1.0 Landscape

1.1 Summary:

This response is made with primary reference to document AP-044 3.1.32 Environmental Statement Chapter 30 Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, and documents AP-083 to AP-088, 3.2.26 Environmental Statement Chapter 30, Figures Part 1 to 6.

The key elements of North Falls project include the proposed Offshore Wind Farm, the Onshore Substation (OnSS), onshore Export Cable Corridor (onshore ECC) and the landfall (where the offshore export cables will meet the onshore export cables).

Essex County Council and Tendring District Council are concerned that there is the potential for residual adverse landscape and visual impacts both during construction and during operation from the Onshore Substation on the local landscape character and visual receptors, due to its scale.

We are concerned that it will take up to 15 years for the mitigation to take full effect, which is half the identified expected 30-year life of the substation. We also judge that the proposed mitigation planting does not reduce all the negative effects on the immediate landscape, its setting and visual receptors to non-significant.

There are concerns that the cumulative effects of North Falls with the proposed Five Estuaries onshore substation, the East Anglian Connection Node (EACN), and the pylons that are proposed to connect to it from the Norwich to Tilbury (N2T) scheme would have a significant cumulative effect on both landscape and visual receptors.

The N2T pylons do not appear to be identified in the cumulative LVIA visualisations, and therefore it is assumed they haven't formed part of the LVIA cumulative impact assessment itself. The pylons form will form part of the DCO for the Norwich to Tilbury project, along with the EACN so their cumulative impact needs to be considered.

Essex County Council and Tendring District Council would expect to see compensation offered for any residual landscape and visual effects in line with National Policy EN1 Paragraph 4.1.5 '*In considering any proposed development… the Secretary of State should take into account: • its potential adverse impacts…including any long-term and cumulative adverse impacts, as well as any measures to avoid, reduce, mitigate or compensate for any adverse impacts, following the mitigation hierarchy'* (Our emphasis)

1.2 Onshore Substation

The proposed Onshore Substation will represent a significant negative visual feature in the local landscape during construction and for up to 15 years operationally until proposed mitigation planting has established and matured due to its scale and height. Additional land is required for access, drainage, landscaping and environmental mitigation.

Landscape Character: We disagree with the judgement in AP-044 *Table 30.13* in the *Baseline Description* which states that '*…the landscape susceptibility, to the type of development proposed, is judged to be medium-low'*. Due to the flat and open, as well as rural nature of the landscape, we judge it has at least medium susceptibility to this type of development. Whilst there is an existing substation nearby, the setting remains overwhelmingly one of an open rural

character. The statement that *'…areas of woodland and hedgerows in the surrounding landscape … help to screen and break up views'* exaggerates the effect existing vegetation can have on a proposal of this scale, especially in the immediate vicinity of the site.

AP-044 *Table 30.13* in the *Baseline Description* also states, *'The onshore substation works area is not designated, indicating a lower value'. GLVIA3 (paragraph5.26)* confirms that landscape value is not always signified by designation: *'the fact that an area of landscape is not designated either nationally or locally does not mean that it does not have any value'.* AP-044 *Para 30.5.3.3 Local Level Landscape Designations states: 'There are no relevant local landscape designations in Tendring which required detailed assessment.'* However, local landscape designation has not been government policy for decades and many local authorities have accordingly removed these from their Local Plans. Detailed assessment should be carried out at the site and setting level based on landscape value as described in *Technical Guidance Note (TGN) 02-21'Assessing the Value of Landscapes Outside National Designations'*

It is not clear that landscape value has been assessed as part of the LVIA despite an ECC comment at the scoping stage identifying that the assessment should take into consideration *'…Technical Guidance Note (TGN) 02-21'Assessing the Value of Landscapes Outside National Designations'*.

GLIVA3 states in Para 5.27: '*Where local designations are not in use…reference to existing Landscape Character Assessments and associated …. Landscape strategies and guidelines may give an indication of which landscape types or areas, individual element or aesthetic or perceptual aspect of the landscape are particularly valued*.' The Tendring Landscape Character Assessment (2001) describes the character of the Bromley Heaths LCA being of 'Moderate' strength albeit declining in condition, that it is sensitive due to its open rural character and that the strategy for its management should be one of conservation and enhancement.

