

1. OPEN FLOOR HEARING SEALINK 5 November 2025 at 5.30pm

Paul Bongers de Rath, The Aldeburgh Society

I am here on behalf of the Aldeburgh Society, which is the **civic society** for the unique and historic coastal town of Aldeburgh. With a membership of **over 350** households - mainly residents but also including some business owners and holiday home owners - we strive **to protect and enhance the town's environment** - something of a challenge with all these energy projects around.

Aldeburgh has a long history and is **nothing like your average coastal town**. It is focussed on the sea, with a past in **shipbuilding** centre and latterly onshore **fishing**. More recently it has become a major **hub for culture and the arts**. Benjamin Britten lived here with Peter Pears for most of his adult life, his composing drawing inspiration from his surroundings. The annual Festival of Music and the Arts which he founded in 1948? goes from strength to strength.

Aldeburgh also hosts **annual festivals** for literature, poetry, documentary film, food and drink,

as well as promoting a popular **triathlon**, a renowned **carnival**, a **Boxing Day swim**, and a host of community events.

All these events – in addition to the **traditional appeal of the beach and the serene coastal and estuary landscape** - attract visitors from far and wide, and are the **foundation of our local economy**.

We boast four hotels, numerous restaurants and cafes, and a wide range of letting accommodation. Also a renowned yacht club, a championship golf club, a mixed programme theatre, a cinema, a library with a lively adult education programme – and a vibrant high street with many independent shops.

It is no wonder, then, that the Aldeburgh Society is **profoundly worried** by the onslaught of energy projects targeting the heritage coast. Visitor surveys show that people are attracted by the **unsullied environment, the dark skies, the peace and quiet, and the rural hinterland rich in flora and fauna**.

Construction traffic on the very inadequate A12 and unsuitable rural roads is already making travel to Aldeburgh more and more difficult. Many people are

likely to choose easier alternative destinations, at a high cost to our visitor economy.

The astonishing thing about the present situation is that Aldeburgh and the neighbouring coast in both directions are located in an **Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, otherwise known as a 'National Landscape'**. Your examiners' site inspections in the area will have revealed that large parts of the area to the north and west of Aldeburgh have been **scraped bare as part of the Sizewell C project. Still more destruction is starting now with onshore works for the** offshore windfarms.

Ironically, householders wishing to make even quite minor changes to their properties in Aldeburgh are required to **seek planning permission** because we are in the AONB. How on earth can it be seen as acceptable for the developers of energy projects to trample wholesale over this National Landscape?

Turning to the details of the Sealink project, our members have very **specific concerns** over what is being planned. The **cable landfall at Haven Beach** would, we are told, be carried out by underground drilling with no visible impact on this much loved recreational area close to the Scallop statue honouring Benjamin Britten. Is this really true? What if the fragile coastal structure - demonstrated by the need to demolish two fine houses on the cliff at Thorpeness in recent weeks - makes open trench drilling unavoidable? Next, the underground drilling is supposed to track under the **North Warren nature reserve wetland** – again, would this actually work? The plan then leads into a **wide cable corridor** to reach the **converter station** at Saxmundham, destroying or displacing the rich flora and fauna to be found along the way. Saxmundham is outside our area, but the thought of a **giant industrial building** looming over this historic market town is hard to bear. More desstructive cable corridor then leads to the NG substation overshadowing the medieval village of Friston.

The big question being asked by the Aldeburgh Society is whether any of this horror is actually necessary. It seems absurd to us to bring power generated by offshore windfarms ashore to Friston, only for this power, not needed in Suffolk, to be taken back out to sea to South-East England, where grid reinforcement is needed. **Surely it would make more sense to link offshore windfarms to interconnectors under the sea and to land the power close to where it is required?** It is deplorable that national government has continued to allow so many one-off developer-led projects to proceed, **without**

apparently any forward plan to create the undersea grid which is so clearly needed.

The consequences of this **national failure** are:-

- the construction of far more industrial infrastructure in fragile coastal areas,
 - the destruction of a large part of our so-called National Landscape,
- and the accumulation of un-coordinated construction traffic on wholly unsuitable roads.

The **cumulative impact** of all this on our **residents**, our **businesses**, our **visitor economy**, and our **quiet way of life** is almost unimaginable.

How can elected governments at all levels allow this to happen? In truth, it makes little sense for this highly undesirable Sealink project to be examined in isolation by the Planning Inspectorate. **A much more holistic approach to energy supply planning is an urgent national need.**

This wider dimension must receive the attention it deserves in this Examination.