

Briefing Note: Application's Economic Impact – A Business Perspective

The applicant's submission Chapter 21: Socio-economics, Tourism and Recreation is founded on statistics for North Devon and Torridge area which they define as the "local area". We challenge this definition as our local area is the Parish of Braunton and the neighbouring parishes of Georgeham and Heanton Punchardon which will be impacted upon.

To support the Braunton Parish Neighbourhood Plan, Devon County Council produced a Local Insight profile for 'Braunton Parish' area 2021 with a section that specifically analysed our local economic activity across sectors.

In respect of business based in Braunton Parish the three largest sectors are hotels and catering, retail industry and agriculture. The first two sectors account for over 40% of employment in our local area. It is worth noting that some of these people may not live in the Parish, so arguably the Parish is an employment provider.

CONSTRUCTION PHASE IMPACT

These two sectors cater for both residents and visitors throughout the year. Whilst there are peak periods related to school holidays, local businesses identify that their trading patterns indicate visitors can now be expected from mid-March to early November, followed by a busy December. This pattern is also applicable to Georgeham Parish.

Residents and visitors alike come to Braunton and the surrounding area because of its landscape and associated recreational pastimes. This is what drives our economy. So it is understandable why the business community have deep concerns about the proposal which will see our iconic places such as Saunton Sands, Braunton Marsh and the Taw Estuary become construction sites for a minimum of 24 months.

Businesses at Saunton Beach are particularly vulnerable to the proposed construction activity. It is difficult to imagine how they will trade given the loss of carparking space, construction traffic, drilling compound and the digging of the cable routes. Would you spend your holiday in a chalet that overlooked a construction site? Whilst the chalet owner may be compensated for loss of trade during the construction period it is unknown how quickly normal trade can be resumed if at all.

Businesses in Braunton village are already experiencing a decreased footfall because of the current cost of living crisis and now fear that this will be exacerbated by the construction activity and the unknown longer term effects of loss of repeat business. There is also concern that the projected HGV traffic will impact upon the timely delivery of stock and staff ability to get to work. This concern is applicable to neighbouring villages that are access via A361 and B3232.

A returning customer segment is that of the surfing community some of whom will come for a single day from places such as Bristol because of our excellent surfing beaches. If the surfers find or feel that their access to these beaches is severely restricted, they will go elsewhere and the consequential loss of trade for the surf shops and hospitality outlets.

The construction activity will have an immediate and tangible impact upon local business. Decreased revenues will lead to job redundancies and more pertinently business closures.

POST CONSTRUCTION

More worrying is the potential impact post construction. Our businesses work incredibly hard to ensure repeat custom, with many visitors coming multiple times per year. Construction sites do not encourage people to spend time in an area, with the consequence that their hard earned money will not be spent in our local independent businesses. Our beautiful area is our Unique Selling Point (USP) and visitors will seek alternate locations to visit, no doubt impacting on when or more worryingly if, they decide to visit our area again.

Businesses know that much of their trade is repeat customer with many people coming at least twice a year. If the customer's experience is that of construction activity across the landscape will they want to come back? They may well go to alternative destinations and not return.

BUSINESS INTERRUPTION TO GROWTH

This proposal is creating uncertainty in the business community both now and in planning ahead for the next few years. There is already an instant where a thriving local business is putting future development plans on hold due to proximity of the proposed cable route and potential harm to the water table upon which they rely.

CONCLUSION

Given all of the above we vehemently disagree with the applicant's conclusions in their Table 21.4.3 Summary of Socio Economics, Tourism and Recreation during construction where they state that significance of impact on Tourism and Recreation will be minor adverse. We would argue that the impact will be very significant and so needs to be restated as medium to high both during construction and for the residual effect.

Because employment and economic expenditure is inextricably linked with Tourism and Recreation there is a knock on effect resulting in a medium to high impact not the minor beneficial that the applicant is claiming.

This proposal will have a profound socio- economic impact on our community with the real likelihood of job losses and business closures.