



NORTH FALLS

Offshore Wind Farm

Applicant's Response to Natural England's Relevant Representation Appendix I2 Seascape, Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment

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1. INTRODUCTIONS

1.1 Introduction

- 1.1.1 This document has been prepared on behalf of North Falls Offshore Wind Farm Limited (the 'Applicant') in connection with a Development Consent Order (DCO) application for the North Falls Offshore Wind Farm project (hereafter 'North Falls' or the 'Project').

1.2 Purpose of Document

- 1.2.1 The DCO Application was accepted for Examination by the Planning Inspectorate on 22 August 2024 and Examination opened on 28 January 2025.
- 1.2.2 Registration of Interested Parties, through the submission of a Relevant Representation (RR) commenced on 11 September 2024 and closed on 18 October 2024.
- 1.2.3 During this period a total of 351 Relevant Representations were received by the Planning Inspectorate, from the following Interested Parties:
- local authorities;
 - parish and town councils;
 - statutory consultees and non-prescribed consultees; and
 - parties with land interests; and
 - members of the public and business.
- 1.2.4 All the RRs have been reviewed and considered by the Applicant. This includes the RR submitted by Natural England **[RR-234]** on 18 October 2024. In Natural England's RR full information regarding seascape and landscape matters was not provided at the time, with Natural England stating:
- 1.2.5 *"Please be advised that this Appendix does not constitute Natural England's full advice on matters relating to Seascape, Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment. Natural England intends to submit full advice on this topic at Deadline 1 of Examination". [RR-234]*
- 1.2.6 Natural England have now provided detailed feedback in 'Natural England's RR Appendix I2 Seascape, Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment' **[REP1-071]** at Deadline 1 (18 February 2025).

- 1.2.7 This document specifically sets out responses from the Applicant to the matters raised in 'Natural England's RR Appendix I2 Seascape, Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment' **[REP1-071]** in respect of the Suffolk Coast and Heaths National Landscape (SECHNL), the special character of the Suffolk Heritage Coast (SHC).
- 1.2.8 In providing these responses, this document provides appropriate cross-referencing to where the issues have been addressed within the DCO Application.

2. APPLICANT'S RESPONSE TO NATURAL ENGLAND'S RELEVANT REPRESENTATION APPENDIX I2 SEASCAPE, LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT

Applicants Ref	NE Ref	Issue	Issue raised	Natural England's recommendation to resolve issues	Applicant's Response
Summary of Key Concerns- Seascape, Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment.					
NE-401	I1	Design changes and impacts to the SECHNL and SHC	<p>Natural England welcomes the removal of the northern array area, the reduction in maximum blade tip height, and the reduction in the number of Wind Turbine Generator (WTGs) proposed for the remaining southern array area.</p> <p>The design as proposed in the ES significantly decreases the risk of further harm to the natural beauty of the SECHNL and the special character of the SHC from the North Falls project. Despite this, we advise that there remains insufficient information to discount significant impacts to landscape and visual receptors within the SECHNL and SHC from turbines within the remaining southern array area.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To understand the potential impacts from the North Falls Offshore Wind Farm (OWF) on the natural beauty of the SECHNL, the implications for the special qualities must be fully assessed within an updated SLVIA. Impacts on the special character of the SHC must be assessed within an updated SLVIA 	The Applicant welcomes Natural England 's recognition of the mitigation through design and the significant reduction in impacts as a result of removal of the northern array area and reduction in number of WTGs and maximum blade tip height. Please see the Applicant's response to I5 and I6 below in relation to the request for an updated SLVIA.
NE-402	I2	n/a	<p>The SLVIA conclusions</p> <p>Natural England disagrees with the SLVIA conclusions of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> No significant effects on special qualities of the SECHNL No significant effects on the landscape character of onshore Landscape Character Types (LCTs) within the SECHNL and SHC The significance of visual effects particularly between Orford Ness and Bawdsey Manor. No significant cumulative impacts on landscape character or special qualities The significance of cumulative visual effects particularly between Orford Ness and Bawdsey Manor. The significance of impacts on people using the Suffolk Coast Path. 	The Applicant should revise the assessment in accordance with detailed advice in Table 2, comments A to H.	Please see the Applicant's response to I8, I9 and I10 below.
NE-403	I3	The acceptability of further harm to	We advise that the Examining Authority considers the acceptability of further harm to the seascape setting of the SECHNL, and the special character	We advise that the Applicant clearly sets out the additional harm that the North Falls OWF will present to the statutory purpose of the SECHNL	Please see the Applicant's response to I5 and I6 below.

