

## **Eye gas-fired power station outcome**

In recent editions of Suffolk View, our county newsletter, we have reported on the proposal for the 200 megawatt gas-fired power station on the World War II airfield at Eye together with a proposed adjacent substation. The airfield brownland site had already absorbed a number of wind turbines, a chicken waste incinerator plant and other large industrial structures, with more infrastructure to come. This was clearly not an application that CPRE was likely to resist. Of course, CPRE acknowledges the need for such uses, and is not unrealistic about local and national needs where appropriately sited. As a power station it was also classified as one of the new Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects (NSIP) for which Government has created a fast-track consent formula that is very hard to oppose. So it looked set to gain early approval and both the County and District Councils were proposing little resistance.

However, this application had a real sting in its tail, namely a massive substation in open countryside under the nearby pylon line surrounded by the ancient settlements of Thrandeston, Mellis and Yaxley, not to mention the relative proximity of Eye itself. This was our concern as there were also some 165 listed buildings which would be impacted adversely, and a considerable area of important, known but un-excavated pre-Roman field boundaries and ancient field patterns. For assets of such critical importance CPRE was duty bound to object particularly as the applicant had made clear that a much smaller solution could be achieved, but they had no intention of doing so because the costs would be significantly greater. A professionally reasoned objection was submitted by CPRE on heritage and archaeological grounds and we were supported by Parish Councillors and local residents who had also thoroughly understood the issues, and had submitted their own objections, like ours, mainly on heritage grounds.

In December last year CPRE and other objectors appeared before the Planning Inspector who carefully questioned our arguments which were based on planning law and guidance. Suffolk County Council also supported the defence of the archaeology under scrutiny by the Inspector.

Ultimately the applicant received their consent for the power station as we all expected but at the very real price for them of having the smaller and much more expensive substation – or nothing. The damage to pristine countryside will now be a 60 per cent smaller footprint and contained within a building rather than a 22 acre blight.

So, as the county Chairman involved in this particular planning case, what are the lessons? First: do not be daunted, but present an impeccably professional case with equally well-prepared local objectors. Find the common ground, in this case heritage, between you and those on the same tack to strengthen the case. And fire off the heritage bullets – they are enshrined in law and they are in our armoury. Even if the system appears heavily loaded against a case, if the arguments are sound, the Planning

Inspector is duty-bound to hear those arguments which he will take into account in his final analysis.

In this case, the outcome is an important gain for all who care about the heritage of Suffolk.