

PLANNING ACT 2008

**THE INFRASTRUCTURE PLANNING (EXAMINATION PROCEDURE)
RULES 2010**

**APPLICATION BY STEEPLE SOLAR FARM LIMITED FOR A
DEVELOPMENT CONSENT ORDER**

**COMMENTS ON SNSE LIMITED'S AND
SNSD LIMITED'S DEADLINE 5 SUBMISSIONS
ON BEHALF OF**

nationalgrid

NATIONAL GRID ELECTRICITY TRANSMISSION PLC

Introduction

1. This document sets out the response of National Grid Electricity Transmission Plc ("**NGET**") to the submissions made on behalf of SNSE Limited and SNSD Limited ("**Landowner**") at Deadline 5 (EN010163-000572) dated 24 March 2026. It should be read in conjunction with NGET's previous submissions to this examination, including its Relevant Representation (RR-049), its Deadline 3 submissions (REP3-053), its written summaries of oral submissions at ISH3 (REP4-007) and CAH1 (REP4-006), its response to the Examining Authority's Second Written Questions and its response to the CAH1 and ISH3 Action Points.
2. The Landowner's Deadline 5 submissions address three principal topics: (a) the Landowner's other proposed projects (in response to ExQ2 Q7.1.1); (b) protective provisions for the North Humber to High Marnham project ("**NHHM**") (in response to ExQ2 Q7.2.3); and (c) the Landowner's response to NGET's ISH3 submissions, including a revised alternative route proposal. NGET addresses each of these matters in turn below.
3. The Landowner identifies two further projects on its land: a proposed data centre (for which an option was granted in July 2025) and development associated with the proposed STEP Nuclear Fusion Project at West Burton.

The Landowner's Other Proposed Projects

4. NGET notes the following points in relation to these projects:
 - (a) As regards the data centre, the Landowner acknowledges that no application for planning permission has been submitted, and that no EIA screening or scoping request has been made. The project is described as being at a very early stage. The Landowner further acknowledges that the data centre does not qualify as a cumulative project for the purposes of the Steeple Renewables Project's EIA. These matters were addressed by NGET at ISH3, where it was submitted that the future developments referred to by the Landowner are either not interactions with NHHM (in the case of the STEP fusion project, which has no footprint overlap) or are inchoate and unknown (in the case of the data centre and STEP associated development). NGET notes that the Parish Council and members of the public confirmed at ISH3 that they had not previously heard of the proposed data centre.
 - (b) As regards the STEP Nuclear Fusion Project, the Landowner acknowledges that an application for development consent is not proposed for submission until Q1 2029, and that an EIA Scoping Opinion is not proposed to be requested until Q3/Q4 2026. The Landowner's interest in the STEP project appears to be confined to the possibility that associated development for the STEP project may utilise land in its ownership; however, the nature and extent of that use is not defined.
5. In those circumstances, neither of these projects is at a stage of development that should carry any material weight in the assessment of NHHM's route. They are, at best, prospective and speculative. The NHHM project, by contrast, has undertaken extensive non-statutory and statutory consultation, and its DCO application is scheduled for submission in September 2026. The suggestion that the routing of a nationally significant infrastructure project of the importance of NHHM should be adjusted to accommodate projects that are at an extremely early stage (indeed they may not ultimately come forward at all, at least in their present, suggested form) and without planning permission would be an extraordinary proposition and is not one that NGET considers is supportable.

Protective Provisions

6. The Landowner's submissions at paragraphs 2.4 and 2.5 of its Deadline 5 note address the breadth of the protective provisions sought by NGET in respect of NHHM, contending that they are "drafted very broadly" to reflect the formative stage of the NHHM project and that they have a "chilling" effect on the Steeple Renewables Project.
7. NGET has addressed this point in its previous submissions and does not repeat those submissions in full here. In summary:
 - (a) As NGET set out in its response to ExQ2 Q7.2.7, the protective provisions establish a framework for coordination, consultation, cooperation and dispute resolution between the two projects. That framework can and should be fixed at this stage, as it defines the rules of engagement rather than fixed boundaries. The precise area affected is a matter of technical detail that will be fixed when NGET's proposals are finalised at DCO submission.
 - (b) The protective provisions include safeguards against the unreasonable exercise of any consent or approval power by NGET. NGET's agreement must not be unreasonably withheld or delayed, and this obligation is reinforced by the availability of arbitration as a dispute resolution mechanism.
 - (c) The characterisation of the protective provisions as having a "chilling" effect does not reflect their practical operation. The language used by the Landowner amounts to hyperbole, and is certainly unhelpful. The Landowner's submission appears to be premised on the assumption that the provisions would place it in a diminished negotiating position. However, the provisions are designed to ensure that both projects can coexist and are subject to a duty of reasonableness and a right to refer disputes to arbitration. They do not provide NGET with an unqualified veto.
 - (d) The Secretary of State has imposed equivalent protective provisions on two recent occasions (the Awel y Môr and Mona Offshore Wind Farm DCOs), demonstrating that there is no prohibition on doing so.