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		the seascape setting of the SECHNL, and the special character of the SHC	of the SHC, given that the statutory purposes of the designation are already compromised. The statutory purpose of the SECHNL is to conserve and enhance. Adding further offshore wind turbines into the seascape setting of the SECHNL and SHC will not conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the designation or positively contribute to the special character of the Heritage Coast; it will degrade these areas further. Therefore, it is necessary to understand how much extra damage to the special qualities the turbines of the North Falls proposal will cause.	and special character of the SHC, taking into consideration the advice provided.	
NE-404	I4		It is not clear how the project proposes to enable the decision-maker to further the purposes of the SECHNL, and in doing so discharge its duties under the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act (2023).	We advise the Applicant clearly sets out how the project proposes to enable the decision-maker to further the purposes of the national landscape.	Please see the Applicant's response to I7 below.
Natural England's Detailed Advice and Recommendations – Seascape, Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment. Seascape and Landscape Visual Impact Assessment					
NE-405	I5	The potential impacts from the North Falls OWF on the natural beauty of the SECHNL are not fully assessed within the SLVIA. Without this NE cannot agree with the Applicants assessment of no significant effects on special qualities.	<p>Table 29.21 summarises the Applicant's judgement of the significance of impacts to special qualities as "moderate-minor effects on the special qualities of the SECHNL, which is not significant in EIA terms". However, it is not clear which special qualities may be associated with potential moderate-minor effects, and how the impact of the project on each special quality has been assessed.</p> <p>The Applicant does acknowledge that each special quality may interact with the proposed project differently, and Natural England agrees with this. For instance, the Applicant describes in Table 29.21 that <i>"taking a precautionary approach to the assessment, the scale of change on certain perceptual aspects of the SECHNL special qualities is judged to be medium, although other special qualities will be entirely unchanged"</i>. However, the interactions between special qualities and the project are not described within the Environmental Statement (ES).</p> <p>As a result, it is unclear what the impact of the North Falls project will have on the natural beauty of the SECHNL, for instance in terms of landscape quality, scenic quality, relative wildness, or relative tranquillity.</p>	<p>The Applicant should in an updated assessment:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide the methodology for how special qualities have been assessed. • Provide an assessment of the potential impact from the project to each relevant special quality. • Use this assessment to form a conclusion on the significance of impacts to special qualities. 	<p>The Applicant considers that the assessment of effects on the SECHNL, presented in Table 29.21 of the ES Chapter 29 Seascape and Landscape Visual Impact Assessment [APP-043] is robust, as set out in the Applicant's previous response to Natural England (Applicant's ref NE-42 in Applicant's Response to Relevant Representations from Natural England [REP1-044]).</p> <p>In the interests of transparency, the Applicant will provide an expanded assessment of effects on the special qualities of the SECHNL, setting out methodology, potential impact in relation to each special quality, and conclusions on the significance of effects.</p> <p>This assessment will be submitted as a Technical Note into the Examination at Deadline 3.</p>

