



Cllr Sam Chapman-Allen
Leader of the Council
Breckland District Council
Elizabeth House
Walpole Loke
Dereham
Norfolk
NR19 1EE

Thursday 18th February 2021

Dear Sam,

Reference: 3PL/2021/0091/F – Erection of a 24.46m high radar tower and associated comms cabins at the Anglian Water Drilling Unit site, Abbey Road, Old Buckenham, NR17 1PZ

I am writing to you to highlight my continued concerns about the Met Office proposals to construct a weather radar tower at the Anglian Water site in Old Buckenham.

As you will recall, I contacted you about the Met Office's previous application for a weather radar tower at this particular site back in January 2020 with serious concerns about the impact of the proposals on the nearby Old Buckenham Airfield – a major tourist asset in our part of the world. Having studied the proposals on this occasion, it does appear that many of those concerns have been looked at in more detail by the Met Office and that this new application is more respectful of the Airfield's proximity. (For example, the height of the tower has been reduced by just over 4 metres and now misses the Airfield's 'Inner Horizontal Surface' protected area – albeit by only 800mm, by my calculations!).

While I very much welcome this boost for the Airfield, new information has now come to my attention that continues to make me question the suitability of the site.

It is my understanding that, following surveys carried out by the British Trust for Ornithology in the area, it has been discovered that several rare bat species live in the area – including the Western Barbastelle Bat, the Serotine Bat and the Nathusius' Pipistrelle Bat. All are threatened with extinction in this country and, I believe, 'red-listed' by the International Union for Conservation of Nature.

Having read through the documents for this application, it is clear that the issue of bats is rarely mentioned and I fear that it may have been missed or, worse, ignored for the convenience of getting approval for this application. I know from my conversations with Old Buckenham Parish Council that there is a strong desire to pause the application until at least such time that proper, comprehensive ecological surveys have been carried out to determine the full extent of the bat

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colonies in the area. (From my experience, once bats are detected, the colonies are much bigger than first thought or recognised! A detailed study over a sufficient period is probably required to fully assess the situation).

Although some may deem the presence of these rare bats as an inconvenient nuisance, I would urge the Planning Committee to view them as a valuable asset – one that does seem to be unique to Norfolk, and definitely worth protecting. If we are to retain the county's rural heritage and ensure that it remains a wonderful place to live, work and visit as we move towards a 'Greener', Net Zero, 21st century society, we must prioritise the conservation of such species.

I should, of course, highlight the enormous visual, and physical, impact that the proposed weather radar will have on residents living in the vicinity of the Anglian Water site too – particularly Mr and Mrs Riches of Waterworks House, but several others too. I have also been struck by the number of residents living in the area that, until recently, were not aware of the Met Office proposals for this weather radar tower – and who have not been directly consulted.

There can be no doubt that this weather radar tower is not reflective of the very rural nature of this area. Given the geography of the area, it will clearly dominate the surrounding landscape and be visible for some distance. Many are concerned by the impact of what will undoubtedly be an eyesore – namely in relation to their quality of life, but also upon the prices of their homes. (There can be no question that this will impact upon local house prices – what compensation will be offered? I understand that Historic England have even requested they be consulted due to the definite visual impact of the radar tower upon historic landmarks in the nearby area). Furthermore, there are worries about the potential health effects that could be encountered by those who may live in close proximity to the tower for a prolonged period of time and, while I know there is some scientific debate about the evidence of such health impacts from these radar towers, I would like to know more about the work that has been done to determine that this tower would be safe at the site in question)

With this in mind, I am surprised that the Met Office continues to insist this is the best location in Norfolk for this structure – and that they haven't consulted with the locals in far greater depth to at least try and find a solution that is more acceptable to the community. Perhaps had the Met Office worked with local residents more, they might find they were not up against the level of opposition that they now are.

As before, I am absolutely not against the construction of such a radar tower, along with its associated infrastructure, in Mid Norfolk – and, as before, I would be very willingly to work with the Met Office in order to try and find a more suitable location elsewhere in my constituency, should no others be situated beyond my patch. (Please take this as me formally offering my assistance to the Met Office again).

Given the size and amount of free space in Norfolk, there must be a more suitable, alternative location elsewhere. I am not convinced however, certainly from what I have read, that the Met Office has truly endeavoured to seek out possible alternatives since the previous application was brought forward – beyond the one that was temporarily offered by the Airfield.

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George Freeman MP
Member of Parliament for Mid Norfolk
House of Commons, London SW1A
0AA

I would ask that my letter is formally recorded and brought to the attention of your planning officers and the relevant members of the Planning Committee prior to any decision being made.

Yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "George".

George Freeman MP

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