



**OPEN LETTER TO CLAIRE COUTINHO, SECRETARY OF STATE FOR ENERGY SECURITY AND NET ZERO,
FROM LET'S STOP AQUIND**

Portsmouth, Hampshire
9 November 2023

Dear Ms Coutinho,

Welcome back to your role as Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero. As you will be aware, one of the items in your in-tray is the re-determination of the application by Aquind Limited for development consent for the proposed Aquind interconnector.

The original application was received by the Planning Inspectorate on 14 November 2019 when Andrea Leadsom was SoS BEIS, who was quickly followed by Alok Sharma, who had to recuse himself from the Aquind interconnector decision in favour of Kwasi Kwarteng, who was followed (briefly) by Jacob Rees-Mogg and finally Grant Shapps. With the exception of Mr Kwarteng, who took the decision not to allow the DCO application, all of your predecessors lasted only months in the role and may not have had time to study the details of the case.

Given that no less than six Secretaries of State have presided over this application, is it not astonishing that nearly 4 years later, the basic facts have still not been established?

Are you confused that the French government is still implacably opposed to the scheme, that the company proposing this £1.3 billion project has had no trading income since its inception, and that even the route has yet to be fully established? Statements made by Aquind's representatives at the High Court regarding the French landfall site were subsequently contradicted by documentation they later submitted to Grant Shapps. We have even found documentation that casts doubt on Aquind's long held stance that Lovedean is the only connection site that National Grid has ever proposed to them.

It's a bizarre situation so late into an exceptionally long planning process and these key points surely require clarification before you make your decision. Consequently, we enclose a compendium of the evidence Let's Stop Aquind submitted to Grant Shapps this year, which will hopefully shed light on these anomalies and also give you a sense of the depth and breadth of opposition to this ill-conceived project.

You will see that the objections and evidence we presented fit into four broad categories: the threat the project poses to our environment (both natural and built); route optioneering (both in the UK and France); changes in UK and French energy needs since the DCO application was originally made (some of which have subsequently been reflected in changes to UK Government policy); and issues related to the Applicant's unsuitability (and likely inability) to deliver the project.

Community action to stop the AQUIND interconnector

www.stopaquind.com



The fundamental argument against the application is the damage it would cause to the environment of the second most densely populated city in the UK, for no (or at best fractional) gain to the residents affected. The green spaces on Portsmouth's eastern seaboard along the proposed trenching route are the lungs of the city, home to numerous protected species of migratory birds, shoreline waders, insects, rare plants and fragile marine plants such as seagrass. Consequently, these habitats are designated as a Ramsar site (Wetland of International Importance), a Site of Special Scientific Interest and a special area of conservation within an SSSI Impact Risk Zone.

The area directly affected by the route has a special importance to the health of our residents. It contains leisure amenities such as several football pitches, cricket pitches, sailing clubs, public parks, a skate park, a popular scenic viewpoint, a public car park, cycle paths and protected monuments. Most worryingly, our research shows that the route maps exactly to historic deposits of toxic waste such as asbestos. In fact the proposed landfall site has been subject to health and safety issues caused by asbestos, which led to nearby dwellings being evacuated. The proposed mitigation of the loss of amenities and the risks of disturbing toxic waste is pitifully sparse.

Furthermore, the citizens of Portsmouth know that any construction project that entails disturbing the traffic flow through one of the only three routes onto the island is madness, as disruption, additional costs and loss of trade will impact business throughout the city. Gridlock would even affect the ambulance station on Eastern Road and journey times to Queen Alexandra Hospital, where the only A & E department in the city is sited.

The traffic congestion and pollution caused by the works and the hundreds of heavy vehicle movements required will choke the city and worsen our already dangerously poor air quality. Your predecessor determined that the route could not be justified in this urban setting, nor could he "conclude... that the need for and benefits of the proposed development would outweigh its impacts" and nothing whatsoever has changed. However, additional complications along the route continue to surface (for example at Ladybridge roundabout in Purbrook), demonstrating the complexities of industrial trenching through a heavily built environment. The Applicant continues to mislead the public as to the impact this would have on their lives, with their representative recently describing the interconnector building works merely as "a ditch" on BBC TV (Politics South 24/9/23).

Although you will look primarily at the planning aspects of the Application, surely you will be aware of its wider context, for example the dramatic changes in the energy market since 2019. The French nuclear estate suffered from serious maintenance issues, decimating its assumed glut of low-cost electricity, and the invasion of Ukraine led France to change its focus from exporting power to fulfilling domestic demand and commitments to its EU partners. The UK became a net exporter of electricity for the first time last year, and all of these changes make the original business case for the Aquind interconnector highly questionable.

Community action to stop the AQUIND interconnector

www.stopaquind.com



Where Aquind originally planned to exploit the difference in price between UK electricity and cheaper French nuclear power, made even more attractive by the lower carbon unit cost of the European Union's Emissions Trading System compared to UK carbon tax, it has now pivoted to become an exporter of UK power to France. Such a business plan may generate Aquind greater profits, but offers even fewer benefits to UK citizens than the original proposals.

Your department has since announced a clear policy of backing home grown renewable sources of power (wind, solar & tidal) to ensure energy security, and supported multi-purpose interconnectors in order to "reduce the impact on coastal communities and the environment". Taken alongside the Prime Minister's recently stated goal to "give every community a say" in energy infrastructure, is it not the case that forcing the Aquind interconnector on Portsmouth in the face of such fierce community opposition would contradict the Government's objectives?

Finally, you will be aware of the many questions around the history, funding and political connections of Aquind Limited. Much of this debate has been stifled by legal threats made to The Portsmouth News and other newspapers. Let's Stop Aquind believes that these threats have had a significantly chilling effect on the level of public discourse around the company and the proposal, and welcomes the Government's recent amendments to the Economic Crime and Corporate Transparency Bill to tackle Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation (SLAPPs).

Both Portsmouth MP's have highlighted the threat to national security posed by this project and we are sure you are aware of the threats made to Penny Mordaunt (MP for Portsmouth North and Leader of the House) related to her opposition to the Aquind interconnector.

The Aquind interconnector would cause chaos in our city and would devastate the precious green spaces of Portsmouth and the 25km cable route into the South Downs. It is opposed by every MP and every local authority along the route, and unanimously by every city councillor of every political stripe. It is unwanted (both here and in France), unneeded and ill-conceived. We hope our evidence will persuade you that the case against the Aquind interconnector is even stronger than when your predecessor originally denied the DCO. We urge you to make the right decision for our city and for our environment – **STOP AQUIND.**

Viola Langley and Paula Ann Savage
Co-founders Let's Stop Aquind
langleyviola1@hotmail.com