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NE-406	I6	Natural England advises that the impacts of the North Falls OWF on the special character of the SHC is not assessed within the SLVIA.	<p>We note that Table 29.21 states that “<i>Special qualities for the Suffolk Heritage Coast are not defined. For the purposes of this assessment, they are assumed to be similar to those for the SECHNL above</i>”. We advise that Heritage Coasts do not have special qualities. Instead, Heritage Coasts are defined by their special characters and the natural beauty of the area. The purpose of Heritage Coasts is clarified on the .gov website here: Heritage coasts: definition, purpose and Natural England's role - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk). Further, the need for the Applicant to specifically consider impacts to Heritage Coasts within the SLVIA is noted within EN-1 (5.6.13, 5.10.10 and 5.10.11) and EN-3 (para 2.8.205, and 2.8.208) as we consider the absence of this assessment is a significant omission.</p> <p>The presence and special character of the SHC within the SECHNL helps to define that part of the designated area which is most likely to experience significant adverse effects arising from the North Falls scheme. Although a defined rather than a designated landscape, the SHC covers a geographical area, which lies wholly within the SECHNL.</p> <p>The special character of the SHC is defined through evidence such as the Suffolk Coast and Heaths National Character Area (Suffolk Coast and Heaths - National Character Area Profiles), local Landscape Character Assessments, and the natural beauty of the National Landscape it overlaps with.</p> <p>To understand the likely extent of the indirect onshore influence of the North Falls scheme, it is therefore the boundary of the SHC that should be regarded within the assessment.</p>	The Applicant should provide an updated assessment of the potential impacts to the SHC within the SLVIA.	<p>The Applicant considers that the assessment of effects on the SECHNL, presented in Table 29.21 of the ES Chapter 29 [APP-043] combined with the assessment of effects on landscape character presented in Section 29.6.3.2.1, is a sufficient basis on which to conclude that effects on the SHC will not be significant.</p> <p>In the interests of transparency, the Applicant will provide an expanded assessment of effects on the SHC.</p> <p>This assessment will be submitted as a Technical Note into the Examination at Deadline 3.</p>
NE-407	I7	It is not clear how the project proposes to enable the decision-maker to further the	Section 245 (Protected Landscapes) of the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023 places a duty on relevant authorities in exercising or performing any functions in relation to, or so as to affect, land in a National Park, the Broads or an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (“National Landscape”) in England, to seek to further the statutory purposes of the area. The duty applies to local planning authorities and other decision	The Applicant should provide clarity on how the project proposes to enable the decision-maker to further the purposes of the National Landscape. Furthermore, we advise that any opportunities for enhancement in line with the Protected Landscapes Management Plan should be explored and secured as part of the Development Consent Order.	Please refer to the Applicant's Response to the Relevant Representation from Suffolk & Essex Coast & Heaths National Landscape Partnership [RR-316] . The response to Part ii) is copied below here and can also be found within the Applicant's Response Applicant's Response to Relevant Representations from Statutory Consultees and Non Prescribed Consultees [REP1-045] .

