

Dear Sir.

I am writing in response to the proposal to erect power lines along "corridor 2".

I strongly object to this proposal on the following grounds:

1. Permanent scarring of an area of natural beauty and disruption of a beautiful landscape.
2. Potential (and perceived) medical effects on the children in the neighbouring schools.
3. Potential (and perceived) medical effects on the residents of neighbouring properties.
4. Detrimental impact on the local economy by way of the affect on house prices and inward movement of new residents.
5. Lack of notice upon the residents of Nailsea of the proposals.

I do not live in an area which will be affected by having pylons built outside my house and I am therefore not speaking from the viewpoint of a NIMBY (Not in My Back Yard) but I appreciate the beautiful countryside which surrounds this area.

I am well aware of the two sides of the medical argument for and against the perceived effects that the electrical currents around pylons that either side of the argument state. I am aware of the research put forward and have studied both sides of the debate. I am aware of Professor Henshaw's views, who is a strong advocate highlighting the negative effect of pylons in relation to nearby residents health, and I am equally aware of the tests and scientific responses that National Grid have put forward countering this view point. I am also aware that both sides of the debate feel passionately about, and believe strongly in, their own views and each believe that they have the scientific evidence to back up their stance.

However, I do believe that I have a different point to make which is backed up by my real life experiences as an estate agent having sold over 4,000 houses in and around Nailsea over the past 27 years and I would like to give you a common example.

There are areas of Nailsea where not only the value but, more importantly the saleability of houses which have been constructed in close proximity to the existing pylons, is seriously affected. This is not necessarily because people are persuaded by the negative side of the medical argument but because of the PERCEIVED potential of the negative effects that the pylons could have. People rarely gamble with their health or that of their children and when looking to move home, and given a choice between investing their life savings and future well being in a property close to or nowhere near pylons, they invariably choose the latter option. I have no doubt that even those whose sympathies fall on the pro pylon side of the debate still do not choose to live close to them, given the option.

An actual experience, which has been repeated countless times over the course of 27 years of marketing property locally, follows, but firstly some background.

Parish Brook Road in Nailsea is a small cul de sac of a dozen 4 bedroom detached homes built in the mid 1990's by Westbury Homes to a high specification and have the most amazing views across Yeo Valley towards Tickenham and the setting sun behind Clevedon. The outlook from each of these properties is over beautiful fields and farmland with a backdrop of the Tickenham and Wraxall hills. They are very attractive homes and they enjoy a truly amazing view. The only negative aspects of the location are the pylons which run directly over the rear gardens of the properties.

Westbury Homes were completely convinced by the evidence that National Grid put before them when deciding to build this small development and took the view that their potential buyers would also be persuaded by the strength of the scientific evidence that they had been given. They thought that the views and aspect would more than outweigh any niggling concerns or doubts that potential buyers

would have about the proximity of the pylons. At the time, unfortunately for Westbury Homes, this did not prove to be the case and despite a strong property market in the mid 1990,s they found themselves having to sell most of the properties by way of part exchange. This meant they took buyers properties in part payment for the new homes and then set about selling those houses instead. These properties, taken in part payment, were often properties that had a blight or difficult selling issues of their own (e.g. located in "undesirable" areas or areas of high crime or on a main road junction next to traffic lights etc). The point being that the buyers viewed the brand new houses in Parish Brook Road not necessarily as their "dream home" but as the lesser of the two evils and as a way of moving on from their own difficult homes (having not been able to find buyers for their own properties). Many of these residents of Parish Brook Road that I have since spoken to have said that they took the view that they would worry about re-selling the Parish Brook Road house when the time came.

Now my example:

I was instructed to sell a property in Parish Brook Road. Despite making many confirmed viewing appointments, few prospective buyers actually turned up. When I contacted them to see if they had been delayed and wanted to re-appoint a viewing time, they invariably said something along the lines of -

"No thanks. I had a quick look at the outside first and decided I didn't want to live under pylons".

