

The Hearings

I would like to express disappointment at the lack of engagement by the applicant and its representative's and the repeated inadequacy of responses to questions and concerns raised by individual members of the community and representatives of community organisations during the recent hearings in Blackpool. Multiple questions and requests for information were met by the huge team representing the applicant with dismissive comments, silence or excuses as to why this information was not available. Given these hearings had been scheduled for a while and we as unpaid interested parties were able to show up, prepared and ready to participate, it seems astonishing that this group of paid representatives seemed unable to do the same. Even basic questions about disruption to emergency services, bird strikes in the vicinity of Blackpool Airport, the destruction of the dunes and overall project timescales and the reasons behind them, went inadequately or wholly unanswered. Never have I witnessed a group of individuals so underprepared for the task at hand, even at a basic community level, never mind representatives of a huge infrastructure project of this nature. If this isn't cause for concern enough there were several points during the proceedings when the behaviour of the applicant's representatives conveyed disrespect, bordering on contempt for the stakeholders, especially the local residents bravely enough to speak. I witnessed one resident having to ask a member of the M&M team to stop smiling and while she was sharing her concerns. On another occasion the applicant's legal representative could be heard muttering under her breath, 'it's only a cable'! I found this offensive and unacceptable.

The proposals themselves were represented in a haphazard, seemingly ad hoc manner giving an impression of ill-preparedness. This alone must surely raise questions about the applicant's ability to coordinate a project of this magnitude with all its unprecedented complexities and unmitigated risks.

Further concerning evidence of ineptitude and fragmented thinking was evident in the news that the applicant has now, without public consultation, notification or publicity apparently now escalated the estimated length of the project from 6 to 11 years in the space of just a few months! This change was explained away at the hearings as being related to the needs of the respective shareholders of both partners who jointly make up 'the applicant', and that shareholder needs were in effect the ultimate priority here ... over and above the requirements of local community and Net Zero itself. The subsequent clumsy presentation of the necessity of a sequential, as opposed to concurrent style of project construction with utter disregard for the needs of local farmers and the safety of beach users and those living in the airport flight path gives rise to further serious concern about who's needs and concerns are being prioritised here.

The Beach

Contradictory answers and comments were given to members of the public regarding the beach closure at St Anne's and the huge potential impact of this on the local and visiting community, was minimised. We have previously been told that the beach in question would be closed for two years and there seemed to be confusion amongst the applicants expert team during the hearings as to whether this meant total closure, partial closure or sporadic closure? The fact is that from the point of view of beach users whether or not this relates to the entire beach or sections thereof, what is clear is that the beach would be in effect a building site and as such, wholly unusable by anyone for the duration of the proposed work. Now the project has been extended to 11 years we can only assume in the absence of any clear answers even after closely following almost 4 days of hearings, that the beach will be closed now for much longer than 2 years. The local community around this beach are not comprised of wealthy people, many are retired public sector workers and a good proportion, like myself, reliant on public transport whether for reasons of [REDACTED] or low resources. This beach is the place where we seek to maintain our physical and mental health daily via the exercise and fresh air it affords us. Many of us can't afford to

run a car and this beach is the reason we moved to this part of the Fylde. As the project has now pretty much doubled in timescale, it's reasonable in the absence of any concrete alternative information to assume that the beach closure/inaccessibility would be doubled too - so we'd be looking at 4 years closure. These proposals will make this beach inaccessible for this duration, whether through complete closure or the restrictions caused by dust, debris and noise and I put it to you that there are people here in my community who will not be alive in 4 years time. This project will therefore mean that for the final years of their lives, they/we, will be destined to live out our time - following lives of service as teachers, nurses, paramedics, care workers, service and retail workers, trapped on a filthy, noisy building site. I would argue that this breaches our human rights denying us the peaceful and safe enjoyment of our homes during our final years.

The Dunes, Ecology and Flooding

There is also the issue of the disturbance and potential destruction of our dunes as there is an ecosystem here that has not been adequately

considered by the applicant. Our dunes provide this part of the Fylde with our only effective, sustained flood defence and it remains unclear whether all aspects of the questions posed regarding flooding and drainage have been fully accounted for.

Examples of this relate to mitigation of the issues of interrupting the drainage water courses by the building work especially if it is not known exactly what has been done previously and these works lie hidden below ground. Messing with our dunes is more than a matter of digging a tunnel which will then be filled in like a sandcastle, any disruption of the dunes messes with the safety and wellbeing of the local community, hugely increasing the likelihood of flooding and making any kind of insurance unaffordable or unavailable. Our uninsured homes will almost certainly be unprotected and become flooded at some point as a direct result.

The Airport, Safety and Birdstrikes

An additional concern for those living around the beach is that we are also living in the flight path of Blackpool Airport. Concerns raised by residents re birdstrike management were dismissed with one resident when asking related questions about community safety and risk to life, needing to request during the hearing that a member of the M&M team refrain from grinning and laughing while she was speaking. Appalling and shocking to witness. The lack of BAE engagement and apparent refusal to organise a survey leaves us aghast when all that was offered during the hearings was a comment about mitigation on bird strikes not being possible and that as we can't mitigate now, we don't need to mitigate in the future despite the fact that the disruption of bird breeding and roosting sites will undoubtedly lead to a much increased risk. When a resident raised this she was admonished by the applicants legal representative for her use of evocative

language!

Any reduction in the quality of (the permanent) habitat at Newton March, Lytham Moss, Freckleton Marsh and Lea Marsh to discourage birds from visiting it will have a consequential effect on the biodiversity score so it may not be possible to satisfy BNG requirements (admittedly not yet a legal obligation but recommended in policy) and avoid increasing bird strike risk. The proposed habitat can be found on page 56 of APP-106

These points were summarily dismissed as BNG was not a legal requirement despite this being a government intention, that the applicant was seeking to meet it, and would be a legal requirement later this year.

It's clear that the only way to move forward with this safely is to strongly consider one of the proposed alternative routes.

Emergency Vehicle Impact

Because of the location of Blackpool Airport, there are only two north / south major arterial roads between Blackpool and St Anne's. One is Clifton Drive to the west of the airport and the other is Queensway to the east of the airport. Both roads become major bottlenecks when planned roadworks are carried out on just one side of the airport, causing long queues of traffic and severe delays. Both these roads will need to be crossed by the proposed cable route. There does not seem to be any 'emergency vehicle impact statement' in relation to access by Police, Fire, Ambulance and Coastguard emergency vehicles and when this was questioned at the hearings the response was that emails sent to the various emergency services had gone unanswered and not followed up!