

## Wind Farm Hearing October 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> 2025

### Observations on the Draft Consent Order

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I wish I could claim to have read and understood every document in the Examination Library. I suspect were these pages placed end to end they might reach from Land's End to John O'Groats although the route would fall under the remit of a National Infrastructure project inquiry.

So, it seems that the final DCO will be a document which has been subject to the closest scrutiny and each and every i will have been dotted and every t crossed to meet the legislative and procedural requirements. Clearly the Examination Authority has sought clarity on many issues during the course of the process; but equally, the applicants have seemed confident that whatever question is posed, they can produce an answer which will satisfy the Examination Authority and any other line of enquiry raised by stakeholders. This has re-affirmed to my mind that the DCO will find favour with the Examination Authority and ultimately the Secretary of State will be content to grant approval.

With some experience of planning applications and subsequent public enquiries, I cannot but help admire the thoroughness of the process and the infinite nuances and details which are addressed. But the key point I want to make is that the very process of testing the validity of the DCO within the constraints laid down by the rules applying to National Infrastructure projects is the reason so many stakeholders enjoy such strong feelings of frustration.

Let me illustrate this from a personal perspective which in all truth is insignificant in comparison to the challenges faced many other stakeholders. I am the shooting tenant on [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] and have been for over fifteen years. I have developed this shoot with a deep emphasis on conservation and respect for the environment. The proposed cable route will, in all probability, result in the closure of the shoot. So what? you may say, but this activity involves not only considerable financial outlay, but it contributes to my personal health and wellbeing and that of the other people involved. This small-scale enterprise which also complements the dog training side of my business requires careful short and long-term planning.

So many things I will not know at the end of this examination of the DCO and its referral to the Secretary of State and the final decision to approve: when will work start, where will work start, what will be the actual impact, how long will the land be subject to construction activity because the two projects are not in unison, can I negotiate access during ground works and continue limited and modified shooting activity? Who exactly will I liaise with to resolve and discuss consequences-the list of uncertainties is endless.

My understanding is that the DCO is a higher order process- almost the testing of fundamental principles; it is of course detailed but matters which concern the true

nature of the projects' impact on people and places are demoted to a lower level and various protocols are appended and deemed to adequately address these matters: for example, construction traffic routes, the actual design of the two substations, the use and re-use of works' compounds, the quality and timing of re-instatement to damaged land, the list goes on....

The competence and experience of the applicants' representatives is well-evidenced and there are other wind farms projects which are often cross-referenced to underline that, in considering this particular DCO, it is not new territory and they offer useful precedents in meeting some of the challenges raised in this examination. I do garner the impression that there is an underlying confidence that despite the concerns raised by many stakeholders, those who are charged with assessing the merits of the DCO will find no substantial reasons to recommend its rejection. It is a complex and complicated process with well-defined criteria which both applicants and assessors know intimately and if the process is diligently followed and parameters respected then a successful application is guaranteed: a rarefied planning world in which the participants engage in various intricate niceties and take special care not to allow any breach of the prescribed rules of the game.

Forgive me if I overlooked the research undertaken by the applicants into all the impacts of the proposed cable route. I know, for example, that the impact of construction work has an immediate impact on the environment, whereas effective mitigation takes years and is not always successful (take for example, the number of saplings which have failed to mature on new highway verges nationally).

But the impacts which really matter are on the individuals, the families, the communities, and the environment. As far as I can see these are largely set aside by the drive to move the DCO forward within the legislative framework and the importance attached to ticking all the boxes which are neatly captured in the appropriate vocabulary of a process which denies the voice of those who will live with the consequences for many, many years.

These voices, it could be argued, will have the opportunity to raise their concerns as many supplementary planning applications will be made and considered by local authorities at various stages in securing the cable routes. This is of little comfort to those who are faced with life changing uncertainties. Worse still, so much that is to happen, assuming the DCO is approved, is a journey into the unknown: this part of the Fylde could be building site for a decade.

I doubt whether I will see the benefit of this major infrastructure project in my lifetime.

Nor am I convinced that the applicants have demonstrated that they truly "understand how best to deliver the infrastructure required in a way that respects the needs of surrounding communities" or that they are "committed to making sure we deliver the project in a way that considers the people who live and work in the area." (statutory consultation brochure October 2023)

The applicants aspire to produce a draft consent order which is not fundamentally flawed and which, after minor adjustments in the review process, gets the green light; in my view this DCO is flawed because in its procedural focus and its legislative

constraints and in the pages and pages of commentary, it inevitably commissions the true impact of the cable route on people and places to be addressed at another time: it does not explore in painstaking detail the human cost.