

Issue-specific hearing on BESS, 9 June 2026: submission includes oral representation and post-hearing notes

Significant new evidence was disclosed at the outset of this Examination.

In its Deadline 1 representation, National Grid stated that the East Park solar generating station has a Gate 2 grid connection, but the BESS only has a Gate 1 offer. This emerged *after* the Application had been presented as a fully integrated solar and battery development. The distinction is significant. Under Gate 1, the BESS cannot secure the grid access relied on in the Application. The implications have not yet been properly scrutinised.

This is not a minor technical issue or a matter of timing.

The Applicant seeks positive weight for the BESS, relying on claimed benefits including flexibility, balancing and intermittency mitigation. If uncertainty exists around the basis on which those benefits are claimed, it is relevant to the planning balance.

National Grid's own evidence is significant.

It is advancing connection design work for the solar element only, confirming that the two components are not progressing through the connections process on the same basis.

Gate 1 status now carries uncertainty.

In its response to my submission at Deadline 2, the Applicant characterises its Gate 1 status as a timing issue. But DESNZ and Ofgem suggest the opposite. They highlight substantial oversubscription of the battery pipeline relative to system requirements for 2030 and 2035. Progression from Gate 1 to Gate 2 is not guaranteed.

Sector commentators support this interpretation, identifying challenges for solar and battery hybrids where the solar secures Gate 2 but the battery does not. One analyst warns that these developments could face delivery and operational risks.

The Applicant does not respond to these “battery connection surplus” concerns, instead suggesting that the BESS can now ‘sit behind’ the solar connection.

But the issue is not whether the BESS can operate via the solar connection; it is whether the broad operational capabilities for which the Applicant claims planning weight remain justified given its current connection status.

In fact, the role of the BESS has been narrowed.

The Applicant now frames the BESS as a storage device for solar generation and describes wider grid-balancing and import activities as “supplementary”. This is a notable shift in emphasis. The Application has not been updated to reflect it. For example, its Statement of Reasons continues to claim that the “battery storage ensures grid stability and reliability”, and that battery benefits include acting as a “flexible

energy hub”. The Examination has not been shown how these differing positions are reconciled.

The reality of solar generation is relevant.

UK solar output is highly seasonal. Sector analysis indicates that opportunities for charging solely from contemporaneous solar generation significantly reduce during autumn and winter. A BESS reliant on solar charging – as the Applicant now suggests – may be largely inactive for substantial periods.

There remains an evidential gap.

The Applicant claims weight for the benefits of the BESS. But the Examination has not been provided with the evidence necessary to test those claims. Following National Grid confirming its Gate 1 status, there has not been a quantified assessment of how the connection position affects the operational assumptions, capabilities or benefits attributed to the BESS in the Application.

Until an evidential basis is established, caution should be exercised when determining the weight to be attached to the benefits claimed for the BESS within the planning balance. The burden rests with the Applicant to demonstrate that those benefits remain robust, deliverable and evidenced under its current connection position.

Thank you.

Post-hearing note 1

During the hearing, the Applicant repeatedly sought to minimise the significance of the East Park Energy BESS’s Gate 1 status. It insisted that the BESS was unaffected by the failure to secure a dedicated grid connection point and that the battery storage system would simply obtain its own connection in due course, and in the meantime would be used to store any spare solar energy. It downplayed any suggestion that lack of import capability was an issue for the project.

However, as I indicated in my oral representation, there is overwhelming evidence to the contrary. It appears that the Applicant is deliberately understating the current uncertainty and risks relating to Gate 1 projects.

Gate 1 status risks are recognised by DESNZ, Ofgem, NESO and analysts and professionals in the wider renewable energy sector, and evidence from an extensive range of announcements, communications and commentary indicates that promotion to Gate 2 status is neither automatic nor guaranteed, and therefore cannot genuinely be characterised as a simple matter of timing. This is especially so for the battery pipeline, which is very significantly oversubscribed, and hybrid solar-plus-battery projects such as East Park have seen their battery plans relegated to Gate 1 status.

The following is a selection of representative communications and commentary.

Sector evidence of uncertainty surrounding Gate 1 status

- **National Energy System Operator: Gate 1 acknowledged as a “disappointing” outcome**

Explaining why projects were not allocated Gate 2 status, NESO states:

“We recognise that this outcome may be disappointing”

This reflects NESO’s own recognition that Gate 1 is not a routine progression towards connection.

“Any further work you choose to undertake to progress your project carries significant risk, as there is no guarantee of a connection.

For customers with hybrid projects determined to be part Gate 1 and part Gate 2, only the works and studies associated with the Gate 2 component of the project will continue.”

This explicitly acknowledges that Gate 1 projects face significant uncertainty, with no guarantee of securing a future grid connection. It also makes clear that continued investment or development at Gate 1 is undertaken at the developer’s own risk.

Link: <https://www.neso.energy/industry-information/connections-reform/gate-1-information>

- **NESO: Changes to the timetable create uncertainty**

When revising the connections reform timetable, NESO stated:

“any change to the timeline creates uncertainty”.

