

# We are really behind green energy but please don't wreck rural Suffolk beauty

Aside from a presumption in favour of development, one of the greatest weaknesses of the current planning system is its lack of emphasis on joined-up thinking. This was vividly brought home to me last month with the release of two communications. The first was a joint letter from the leaders of Suffolk County, Suffolk Coastal and Waveney District Councils to Greg Clark, Secretary of State for Business, Enterprise and the Industrial Strategy.

The second was a detailed statement to the media by a new action group in Friston concerned about the inland impact of Scottish Power Renewables' offshore windfarm plans.

Before commenting on these, let me set the record straight on behalf of the Suffolk Preservation Society. We are broadly in favour of offshore, renewable, sources of energy. We appreciate that a broad mix is essential in ensuring energy security for British households and businesses over the foreseeable decades.

We get that.

Our concern relates to the damage done to Suffolk's environment across an unacceptably and increasingly

Suffolk Preservation Society director **Fiona Cairns** appeals for some joined-up thinking to protect coastal countryside from the impact of numerous power-related projects



wide area of the county. This will have a major impact on Suffolk's farming and tourism sectors, as well as residents across a large swathe of the coastal area.

The infrastructure needed to bring onshore the energy created by wind turbines, and eventually onto the National Grid, is extensive. We believe the negative impacts of this could and should be minimised by concentrating the new buildings and routes on as limited a number of locations as possible.

Yet the opposite seems to be happening.

Firstly, Scottish Power Renewables, which operates a number of offshore wind farm projects, has identified a preferred site at Friston, adjoining the Suffolk Coast and Heaths AONB,

for an industrially-scaled substation.

Yet there is clearly a more suitable site at Sizewell which is already an existing "energy hub" and so is the most suitable location for such a complex. The reason why this location is not being used seems to revolve around a failure of Scottish Power Renewables and EDF Energy, who run the Sizewell nuclear site, to come to an agreement.

Secondly, such a new substation will require additional cabling linking it to the offshore windfarm, resulting in further disruption to the countryside.

As the council leaders referenced above say: "the potential for economic benefits in relation to the offshore proposals have to date not been

demonstrated as being significant enough to outweigh the disruption and longer term adverse impact on the local environment and communities.

"There has been to date inadequate demonstration by energy companies that their proposals would be adequately mitigated and there has been no discussion to date on compensation for the residual harm which will arrive from all of the energy projects proposed."

Let's not forget the impending National Grid projects known as Nautilus and Eurolink which must also be accommodated on the Suffolk coast in coming years, not to mention Sizewell C. The growing realisation is that the cumulative impacts of all this requires urgent co-ordinated action.

The Suffolk Preservation Society believes there should be a specific plan for the whole of the Suffolk energy coast - to include the related transport issues, not least the necessary improvements to, and possible rerouting in places of, the A12.

There is clearly a willingness for a more joined up approach from residents and politicians alike. And I'm convinced the

energy companies themselves would not be adverse to a less wasteful and risky way of doing business if they were encouraged to co-ordinate their plans.

There is also the perfect vehicle for such a co-ordinated approach and this is the regional industrial strategy, which is the responsibility of New Anglia LEP to co-ordinate. We think a Suffolk energy plan should be a key part of this strategy and must include the managing of environmental impacts as well as economic concerns. It is time for all stakeholders - developers, politicians, environmentalists and decision makers - to come together in a co-ordinated way.

Otherwise, the unique countryside along the Suffolk coast and beyond will be needlessly undermined by the failings of a fragmented planning system which allows companies such as EDF, National Grid and Scottish Power Renewables to not only choose where and how they want to develop their business but also choose the process by which their schemes are evaluated. Someone needs to get a grip on this situation or Suffolk will be paying the price.