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		purposes of the SECHNL.	<p>makers in preparing development plans, making planning decisions on development and infrastructure proposals, as well as to other public bodies and statutory undertakers in undertaking their functions. Defra have released 'Guidance for relevant authorities on seeking to further the purposes of Protected Landscapes' (December 2024) and, in accordance with that guidance, Natural England advises that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The duty to 'seek to further' is an active duty, not a passive one. Any relevant authority must take all reasonable steps to explore how the statutory purposes of the protected landscape (National Park, the Broads, or a National Landscape (formerly AONB)) can be furthered; • The new duty underlines the importance of avoiding harm to the statutory purposes of a Protected Landscape and also to seek to further the conservation and enhancement of a Protected Landscape. That goes beyond mitigation and like for like measures and replacement. A relevant authority must be able to demonstrate with proportionate, reasoned and documented evidence what measures can be taken to further the statutory purpose; • The proposed measures to further the statutory purposes of a Protected Landscape, should explore what is possible in addition to avoiding and mitigating the effects of the development, and should be appropriate, proportionate to the type and scale of the development and its implications for the area and effectively secured. Natural England's view is that the proposed measures should align with and help to deliver the aims and objectives of the Protected Landscape's statutory management plan, which is reinforced in the Defra guidance. The relevant Protected 		<p>Section 245 of the Levelling-up and Regeneration Act 2023 (LURA) came into effect on 26 December 2023. It changed the wording to section 85 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 (CRoW Act) and amends the duty placed on relevant authorities when undertaking any function in relation to, or so as to affect, land in Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty which are now known as 'National Landscapes'.</p> <p>Relevant authorities must now 'seek to further' the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of National Landscapes. This replaces the previous duty on relevant authorities to 'have regard to' their statutory purposes.</p> <p>Section 85 (A1) of the CRoW Act (2000) (as amended by the LURA 2023) states:</p> <p><i>"In exercising or performing any functions in relation to, or so as to affect, land in an area of outstanding natural beauty in England, a relevant authority other than a devolved Welsh authority must seek to further the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the area of outstanding natural beauty."</i></p> <p>It is noted that to date no draft regulations have been published to provide further details as to how a relevant authority is to comply with the duty. However, the Applicant notes that guidance was recently published by Defra on the 16 December 2024 titled 'Guidance for relevant authorities on seeking to further the purposes of Protected Landscapes', for which regard has been had in this written response.</p> <p>It is noted that the Defra Guidance explicitly states that the duty applies to decision making in respect of nationally significant infrastructure projects. It is also noted that the Defra Guidance states that:</p> <p><i>"Consideration of what is reasonable and proportionate in the context of fulfilling the duty is decided by the relevant authority and should take account of the context of the specific function being exercised."</i> (emphasis added).</p> <p>The duty does not over-ride other statutory duties and this is noted in the Defra Guidance:</p> <p><i>"The duty does not prevent relevant authorities from undertaking their statutory functions and discharging their</i></p>

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			Landscape team/body should be consulted.		<p><i>legal duties and other responsibilities. The duty is intended to complement these requirements by ensuring that the purposes for which Protected Landscapes are designated for are recognised in reaching decisions and undertaking activities that impact these areas."</i></p> <p>The Defra Guidance confirms that the duty applies to functions undertaken outside of the designation boundary including the setting of a National Landscape. This is consistent with paragraph 5.10.8 of National Planning Statement (NPS) EN1 which states that:</p> <p><i>"The duty to seek to further the purposes of nationally designated landscapes also applies when considering applications for projects outside the boundaries of these areas which may have impacts within them. In these locations, projects should be designed sensitively given the various siting, operational, and other relevant constraints. The Secretary of State should be satisfied that measures which seek to further the purposes of the designation are sufficient, appropriate and proportionate to the type and scale of the development."</i></p> <p>It is therefore the Applicant's position that a relevant authority must exercise judgment as to whether the measures proposed as part of the Project to avoid and reduce impacts on the statutory purposes of the SECHNL are appropriate, reasonable and proportionate and whether it would be appropriate, reasonable and proportionate to require any further measures to further the purpose of the SECHNL.</p> <p>This includes consideration of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the scale, extent and significance of any harm to the SECHNL; • the policies in NPS EN-1 and EN-3 regarding minimising and mitigating landscape effects and Critical National Priority (CNP) infrastructure; and • whether the Project has been designed sensitively taking into account siting, engineering, operational and other relevant constraints. <p>It is the Applicant's position that the duty does not oblige a relevant authority to give less weight to other important relevant considerations nor to reduce the scale of a proposed development to minimise the potential impacts on the SECHNL.</p>

