

weekend comment

Renewable energy's good, but don't mar precious lands

Suffolk Preservation Society director **Fiona Cairns** calls for a wide-ranging debate about the impact of energy proposals on our treasured environment



I accept that tilting at windmills has had a poor reputation since the days of Don Quixote. Indeed, given the prevailing conventional wisdom in support for both existing and proposed offshore windfarms, it might at first sight seem a foolhardy task to raise any objections about them whatsoever.

Yet the Suffolk Preservation Society feels that a more balanced debate is needed to better address the associated impacts of the growth in energy installations off the East Anglian coast.

First off, allow me to charge down a few misconceptions. The society is not against renewable sources of energy: quite the opposite. We also welcome the focus on developing offshore windfarms as being far preferable to the onshore alternatives.

Furthermore, our main concerns about Scottish Power Renewables' proposals for its East

Anglia ONE North and East Anglia TWO offshore windfarms have less to do with the visual impact of the turbines themselves, although we are seeking further clarification on this matter.

Our principal worry relates, therefore, less to the generation process at sea and more to the transmission infrastructure that will be required to bring the energy ashore and then connect and distribute it around the

The combined impact of all these new energy sources on this county and the wider region could well be considerable



Archaeological excavations being carried out from Bawdsey to Bramford last year, as part of work to install the onshore cable route for East Anglia ONE windfarm. Picture: TOM POTTER

National Grid.

Scottish Power Renewables plans to construct an enormous new National Grid substation (325m by 140m, 13m high) and two connection substations (each 190m by 190m, with 21m high buildings and 18m high external equipment).

The location for these has not yet been defined but a search area has been drawn south of Leiston, stretching from Sizewell across past Knodishall – within the Suffolk Coast & Heaths Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty – a nationally-designated and protected landscape.

Did I mention Sizewell C, also in the AONB? Most readers will

be aware that EDF Energy's proposals for a new nuclear power station will involve considerable onshore infrastructure both during the construction phase and the operational one, especially in terms of new rail and road links.

And in addition to these, the infrastructure associated with Nautilus, a new interconnector gas pipeline – between England and continental Europe – will have an impact along the Norfolk coast, where it comes ashore, and possibly further south as well.

In short, the combined impact of all these new energy sources on this county and the wider region could well be considerable.

Indeed, there have been concerns raised that the sheer amount of extra generation capacity and need to distribute energy to other parts of the UK could mean that National Grid may revive the Bramford to Twinstead proposals that included the construction of additional pylons and may impact the Dedham Vale AONB and Stour Valley.

What the Suffolk Preservation Society is calling for is a much wider and joined-up debate about the accumulated impact of all these proposals on our most precious landscapes.

We will continue to tilt on this issue for a while yet.