NESO specifically linked this uncertainty to project resourcing and investment decisions.

Link: <https://www.neso.energy/industry-information/connections-reform/connections-reform-timeline>

- **NESO: Gate 1 reflects strategic need, not just maturity**

NESO defines Gate 1 as projects that are *“not yet ready or needed”*, indicating that Gate 1 status is not based on project maturity alone.

Link: <https://www.neso.energy/document/373546/download>

- **Department for Energy Security and Net Zero/Ofgem: Battery pipeline remains well above system need**

DESNZ and Ofgem state that there remains:

“14.8 GW above the top of the Action Plan battery capacity range for 2030”

“61.7 GW above the projected battery system need in 2035.”

This confirms that the battery pipeline substantially exceeds projected system need. It reinforces that Gate 1 progression cannot be assumed and that competition for future Gate 2 allocation remains significant.

Link: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/connections-reform-delivery-update-and-battery-capacity/open-letter-from-desnz-and-ofgem-on-connections-reform-delivery>

- **Bird & Bird: Mixed Gate outcomes can materially affect project viability**

Energy lawyers at Bird & Bird observed that the BESS market is facing a “*saturation risk*”:

“The hybrid and battery headache – if you are developing a co-located (hybrid) project, the news is nuanced. NESO treats each technology as a separate asset.”

“There’s also a critical nuance regarding import/export capability. ... You may receive a Gate 2 offer that technically succeeds but doesn’t permit grid charging. This isn’t just an administrative issue, it fundamentally undermines your revenue model.”

This demonstrates that differing Gate outcomes within hybrid projects can have material operational and commercial consequences, rather than being a simple procedural distinction.

Link: <https://www.twobirds.com/en/insights/2026/uk/the-uk%27s-grid-reform-recalibration-why-we-pull-back-to-launch-forward>

- **Landmark Chambers: Emphasises scale of battery project oversubscription**

A sector webinar by planning and energy law specialists made the national system operator decision-making on Gate status clear:

“NESO assesses strategic alignment with system needs and Net Zero targets”

It was confirmed that:

“protected [battery] projects took priority”

Speakers explained that 153GW of battery projects were not prioritised despite being 'ready', illustrating the severity of battery oversubscription.

Link: https://www.landmarkchambers.co.uk/web-content/uploads/PDFs-documents-and-other-resources/Resources/Grid-connection-reforms-in-practice_webinar-slides.pdf

- **Osborne Clarke: Battery projects disproportionately affected by Gate 1 outcomes**

Energy lawyers explained that under the reformed connections process:

"...those meeting the readiness and strategic alignment criteria will be prioritised and can expect to receive a "Gate 2" offer, while "Gate 1" offers will be issued to projects which are not prioritised (as a result of failing to satisfy the Gate 2 criteria, failing to submit evidence on time, or where a project has affirmatively requested Gate 1 status)."

They further observe:

"The results paint a varied picture for energy developers. While offshore wind and solar photovoltaic projects fared well in terms of being prioritised, over 150 GW of BESS capacity has been deprioritised or removed from the connections queue due to the oversupply in specific regions and speculative applications generally."

This professional analysis confirms that battery projects have been disproportionately affected by the reforms and that many have been relegated to Gate 1 or removed from the queue because of oversupply, rather than as a simple matter of project timing or maturity.

Link: <https://www.osborneclarke.com/insights/energy-transition-ofgem-completes-gb-grid-connections-overhaul-2035>

- **Solar Power Portal: Large numbers of projects relegated to Gate 1**

Following queue reform, Solar Power Portal, an online renewable energy industry news service, reported:

"153GW of projects were not 'prioritised', receiving Gate 1 offers or removed completely."

"it was generally known that there would necessarily be 'winners and losers' in the process."

This illustrates the scale of reassessment occurring across the sector and reinforces that previous expectations of grid access have been subject to significant revision.

Link: <https://www.solarpowerportal.co.uk/solar-planning/uk-grid-connections-reform-132gw-renewables-to-connect-by-2030>

Post-hearing note 2

During the BESS hearing, it was pointed out that the Applicant has not responded in a transparent or direct way to one of the Examining Authority's first set of questions:

Q11.20:

"Grid Connection. In response to National Grid's Relevant Representation [RR-903] it is stated in the Applicant's Responses to Relevant Representations submitted at D1 [REP1-055] that "The Applicant can confirm that the Scheme received a 'Gate 2' offer with a connection date of October 2028, with an October 2030 backstop.". Please supply evidence of the offer and agreement."

The Applicant's response was ambiguous and stated that:

"Information in respect of the Applicant's connection offer is publicly available at NESO's TEC Register".

However, the East Park Energy project entry on the TEC Register, which is not listed under its project name but instead as 'Eaton Socon Solar', contains very little information and does not detail a "connection offer". The 'Gate' column remains blank.

An additional column called 'Gate' was added to NESO's TEC Register in November 2025. According to NESO: "This column will be populated once agreements have been countersigned."

Link: <https://www.neso.energy/data-portal/transmission-entry-capacity-tec-register>