Table 30.35 Summary of likely significant effects on LVIA: We agree that the Magnitude of the Impact on the landscape fabric of the Substation Works Area will be High adverse at the operational stage, however we disagree that the Significance of the Impact is only Moderate adverse at Year 1. We judge it is Major, as the fabric (e.g. ecosystem services relating to agricultural function) and key identified characteristics (in APP-044 Para 54) *a*re permanently lost at the Site, particularly '*Deep, coarse, loamy and often stoneless brown soils which support a high-grade agricultural land' 'Large scale productive arable fields divided by low, gappy hedgerows where hedgerow oaks stand out as silhouettes against the skyline';* and *'Dramatic, dominating skyline.'*

We also disagree that the magnitude of impact on landscape character is just medium locally, that the Significance of Effect at Year 1 is Moderate adverse locally and that the significance declines to minor over 15 years. As the key characteristics described above are substantially lost through the development, planting a belt of trees cannot demonstrably mitigate the effects on character/landscape fabric itself but only on visual receptors.

Mitigation can substantially moderate visual impacts, but are limited in relation to the landscape impacts, particularly when the character of the mitigation proposed does not necessarily follow the pattern and character of the receiving landscape. For that reason, although by Year 15 the significance of visual impact can be mitigated, we judge that the significance of the landscape impact on the site remains at best at Major-Moderate and not just Moderate

We do not agree with the conclusions in the baseline description (APP-044 Table 30.13) that the sensitivity of the landscape to a development of this scale is '*medium-low'*. The site and setting exhibit many of the characteristics of this type of landscape and we would assert it is of '*Medium'* value as a result. This is the conclusion in the Five Estuaries LVIA as well. We judge that as a result the site and setting will be affected in a Major way at a local level due to the scale and character of the development and that residual significant impacts will remain.

Visual Impacts: generally, we are concerned that there are so few viewpoint baseline photographs, visualisations and assessments of such a substantial infrastructure development in an open rural landscape.

Viewpoint No 2 from the bridleway to the north of the scheme is taken from 700m east from the development site when much closer viewpoints appear available. We suggest a series of closer viewpoints are required along the bridleway to demonstrate the sequential effect on the user as they move east-west along this important public route. We do not agree with the conclusion that the residual impact on bridleway users will be minor as, even from 700m, the tops of the substation and associated infrastructure remain visible over a wide section of the view giving the perception of an industrialised landscape beyond.

It is unclear why no viewpoints have been taken from Grange Road to the west/north-west of the site when there are open views along much of the eastern boundary and the proposed facility lies closest to it. There appear to be no viewpoints to the north-west of the site within the study area at all, despite there being several PRoW as well in this direction. At least two viewpoints are needed along Grange Road close to the site. This is also the boundary around which the least mitigation is possible increasing the likelihood of significant impacts from this direction. Despite its name, Grange Road is a narrow lane at this point, characteristic of this landscape and so receptors using it should be assessed appropriately. VP6 is over 1.5km away so likely impacts judged from that distance are likely limited.

We also suggest that at least one further viewpoint is needed from the PRoW network to the north of the development to demonstrate what impacts are likely between 1-1.5 km in this direction.

We are concerned that there is only one viewpoint VP No8 that is taken from the Dedham Vale National Landscape and that is at a substantial distance from the development when other areas of theoretical visibility are closer. It is not clear whether other viewpoints within the National Landscape or its setting were explored or whether the enhanced duty under LURA 2023 has been addressed. A figure should be provided combining the viewpoints with the ZTV and National Landscape boundaries, to make understanding of their relationship easier. We propose additional viewpoints are required to demonstrate that there are no significant impacts on the National Landscapes and their settings. Closer viewpoints and visualisations have been made available by the Five Estuaries applicant.

Much of the success of the planting will depend on the nature of the aftercare in the LEMP, how replacement planting is monitored, especially in the final year of a maintenance period and whether the mitigation planting is maintained for the life of the installation. We understand that the LEMP is an iterative document and would wish to comment further on this document.

We are concerned that it will take up to 15 years for mitigation planting to take effect (effectively half the life of the proposed sub-station) and disagree that mitigation planting will reduce the negative effects on the immediate landscape and its setting to non-significant.

1.3 Cumulative effects:

GLVIA3 (Landscape Institute and Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment, 2013) defines cumulative landscape and visual effects as those that *'result from additional changes to the landscape and visual amenity caused by the proposed development in conjunction with other developments (associated with or separate to it), or actions that occurred in the past, present or are likely to occur in the foreseeable future.'* However, it is clear that the overhead element of the Norwich to Tilbury proposals have not been included in the visualisations provided with the assessment so we assume have not been assessed. The overhead pylons need to be included in the visualisations and the cumulative impacts re-assessed.

As it is clear not all residual impacts can be mitigated, Essex County Council and Tendring District Council would expect to see compensation offered for any adverse impacts as encouraged by National Policy EN1.