RAMPION 2 NEW SUBSTATION AT OAKENDENE – THE WRONG SITE

Further to the article in 1st November issue ‘Cables threat to Royal Woodland’ I am also questioning the choice of location for the new Substation that would serve the Rampion 2 Windfarm. There is the second consultation underway about the onshore cable route and the first since RWE decided to opt for a new substation at Oakendene, on the A272 near Cowfold. This brings the 50 metre wide construction route across the river Adur and all through the undisturbed patchwork of hedges and flood meadows around the Cowfold Stream (a named tributary that flows into the river Adur). With this comes the destruction of meadows that have not been ploughed for decades, many areas of species-rich hedgerow (some over 3 metres wide) and many mature oak trees. RWE say that it can be 2 years before the land is reinstated in any form. West Sussex County Times has reported that there is a River Adur Landscape Recovery project which has just received funding from Defra, is spearheaded by Knepp Estate’s Wildland Foundation, and is supported by the Wilder Horsham District policy. This aims to improve the flood areas of the river, join up wildlife corridors and increase biodiversity along and around the tributaries, yet I cannot even get answers about how this massive construction project for Rampion 2 will mitigate against the loss of carbon, wildlife habitat, wildlife corridors and biodiversity in this specific area. It is not so much rewilding that is needed here but mitigation and preservation.

There are red list bird species that nest all along and across the cable route around the Cowfold Stream from April to July. These include nightingales, turtle doves and cuckoos, which are not even mentioned in the published Preliminary or Supplementary Environmental reports for Rampion 2. We do not believe that the RWE environmental surveyors came here during nesting times. In March each year there is a toad migration on our narrow private lane which is to be crossed twice by the 164ft wide construction route, but this also gets no mention. There are adders that nest in nearby farm grounds where the cables come through, these are also a protected species, yet no surveys mention them or detail whether the vibration of construction will be a problem to them. I sent photos and recordings last year and in September 2021 I had a representative of the engineering company walk around the site with me, yet I have no evidence that any of this was added to the reports nor have I heard how things may be considered and protected. Copies of what was included in the surveys were promised at the time of the visit but I have asked by email last year and again by letter in August this year when the substation route option was confirmed. I have had no replies.

We saw for ourselves that restoration after Rampion 1 cable construction was poor and there are still struggling hedges 6 years on. A phrase in the Sussex Wildlife Trust’s Response to the first Rampion 2 consultation was ‘It is apparent in the aerial photography that there are still clear gaps in the hedgerows along the Rampion 1 cable route’ and that reinstatement had clearly failed in a number of places. Lost mature oak trees cannot be reinstated in our lifetime, and most trees in the cable path would not be considered significant enough to merit the extra cost of sending cables deep under their roots to save them. There is a boundary behind our property that could stand to lose 25 mature oak trees in a double row. Between these rows is a sheltered and well-used route for wildlife that leads out from an area of woodland nearby. There are badger setts, rabbit warrens and deer are often seen. This boundary would have to be breached to get the cables and the construction vehicles through. Mature oaks are ecosystems of ivy, insects, fungi, caterpillars, birdlife as well as being impressive carbon stores. Even successful Jubilee Planting (like that proposed in the article mentioned above) cannot replace what will be lost if mature hedges and trees are not protected.

This is not just an issue for the landowners and very local residents, it is a much bigger environmental question which has not been adequately addressed by those who stand to profit so much from creating Windfarms.

Kent Street Resident, Cowfold