

Good Morning. My name is Theresa Thorne, and I am speaking on behalf of the residents of Whitearch Park in Benhall.

At the outset, I would like to make it clear that we recognise change and progress as an essential part of modern life. We understand the importance of developing cleaner energy and sustainable infrastructure for future generations, and we do not stand in opposition to that broader goal. However, we do believe it is both reasonable and necessary to consider carefully the concentration of large-scale energy projects within what is, in reality, a relatively small and closely connected area.

The Suffolk coastline, once widely recognised and valued as a Heritage Coast, is already undergoing significant transformation. Across the region, we are seeing the effects of ongoing development—road closures, diversions, increased traffic, and major construction activity. Importantly, this is only the beginning. Further large-scale projects, including Sealink and other planned developments, have yet to commence, and their cumulative impact remains a serious concern.

While these projects may bring clear national and strategic benefits, we respectfully ask that equal weight is given to the local consequences for communities such as Benhall and Saxmundham. These are not abstract locations on a map; they are established communities where people live, work, and have chosen to spend important stages of their lives.

Whitearch Park is home to residents ranging in age from 60 to 92. Many moved here with the intention of downsizing and enjoying a quieter, more peaceful, and less stressful stage of life. For some, this is not simply a preference but an important aspect of maintaining their health and wellbeing. Increasingly, however, the level of disruption, activity, and uncertainty surrounding ongoing and proposed developments is beginning to affect that sense of stability.

One specific example concerns the railway line that runs close to our homes. The recent decision to use this line during the night in connection with construction activity has caused understandable concern among nearby residents. While we fully acknowledge that the railway itself is not new, the change in how it is being used represents a significant and material difference for those living closest to it. Night-time operations introduce a level of disturbance that was not previously experienced and is particularly challenging for older residents.

We were encouraged when a noise barrier was initially proposed as a potential mitigation measure. However, we were disappointed when this proposal was later withdrawn. Of equal concern was the perception among residents that those most directly affected were not fully involved in that decision-making process. Meaningful engagement is essential if communities are to feel heard and respected.

Traffic presents another growing and very tangible concern. In recent months, there has already been a noticeable increase in the volume of vehicles using Main Road in Benhall. For some residents, particularly those with reduced mobility or slower

reaction times, it is becoming increasingly difficult and stressful to exit safely onto the road. This is not simply an inconvenience—it is a matter of safety and confidence in everyday activities.

Looking ahead, there is understandable anxiety about how traffic levels may develop as further construction progresses, particularly in and around Saxmundham. Many residents now routinely allow additional time for even routine journeys to appointments, reflecting the unpredictability and congestion that are already emerging.

In this context, the proposal from Suffolk County Council to utilise the Northern Route for access to the converter stations site is viewed very positively by residents of Whitearch Park. As this route is already under construction for other related developments, its inclusion represents a practical and potentially effective way to reduce additional strain on local roads such as those through Benhall. We would therefore respectfully request that this route is formally incorporated into the Development Consent Order.

Beyond the practical impacts, there is also a more intangible but equally important concern: the pace and scale of change itself. For those who have lived in Suffolk for many years, there is a deep sense of connection to the character and identity of the area. Increasingly, residents express sadness at how quickly that character appears to be changing. Conversations within Benhall and Saxmundham often return to the same themes—uncertainty, loss of tranquillity, and concern for the future wellbeing of the community.

We fully appreciate that national infrastructure projects are complex and necessary, and that difficult decisions must often be made. However, we respectfully ask that these decisions do not lose sight of the people who will live with their consequences on a daily basis.

It is not only the physical environment that is affected by cumulative development, but also the mental wellbeing and quality of life of residents. For an older community in particular, prolonged disruption, increased noise, traffic, and uncertainty can have a significant and lasting impact.

In conclusion, I would ask the panel to consider carefully the cumulative effect of these developments—not only in terms of infrastructure and logistics, but in terms of human impact. The residents of Whitearch Park, along with those in Benhall and the wider Saxmundham area, are asking not for development to stop, but for it to be managed in a way that is balanced, considerate, and genuinely responsive to the communities it affects.

Thank you for listening. I sincerely hope that the voices, experiences, and wellbeing of the people who live here will carry as much weight in your deliberations as the infrastructure that is planned for this landscape.