

Draft - Updating Letter to the Chilterns' Conservation Board

From Colin Ratcliff
Clerk to Goring-on-Thames Parish Council

Dr. Lucy Murfitt
Chilterns' Conservation Board

Dear Lucy,

Further to our discussion in March concerning the Chilterns AONB and the Goring Conservation Area, matters have moved on apace.

Despite very strong and increasing opposition to the installation of an electricity generation plant on the Goring Weir, SODC granted planning permission. The views of the 4 supporters were favoured over those of the 58 objectors, including Goring PC. Local feeling was further aggravated by the comment of one District Councillor on the Planning Committee: "Goring want to preserve their village in aspic".

Initial legal advice to Goring PC indicated that SODC had failed to follow the guidelines for development in AONBs and CAs. SODC justified this by changing the classification of the proposal from "major" on its original presentation to "minor" in its current substantially unchanged re-application. Goring PC has become increasingly concerned about SODC's disregard of their duties to the local environment (specifically regarding the AONB) given this and other examples. At a special Parish Council Meeting in April, it was agreed that Goring PC would begin the process of making a High Court Claim against SODC's decision (ref: [CO/2122/2016](#)), though there were, of course, concerns about the cost and risk of this action. An independent protest group: "Stop the Goring Hydro" has formed, and is hoping to raise £15k to support cost of the legal challenge.

The principal driver of the project is that it will produce green energy, and a few individuals even mistakenly believe that "free electricity" will be available to the community. Our initial view was that the quantity of electricity generated would be not outweigh the harm to the CA and the AONB, and that with the withdrawal of government subsidy, would be hugely uneconomical. However, further consideration of the energy used in the construction, operation and decommissioning of the plant suggests that there will be no net energy gain in the 20 years of its working lifetime. Unfortunately, SODC planners have neither the technical knowledge nor the legal requirement to assess the viability of such projects.

In addition to the problems with the historically important Brunel railway bridge over the Thames at Gatehampton (a "listed building"); the failure of Network Rail to consult over the railway electrification designs; and the Goring Hydro proposal, Goring PC noted a report by the National Trust ("*AONBs and development*") which criticised SODC for their failure to apply AONB legislation to the redevelopment of the CABI site at Crowmarsh near Wallingford. The conclusion of the NT was that poor decisions by planners are endangering our environment.

So it is the hope of Goring PC that our actions will be successful in preventing damage to the iconic view of the Goring Weir, or at least be a warning to SODC to pay more attention to the protection of AONBs and CAs.

We will keep you informed about our progress, though welcome the opportunity to discuss our Claim with you, should you wish.