

Willington Parish Council

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Response to the Castle Way Energy Scoping Consultation – Your Ref EN0110037

Introduction

Willington Parish Council recognises the importance of improving the UK's electricity infrastructure and increasing renewable energy generation. We are therefore not opposed to renewable energy or nationally significant infrastructure in principle. Our concern is whether this scheme has been designed in the best possible way. Throughout discussions with Castle Way Energy, it has become increasingly clear that several major infrastructure projects are either planned or already progressing around Willington. Each has its own objectives, timetable and business case. However, from the perspective of local communities, they are all part of one much bigger picture.

Our view is simple.

As a recognised Key Service Village, Willington should not have to accommodate a series of independently designed infrastructure projects when a more joined-up approach may reduce the impact on residents, businesses and the environment, not only within Willington, but across the Trent/A38/A50 corridor.

For that reason, Willington Parish Council requests that the following matters are fully explored before any Development Consent Order is submitted.

1. A Whole-System Infrastructure Masterplan

This has consistently been the Parish Council's primary request. Rather than considering Castle Way Energy in isolation, we believe there should be a strategic assessment of all major energy and infrastructure projects affecting the Willington area.

This should include:

- Castle Way Energy;
- National Grid reinforcement works (Chesterfield to Willington line);
- Battery Energy Storage applications;
- the East Midlands Rail Hub proposals;

- strategic housing growth around Mickleover and South Derbyshire;
- the former Willington Power Station site.
- Mercia Marina

We believe there is a real opportunity to reduce environmental impacts, construction disruption and future infrastructure costs if these projects are planned together rather than independently.

2. Full Assessment of the Former Willington Power Station Site

The former power station is already an established energy site and is committed within the neighbourhood plan for further energy generation use.

Before extensive development of agricultural land is considered, we believe every reasonable opportunity should be explored to make greater use of this brownfield site. This assessment should include discussions with the landowner, Beal Bank, and consideration of whether acquisition by agreement or, if justified through the DCO process, compulsory acquisition could provide a better long-term solution.

We appreciate that this may require a different commercial approach from one based primarily upon long-term leasing of agricultural land.

However, if this energy development is of National Strategic Infrastructure importance, then commercial convenience should not be the only consideration where nationally significant infrastructure is concerned.

The easy option of using greenbelt land instead of redeveloping more suitable brownfield site should not be based on pure profit by the developer. The benefit of the power station site should be placed with a heavier weighting and importance before greenbelt. It should be proven that the site cannot be used before a greenbelt field is developed.

3. Alternative Grid Connection Options

The Council would like to see greater exploration of opportunities to connect into existing or proposed electricity infrastructure rather than creating entirely new corridors.

In particular, we believe the Environmental Statement should consider whether closer integration with the proposed Chesterfield–Willington National Grid reinforcement could reduce the amount of new infrastructure required through open countryside.

4. Construction and Cumulative Impacts

Residents will experience the cumulative effect of all infrastructure projects, regardless of who is promoting them.

Construction traffic, road closures, utility diversions and disruption should therefore be assessed collectively rather than project by project. Without the correct proactive planning, the roads and access to the national grid will be closed and dug up on at least 3 separate occasions which will have an impact on employment, the environment, Willington as a key service village and the many other villages using Willington to access the A50 or A38 commuter routes.

Willington Parish Council is particularly concerned about the route through Willington and the cumulative impact alongside:

- National Grid works;
- proposed Battery Energy Storage developments;
- major housing developments;
- East Midlands Rail Hub proposals.

5. Impact on Future Development

The Council also requests that the proposed cable route is assessed against planned development within the village.

In particular, consideration should be given to the proposed retirement living development and whether alternative routes could avoid unnecessarily constraining future regeneration opportunities.

Infrastructure installed today should not limit sensible development for decades to come.

6. Flood Risk and Climate Resilience

Willington has experienced a noticeable increase in flooding over recent years.

Bridge closures, once relatively infrequent, now occur considerably more often than residents historically experienced.

The Environmental Statement should therefore consider:

- impacts upon the River Dove and River Trent floodplain;
- cumulative surface water impacts;
- climate change resilience;
- effects during prolonged flood events;
- interaction with other nearby developments.

7. Health

The Council recognises that there is currently no conclusive scientific evidence demonstrating harm from high-voltage electricity infrastructure operating within current UK standards.

However, there remains understandable public concern where infrastructure is located close to homes with anecdotal reports of increased cancer rates within Willington already.

The Environmental Statement should therefore provide a clear summary of current evidence, national guidance and the reasoning behind route selection where residential communities are affected.

Providing clear information is important in maintaining public confidence.

8. Legacy Benefits

If this nationally significant project proceeds, local communities should receive lasting benefits.

Willington Parish Council would welcome discussions regarding:

- environmental improvements;
- biodiversity enhancement;
- flood resilience projects;

- community facilities;
- highway improvements;
- long-term community investment;
- Reduced energy bills for those affected.

Legacy funding should form part of the overall project rather than being considered after decisions have already been made.

Yours sincerely

Catherine Hedley
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Willington Parish Council