storage areas are a major concern to us, as well as the numbers of HGV and staff traffic.

4) Oulton has been ‘targeted’ numerous times because, by sheer accident of geography, Oulton is centrally situated for ALL current projects as it is approximately 30km along the cable routes. The possibility of Oulton hosting yet another project's compound and storage areas, as well as a further cable route, would be completely unacceptable to this community.

5) Equinor need to be aware that local communities are now facing the very real prospect of 10 years of upheaval from the construction impacts of offshore wind farm projects onshore. This sustained upheaval will have severe adverse impacts on local environments, communities, local businesses, tourism and agriculture.

6) Equinor should also be aware that one property has been unfairly impacted by ALL of the projects so far and, with the possibility of Equinor’s cable route going through a field south of their property, it seems almost inconceivable that they should be required to tolerate yet more disruption. OPC also have been made aware recently that in the same field there has been a consultation for a 35 hectare solar farm, the screening opinion having been submitted to the local authority Broadland District Council.

7) If, by some extraordinary mischance, the DEP/SEP Project is excluded from the OTNR, then OPC would like to state now - and in the strongest possible terms - that the only cable route acceptable to this community would be an onshore cable trench shared with that of Hornsea Project Three. Whatever difficulties might stand in the way of such a collaboration would simply have to be dealt with by the developers and the government. The alternative - of asking so many communities to be dug up THREE times (twice for H3 and once more for Equinor) - is utterly unacceptable.

8) Finally, OPC would like to draw Equinor’s attention to the fact that, in response to the Secretary of State’s recent decision to approve a DCO for the Norfolk Vanguard project, a concerned Norfolk resident has filed an application for permission to proceed to a substantive Judicial Review with the Administrative Court. This is the very first of the current major offshore wind farm projects, affecting Norfolk and Suffolk, to reach its final decision point.

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**020/030 PLANNING (ii) WINDFARMS continued**

In conclusion, Oulton Parish Council, along with many other parish councils and communities, have worked hard over many years to put our concerns across. As part of Equinor’s consultation, this community is asking you to take a better approach to offshore construction and its impacts onshore. We all understand that offshore wind is vital to a net zero future but it cannot come at the expense of such severe onshore environmental and human consequences.

**(e) Vanguard: Judicial Review**

Ms Shaw updated the meeting:

As some of you already know, the Claimant in this Judicial Review challenge has recently filed papers with the Administrative Court section of the High Court, seeking permission to progress to a full Judicial Review.

During the weeks since I last wrote, many legal hoops have had to be jumped through, involving responses to the Defendant’s and the Interested Party’s positions, the preparation of a Statement of Facts and Grounds, and finally the submission of ‘permission papers’.

Please find below a short statement from the Claimant, summarising the current position, which is a brief lull while he waits for official permission from the Judge to proceed to a full review. The Judge has given himself three weeks to read into the case as so far presented, and permission to proceed is by no means a foregone conclusion. However, the strength of the case is gaining ground as more documents have come to light over recent weeks.

Several Parish Councils along the cable corridors for both Orsted’s and Vattenfall’s projects, as well as many individuals, have made significant contributions to the challenge fund.

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Dear All,

I am pleased to report that the JR is now with a Judge at the Court of Administration (Planning) who will make a decision on permission to proceed to a substantive hearing in court.  The process has been given ‘Significant’ status, which expedites the proceedings.  Therefore, the Judge is expected to respond before the end of September with his permission to proceed  - or not.

Many thanks to all those involved, and I would also like to pass on my best wishes to those Parish Councils who are continuing to respond to the challenges of the Boreas examination.

Yours sincerely,

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**020/030 PLANNING**

1. GOVERNMENT PLANNING WHITE PAPER

It was **AGREED** that Mr Windross will draft a response based on councillors’ comments and this will be presented to the next Council meeting for approval

**020/031 CLERK’S REPORT**

1. Street Farm entrance and road: the Clerk was asked to contact Mr Peck regarding Highway’s inaction in this matter
2. A wage and conditions settlement had been agreed by the Joint Committee and is implemented from 1st April 2020

**020/032 ITEMS OF INFORMATION / FUTURE AGENDA**

None

**020/033 DATE OF MEETINGS**

It was **AGREED** to hold the next ‘virtual’ meeting by Zoom on Tuesday 27 October at 7.30pm.

THERE BEING NO FURTHER BUSINESS THE CHAIRMAN THANKED EVERYONE FOR ATTENDING AND DECLARED THE MEETING CLOSED AT 8.30pm