Response to the Landowner's Criticisms of NGET's Route Selection Process

8. The Landowner's submissions at paragraphs 3.3 to 3.9 of its Deadline 5 submission take issue with a number of matters raised in NGET's ISH3 submissions. NGET addresses each of these in turn.

The suggestion that NGET considers the Landowner lacks sophistication

9. The Landowner contends (at paragraph 3.4) that NGET has suggested the Landowner "is not sufficiently sophisticated" to identify an alternative route. That is not NGET's position. What NGET submitted at ISH3 was that the route selection process for NHHM is "necessarily a sophisticated and iterative" process, that the interaction with the Steeple Renewables Project is "only one of multiple considerations", and that "NGET's position is more complex and more nuanced" than that advanced by the Landowner, which focuses on its own commercial interests. These are statements of fact, not criticisms of the Landowner's capability. Route selection for a 90-kilometre overhead line involves the balancing of a wide range of environmental, socio-economic, heritage, technical and cost considerations across the full extent of the route. The Landowner is, understandably, focused on the impact of NHHM on its own land, but that is only one of many factors that NGET must take into account.

The suggestion that the local routing is not influenced by other parts of the route

10. The Landowner contends (at paragraph 3.7) that "*there is not ... any material influence of the remainder of the route for the NHHM Project on the local routing of the NHHM Project in this specific location.*" NGET does not accept this. The linear nature of the NHHM Project (a 90-kilometre overhead line) means that changes to the route in any one location have implications outside that specific section. This is self-evident. The strategic route has been determined following a process of strategic options appraisal, corridor identification, and design development. Within that framework, local alignment decisions must be consistent with the overall design parameters and constraints of the scheme. It is not a matter of simply selecting a line on a map for a two-kilometre section in isolation.

The Landowner's characterisation of the burden of proof

11. The Landowner contends (at paragraph 3.8) that "*[i]t is not therefore for NGET to prove that an alternative is not preferable*" but rather "*for NGET to properly consider which route is preferable having regard to all relevant matters, and to cogently explain its analysis and reasoning in that respect.*" NGET agrees with this formulation. That is precisely what it has done. As set out in NGET's Deadline 3 submissions and in its response to ExQ2 Q7.2.5, the selection of the proposed alignment involved making a judgement as to the optimal balance between a number of factors, of which impact on the Steeple Renewables Project and the Landowner's estate was only one of many. Those factors include avoiding the crossing and undergrounding of the existing 132kV overhead line, avoiding the consented Wood Lane Solar Farm, achieving an optimised crossing of two railway lines, minimising impacts on the setting of the Scheduled Monument Church of St Helen's, following lower-elevation land to reduce landscape and visual impacts, and minimising proximity to residential properties.

Engagement since ISH3

12. The Landowner's submissions at paragraphs 3.10 to 3.14 address the engagement between the parties since ISH3, and are critical of the meeting held on 23 February 2026.
13. NGET makes the following points in response:
 - (a) The meeting on 23 February 2026 was arranged at the request of the Landowner. NGET's representatives attended that meeting in good faith with the purpose of discussing the Landowner's alternative route proposal.
 - (b) The Landowner's characterisation of what was said by NGET at ISH3 is misleading. At paragraph 14c of its ISH3 submissions, NGET explained that it was "*still in the process of considering the December 2025 request, following its proper procedure, which includes drawing up a full plan with tower and stringing positions, access roads and limits of deviation.*" The reference to plans with tower and stringing positions, access roads and limits of deviation was a description of the process that NGET itself undertakes when appraising route alternatives. It was not a commitment by NGET to prepare and present such plans to the Landowner, nor to deliver a detailed presentation on engineering, planning, environmental and wider considerations at the meeting on 23 February 2026. What NGET said was that the Landowner would be "informed of the outcome" of NGET's consideration. There is a material difference between informing a party of the outcome of an appraisal and providing that party with a detailed presentation of the underlying analysis and technical materials. The Landowner's criticism of NGET in this regard is therefore misplaced.
 - (c) It is not NGET's practice to provide detailed presentations to interested parties setting out tower and stringing positions, access roads and limits of deviation as part of its engagement on route alternatives. The suggestion at paragraph 3.12 of the Landowner's submissions that NGET was under an obligation to do so, or that its failure to do so represents a deficiency in engagement, is not accepted.