I would try to discuss the evidence put forward by National Grid but the reply would often be –

"No thanks. Whether there is a problem or not, I'm not risking it - I wouldn't let my family live there if you paid me to".

This scenario was repeated many times over a 12 month period and, on the few occasions where buyers did turn up and actually view the property, the feedback afterwards was often along the lines of –

"Lovely house, great views...but I couldn't live with the pylons there and even if I could, my friend/neighbour/relative/local shop keeper/ hairdresser....says that houses in that road are really difficult to sell because no one wants to live under or close to pylons because they give you cancer".

And again I would try to talk about the research into the issues and their concerns but come up against the same negative outcome.

Finally, I did it. I managed to show someone round who was moving from a rented property in an area already affected by pylons and took the view that –

"They ain't done me no 'arm".

He loved the views and the accommodation and ignored all the naysayers that he came across. A sale was agreed and his mortgage application was completed and sent off. The surveyor duly carried out his survey report and valuation. In doing so, a surveyor will speak with other estate agents in the town not marketing the subject property and get evidence of comparable sales. Of course, the feedback that the surveyor received was very negative...

"Houses in that road take literally years to sell" and "No one wants to buy them because of the pylons" etc.

The surveyor works on behalf of the building society or lender and his remit is to ensure that if the borrower defaults on the mortgage, the lender can get their money back from the enforced sale of the property. When it came to completing his report, the surveyor took the view that it wasn't a risk that he could recommend to the building society who had instructed him to carry out the report and his recommendation was that they decline to offer a mortgage against the property.

The prospective buyer then called me to say that despite wishing to proceed, he wasn't able to. We discussed sourcing an alternative lender for the mortgage who may possibly take a different view but the impetus had been lost and the buyer's confidence in the house had been completely crushed.

“Even if I love the house, I will never be able to sell it again”.

The result of this was that I had to find a potential buyer who would not only accept all the negative aspects of the proximity of the pylons, ignore all the naysayers, come to terms with the perceived medical issues (whether proven or not from the evidence available) and be literally a cash buyer – not requiring funding or finance in any way. Consequently the price was adjusted and a buyer was eventually found and a sale went through but at a substantially discounted figure and after a considerable length of time.

Over the years a rule of thumb has evolved. Properties in Parish Brook Road have a “value” (IF you can sell them) which is approximately 25% less than the equivalent house in a non pylon affected area of Nailsea. In real terms, the current price you need to pitch a property in Parish Brook Road in order to stand any chance of achieving a viewing, let alone a sale, is £250,000. If you were to put the same property in a non pylon affected area of Nailsea it would certainly achieve a figure of £335,000 in today’s market; i.e. the proximity of the pylon has the effect of reducing the immediate value by £85,000 in today’s terms but I stress, that is IF you can actually find a buyer at all!

I have played this scenario out so many times that frankly, from a commercial stand point, I now refuse to market houses on Parish Brook Road - not only because it is not commercially viable but because I genuinely cannot stand the stress and anguish that home owners go through with the drawn out and painful process of selling their homes, through no fault of their own. Their only “sin” was to buy a home, for whatever reason, under a pylon in the first place.

This situation will be played out countless times in the future and affect hundreds more houses and families if the proposals for “Corridor 2” go ahead. I accept the reason for the increase in power supply that is required and I understand that a way needs to be found but I strongly believe that more careful consideration should be given to the route taken and alternative ways of doing so. I also strongly believe that giving the local residents just a few weeks notice of consultation before a decision is taken, especially as it is clear that these proposals have been in the pipeline for some considerable time, is scandalous and unacceptable.

More time and a more considered approach is essential so that a properly constructed and informed set of decisions can be taken to ensure that whatever upgrading is required is done with the minimum amount of negative effect on families, children and the environment; not just in the short term but throughout a potential lifetime of impact.

Stephen Pring

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