

Celebrities join campaign against green energy cable at Suffolk village

Wind farm interconnector would help to power 1.8m homes, but Walberswick locals say it would be disastrous for the landscape, wildlife and tourism

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Residents of Walberswick fear that the huge trenches that would need to be built to host the new electricity cables will scar the landscape

“We’re not against renewables and this isn’t a Nimby thing. It’s a common sense thing. If it comes in here, it will be a disaster,” says David Riches, gesturing at reedbeds where a nationally important new electricity cable could be laid.

A 64-year-old artist, Riches is one of the many locals in Walberswick who have united against a North Sea energy scheme that could make landfall in this historical secluded Suffolk village.

National Grid and its Dutch counterpart, Tennet, want to build an electricity cable that would connect the grids of the Netherlands and the UK as well as offshore windfarms. It would be the world’s largest “multi-purpose interconnector” and the first of its kind in the UK, where it would be capable of powering 1.8 million homes. But the cable needs to come onshore somewhere — and two of five proposed sites are at this tiny village.

Fears over the impact on traffic, wildlife, landscapes and tourism have prompted a well-organised opposition in Walberswick, boosted by a constellation of local

celebrities, including Emma Freud, the broadcaster and partner of Richard Curtis, the *Hideous Kinky* author Esther Freud and the illustrator Charlie Mackesy.

Walberswick offers a microcosm of the tensions Britain faces as its race to build a zero-carbon power system bumps up against local concerns. Across the country, an estimated 20 new cables will need to come onshore this decade to meet the government's goal of 50GW of offshore wind power by 2030, up from 13.6GW today. About seven miles south of Walberswick, pylons will need to be built for the new Sizewell C nuclear plant.

In the village, concern has focused on the mostly open-cut trenches that need to be dug for the Lionlink interconnector to take the power to a substation at Friston. Campaigners claim the works could be the width of the M11 or M25 — up to 50 metres at points. National Grid said a “temporary construction corridor” would be about 30 metres wide, encompassing a 2-metre trench.

It's clear there would be disruption for the village, which is accessed by a narrow, pavement-free road. “It's a profound concern for the whole village. It will have a major impact on locals and tourists,” said Richard Leiper, a senior barrister and trustee of a charity that owns the land for one of the two proposed Walberswick landing sites.

Charlie Mackesy, author of *The Boy, the Mole, the Fox and the Horse*, is among the celebrities who have joined the campaign against the project

RICHARD POHLE FOR THE TIMES

In the local pub, the Anchor, a petition has been adorned with an illustration contributed by Mackesy, whose book *The Boy, the Mole, the Fox and the Horse* was adapted for television last year. “So much beauty we need to look after,” it says. Bitterns are among the many birds recorded locally by ornithologists.

Esther Freud, whose family has been spending time in the area since her grandparents bought a house there, said that she was “not aware of opposition to the wind farms. I think people are hungry for that kind of energy.”

But, she said: “It’s a heartbreaking idea that in order to fuel the country with green energy they’re destroying our green world.”

She added: “I suppose anyone who lives in Suffolk particularly is aware of how fragile the coast is. It just takes one stormy night and the beach starts eroding the cliffs falling into the sea, it feels as if we’re already protecting it and all the wildlife.”

People are also concerned about the economic impact. Philippa Everett, who lives up the coast at Reydon, one of the five proposed landfall sites, is worried about the impact on farmers and tourism from heavy vehicles moving around. “I’ve got an Airbnb which relies on people being able to get down my little country lane. They come here to Suffolk for their holidays, and the pretty landscape and the lovely views,” she said. Everett said communities at potential sites wouldn’t allow themselves to be pitted against each other.

Residents fear that, as well as the environmental impact of the project, tourism will also be hit “These are the wrong plans in the wrong location,” said Fiona Gilmore, who runs the Suffolk Energy Action Solutions campaign group. Gilmore, who has also fought other offshore wind power schemes coming onshore, claimed she was “passionate about renewables”. However, she wants more effort to centralise connections out at sea before bringing them onshore at one brownfield location such as the Isle of Grain, rather than at many spots on the coast.

Other locals take a different view but few wanted to make their identity public given the prevailing opinion. One person who works in the village, but did not want to be named, said the cable should go ahead at Walberswick if rejection

would mean delaying more renewable energy. “The voyage to green energy needs to happen. But not at any cost,” they said.

An electrician working in the village, who did not want to be named, said: “For the benefit of the country, for the power, it’s a good thing. And it’s temporary. It’s not like the pylons they’re going to put up. You’ve got to do something about electricity.” Dan, a 37-year old lawyer, said he was “relaxed” about the scheme provided the impacts were not too adverse locally.

National Grid Ventures, which is consulting on Lionlink landing sites until November 3, said the cable could not access the national electricity grid via the Isle of Grain because Lionlink’s connection agreement was for the Leiston area in Suffolk.

“We are keen to work with communities to develop the most suitable project to enable us all to realise the project’s national benefits to support the UK’s growing energy needs and play a key role in reaching the UK’s climate and energy goals and ensuring national energy security,” said Gareth Burden, construction director at the company.