(d) As regards the Landowner's criticism at paragraph 3.13 that those representing NGET at the meeting stated that their expertise was "limited to land matters only", NGET is satisfied that its representatives at the meeting had suitable expertise to discuss the matters that were the proper subject of that meeting. In attendance were [REDACTED], Senior Surveyor in the NGET Strategic Infrastructure Lands Team, and [REDACTED], Associate Surveyor and NHHM Project Lead at [REDACTED] (the appointed Land Agents for NHHM). Together, they were appropriately qualified and authorised to represent NGET in discussions relating to the land impacts, land rights acquisition strategy for the NHHM project, landowner engagement and the communication of appraisal outcomes. As a Senior Surveyor within NGET, [REDACTED] is responsible for land rights, compensation and landowner engagement matters on NHHM and was a suitable representative to explain NGET's position, the basis on which the appraisal was undertaken, and how the conclusions inform the progression of the DCO application. [REDACTED], as NHHM Lead for the scheme at [REDACTED], supports NGET in the delivery of the same. Importantly, both have been directly involved in coordinating input into the appraisal process, and are directly responsible for the subsequent landowner engagement. The attendance of further technical specialists was not considered necessary, as the meeting was convened to communicate the outcome of and reasoning behind NGET's consideration of the Landowner Alternative Route. The approach taken is consistent with established practice for engagement on landowner requested alternatives across NHHM.

(e) It should be noted that NGET's established design change control process has its own governance procedures and draws on input from a wide range of disciplines. A full and proper appraisal of the type the Landowner seeks cannot be conducted instantaneously and requires the disciplined application of NGET's standard methodology.

(f) Finally, NGET will provide full justification for its chosen route as part of its application for development consent. The application will be accompanied by a Consultation Feedback Report, which will set out NGET's responses to consultation feedback received, and a Design Development Report, which will explain the evolution of the design and the rationale for any changes made. The Landowner will have the opportunity to review and comment on these documents as part of the examination process, and to participate fully in that examination should they wish to do so.

The Landowner's "Micro-Sited" Alternative Route

14. The Landowner's submissions at paragraphs 3.16 to 3.19 present what they describe as a "micro-sited" version of the alternative route alignment (referred to by the Landowner as the "Alternative Route"), which it describes as a refinement of the route put forward in December 2025, intended to respond to NGET's preliminary observations. This is the latest in a number of alternative routes that the Landowner has proposed during the course of this examination and NGET's pre-application process. The fact that the Landowner has found it necessary to present multiple iterations of its proposed alternative is itself illustrative of one of the central points that NGET has made throughout: that route selection involves a significant number of considerations and that adjusting one element of an alignment inevitably engages others.
15. NGET will consider the Landowner's "micro-sited" alternative route in accordance with its established design change control process and will notify the Landowner of the outcome of that process in due course. As set out in NGET's Deadline 3 submissions (REP3-053), NGET has already appraised a number of alternative alignments in this area, both to satisfy its own consideration of alternatives and in response to representations from a number of interested parties, including the Landowner. However, NGET understands that the "micro-sited" alternative alignment advanced by the Landowner has not been endorsed by the Applicant. In the circumstances, the consideration of alternative routing proposals for the NHHM project is not a matter for the Steeple Renewables Project examination. Any concerns, objections or suggested alternatives relating to the NHHM project should be brought forward through the NHHM

examination at the appropriate time, where they can be considered by the relevant Examining Authority in the correct procedural, evidential and policy context.

Programme and Timing Considerations

16. The Landowner's submissions do not engage with the programme implications of any route change. NGET reiterates that it has a licence obligation requiring NHHM to be commissioned by the end of 2031. The inclusion of that commissioning date as a condition of NGET's transmission licence underscores the critical public interest in ensuring that deadline is met. Any significant route change would require further consultation, additional environmental surveys and design work, and would introduce material programme delay. Given the national importance of delivering the NHHM Project within the required timeframe, such delays should not be countenanced absent clear and compelling justification.

Conclusion

17. In summary, NGET's position is as follows:

- (a) The Landowner's other proposed projects (the data centre and STEP associated development) are at a very early stage and do not carry sufficient weight to justify altering the route of a nationally significant infrastructure project of the importance of NHHM.

- (b) The protective provisions sought by NGET are not "chilling" in nature. They establish a balanced framework for coordination, subject to duties of reasonableness and with recourse to arbitration.

- (c) NGET's route selection process has been robust, iterative and has taken into account a wide range of relevant factors, of which the impact on the Landowner's estate is one.

- (d) NGET will consider the Landowner's "micro-sited" alternative route in accordance with its established design change control process and will notify the Landowner of the outcome of that process. However, as the "micro-sited" alternative alignment has not been endorsed by the Applicant, the consideration of alternative routing proposals for the NHHM project is not a matter for the Steeple Renewables Project examination. Any concerns or alternatives relating to the NHHM project should be brought forward through the NHHM examination at the appropriate time.

- (e) The programme imperative for NHHM is acute, and any delay arising from a route change must be weighed carefully against the claimed benefits of an alternative alignment.

18. NGET remains committed to engaging constructively with the Landowner and with the Applicant, and to reaching agreement on appropriate protective provisions and interface arrangements.