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					<p>The Project's offshore and onshore infrastructure is not within the boundary of the SECHNL but the offshore array will be visible from within it, albeit some distance away (circa 40km). As outlined in paragraph 37 of ES Chapter 4 Site Selection and Alternatives [APP-018] the former northern array for North Falls was removed to reduce impacts on the SECHNL. The maximum number of turbines has also reduced since the PEIR stage to 57 of the smallest turbines (down from 72); or 34 of the largest turbines in the design envelope (down from 40). The site selection process has given due weight to the SECHNL, as a National Landscape, and has sought to further its purposes by reducing the potential effects arising from the array area.</p> <p>Given the Project's Order Limits do not fall within the SECHNL and the distance from the array area to the coastline within the boundary of the National Landscape, of circa 40km, the inclusion of any other measures specifically to further the purposes of the SECHNL would not be considered reasonable, proportionate or appropriate, in the context of concluding no significant effects on the special qualities of the SECHNL from the Project.</p>
NE-408	I8	Underestimated visual effects	<p>We advise that significance of effects (in EIA terms) from the North Falls OWF on visual receptors at viewpoints from Orford Ness to Bawdsey Manor (located within the SECHNL and SHC) have been underestimated.</p> <p>Natural England's judgements (Table 3) have been informed by our experience of other offshore wind farms supported by the apparent height calculations of the proposed North Falls turbines at these viewpoints (Table 4).</p>	The Applicant should review Table 3 and update the assessment accordingly.	<p>The Applicant has reviewed Natural England's judgements provided in Table 3. The Applicant does not agree with Natural England that the effects on any visual receptors have been underestimated.</p> <p>Natural England consider that the magnitude of change should be medium rather than low for the three coastal Landscape Character Types (LCTs) within the SECHNL, stating that this would lead to significant effects in each case. In relation to the Coastal dunes and shingle ridges LCT, Natural England note that "<i>There is the potential for additional visible infrastructure to interfere with the "vast open uncluttered landscape", a key characteristic</i>" of the LCT. For the same LCT, Table 29.16 of the ES Chapter 29 Seascape and Landscape Visual Impact Assessment (SLVIA) [APP-043] clearly states that the proposal "<i>could further alter certain perceptual qualities of the landscape, including the "vast open uncluttered landscape."</i>" The additional justification provided by Natural England for this and the other LCTs has already been considered by the authors of the SLVIA. At a distance of over 40 km from any onshore LCT, the Applicant is satisfied that the magnitude of change is correctly recorded as 'low' in each case.</p>

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					<p>Natural England's comments on effects on the SECHNL will be addressed in the Technical Note to be submitted into the Examination at Deadline 3.</p> <p>Natural England disagree with the assessments of magnitude and effect at six viewpoints (VP5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10), all within the SECHNL. Other than the apparent height calculations, no justification is provided for their alternative assessments. At VP5, 6 and 7, Natural England conclude that, although effects would be greater, they would remain not significant. At VP8, 9 and 10, the SLVIA concludes significant (moderate) effects. Natural England consider this should be major in each case. It is notable that there is no difference between the SLVIA and Natural England in terms of the extent of significant effects, and the disagreement is only one of degree.</p> <p>The Applicant concludes that the SLVIA presents a detailed and comprehensive assessment of effects, and there is no need to provide any updated material in response to these comments.</p>
NE-409	I9	Orford Ness	Natural England's judgement is that the sensitivity of Orford Ness is high, not medium-high as judged by the applicant because the SECHNL is a nationally protected landscape which has been designated for its natural beauty and has a statutory purpose to conserve and enhance that natural beauty. The SHC is a nationally defined landscape because of its special character, of which natural beauty is one element. The criteria used by the Applicant to judge this receptor as having a medium-high sensitivity has not been clearly articulated within Table 29.29.	Natural England advises that based on the information presented we cannot support the sensitivity of medium-high that has been assigned to Orford Ness and advise that this is amended to high.	<p>Table 29.29 in ES Chapter 29 Seascape and Landscape Visual Impact Assessment [APP-043] presents the assessment of effects on views experienced by receptors (people) at Orford Ness. The sensitivity stated is therefore the sensitivity of these people to changes in the view, not the 'sensitivity of Orford Ness'. The location of these receptors within the SECHNL and SHC is noted in the evaluation of sensitivity, indicating higher value. The susceptibility of the receptors to changes in the view is stated to be medium. This is because their attention is likely to be focused on the nature reserve, and due to the presence of existing military structures and other built features in the view.</p> <p>The medium-high sensitivity of receptors, combined with the medium magnitude of impact, results in a moderate effect, which is significant, as recorded in Table 29.29.</p>
NE-410	I10	Suffolk Coast Path.	This stretch of coastline offers the opportunity for high quality views out to sea, and the availability of this experience allows people to enjoy the natural beauty for which the SECHNL was designated. The natural beauty indicator scenic quality highlights the ' <i>long distance and panoramic views including out to sea and along the Heritage Coast</i> ' which are available from	The Applicant should reconsider their assessment in the light of Natural England's advice.	<p>Table 29.38 in ES Chapter 29 Seascape and Landscape Visual Impact Assessment [APP-043] notes the high sensitivity of users of the Suffolk Coastal Path, which is in part due to the route of the path through the SECHNL and SHC.</p> <p>The assessment set out in Table 29.38 has been considered in light of Natural England's comments, as have</p>

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			<p>within the designation; these views are highly susceptible to changes in seascape character.</p> <p>The Applicants assessment of sequential impacts to users of the Suffolk Coast Path states <i>"From the southern coastal section, scale differences will be more apparent and the Offshore Above sea Development will contribute somewhat to 'curtaining' of the skyline, though it occupies a modest extent of the skyline. In this southern coastal section (between the mouth of the Butley River and Landguard Point) the cumulative magnitude of change in views arising from the contribution of the Offshore Above-sea Development is judged to be medium. The cumulative effect is predicted to be moderate, which is significant in EIA terms."</i></p> <p>Natural England agree that the cumulative effect is significant in EIA terms, however considers the impact to be major adverse given the potential for the North Falls project to affect the special qualities (which are not fully assessed within the ES), taking the designated landscape further away from its required state.</p>		<p>the assessments at the individual viewpoints along the route (see response to I8 above). Again, there is no difference between the SLVIA and Natural England in terms of the significance of effects, and the disagreement is one of degree.</p> <p>Natural England's comments on effects on the special qualities of the SECHNL will be addressed in the Technical Note to be submitted at Deadline 3.</p>
NE-411	I11	Impacts on Landscape Character	<p>Natural England disagrees with the Applicant's judgements in relation to the three Landscape Character Typologies taken forward for assessment. Natural England's judgement is that impacts on the following character areas is likely to be moderate and significant in EIA terms:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coastal dunes and shingle ridges; • Coastal levels; • Saltmarsh and inter-tidal flats. <p>Please see Table 3 for Natural England's reasoning.</p>	The Applicant should update their assessment in the light of Natural England's reasoning.	The Applicant's response to Natural England's judgements in relation to LCTs is provided in the response to I8 above.
NE-412	I12	Cumulative impacts	<p>We disagree that the North Falls OWF will have no significant cumulative impacts on the SECHNL and SHC. The Applicant's own assessment concludes moderate significant sequential effects on users of the Suffolk Coast Path within the protected landscape. Natural England's judgements are described in Table 3.</p> <p>Natural England's position on the current ES design:</p>	Applicant to update assessment	Natural England's comments on effects on the SECHNL and SHC will be addressed in the Technical Note to be submitted at Deadline 3.

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			<p><u>377.4m turbines</u> The proposed turbines located within the remaining southern array area will introduce a sense of industrialisation and clutter into the seascape setting of the SECHNL. However, the adverse influence of these turbines will likely be confined to a stretch of coastline from the southern coast limit of the SECHNL (Old Felixstowe) to Orford Ness. However, their presence in the seascape setting of the SECHNL will further degrade the quality of views out to sea. When seen from Orford Ness their size, combined with the marked contrast in height with the existing arrays, will create a visually incoherent and cluttered seascape, leading to further loss of the sense of wildness and tranquillity.</p> <p><u>276.4m turbines</u> The turbines located in the remaining southern array area are unlikely to have a significant effect on the special qualities of the SECHNL and special character of the SHC alone, although they will add to the visible presence of the Galloper OWF and Greater Gabbard OWF arrays and should be considered in the context of their impact adding to the wider visually incoherent and cluttered seascape described above.</p>		

HARNESSING THE POWER OF NORTH SEA WIND

North Falls Offshore Wind Farm Ltd

A joint venture company owned equally by SSE Renewables and RWE.

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