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To the applicant
(By email only)

Your Ref:

Our Ref: EN020026

Date: 23 April 2025

Dear Mr Stevens

Planning Act 2008 – section 51

Application by National Grid Electricity Transmission for an order granting development consent for the South East Anglia Link Project

Advice following issue of decision to accept the application for examination

On 23 April 2025 the Secretary of State decided that the application for the above project satisfied the acceptance tests under section 55 of the Planning Act 2008 (PA2008). The Planning Inspectorate's acceptance checklist and the application documents have been published and made available on the project page of our website.

In undertaking checks at the acceptance stage, the Inspectorate has made some initial observations in relation to the application. This letter comprises advice to the applicant provided under section 51 of the PA2008 in respect of these initial observations. The applicant should pay attention to its content and consider how appropriate action might be taken in response.

Consultees identified on a precautionary basis

Given the individual circumstances of this case, the Planning Inspectorate advises taking a precautionary approach to consultation under s42(1)(a) of PA2008 to ensure that all persons potentially affected by, or potentially likely to have an interest in the application are given the opportunity to participate fully in the examination of the application. On this basis, the applicant may wish to serve notice on the bodies listed in Box 6 of the section 55 checklist when it serves notice of the accepted application under s56(2)(a) of the PA2008; unless there is a specific justification why this is not necessary.

ES Part 2 Suffolk Chapter 2 Appendix 2.2.A Extended Phase 1 Habitat Survey Report (Doc 6.3.2.2.A) and ES Part 3 Kent Chapter 2 Appendix 3.2.A Extended Phase 1 Habitat Survey Report (Doc 6.3.3.2.A)

These survey reports are watermarked as confidential. Whilst the report contains some confidential information (for example in relation to badger setts) most of the information does not appear to be confidential, as its release would not adversely affect protections of the environment to which the information relates. The applicant is requested to provide 2 versions of these survey reports, to enable the information that is not confidential to be published in line with duties under the Environmental Information Regulations. The survey reports should be provided as soon as possible before commencement of the examination.

Part 2 Suffolk Chapter 3 Cultural Heritage (Doc 6.2.2.3) and ES Part 2 Suffolk Chapter 3 Appendix 2.3.F Phase 1 Archaeological Trial Trenching Report (Draft) (Doc 6.3.2.3.F)

Appendix 2.3.F presents results of the completed trial trenching (Phase 1 and 1b) but it is labelled as draft. The Consultation Report, Appendix E (Part 4 of 4) (**Doc 5.1.6**) indicates that a limited area of Phase 2b would not be complete until March 2025. ES Part 2 Suffolk Chapter 3 Cultural Heritage states that the Outline Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) (**Doc 7.5.4.1**) would be updated during examination following receipt of the final fieldwork report for the trial trench evaluation, but it was not considered that the absence of this fieldwork was a meaningful limitation to the assessment. The applicant is requested to provide a final version of the trial trenching report including the results of work carried out in March 2025, and an updated Outline WSI reflecting this information, as soon as possible before commencement of the examination.

ES Part 4 Marine Chapter 6 Marine Archaeology (Doc 6.2.4.6)

ES Part 4 Marine Chapter 6 Marine Archaeology states that additional geotechnical surveys were undertaken in October 2024 to duplicate earlier vibrocores that were destroyed. The results have not been included in the ES and are proposed to be submitted as a standalone document when complete. It states that the existing baseline information from geophysical survey and geoarchaeological deposit models (presented in the Marine Archaeological Technical Report Figures (**Doc 6.4.4.6.A**) and summarised in ES Appendix 6.4.A (**Doc 6.3.4.6.A**) is suitable to inform impact assessment. The applicant is requested to provide results of the October 2024 surveys and set out any implications for the ES assessment conclusions as soon as possible before commencement of the examination.

ES Part 4 Marine Chapter 2 Benthic Ecology (Doc 6.2.4.2)

The Consultation Report, Appendix E (Part 4 of 4) (**Doc 5.1.6**) response to the 2023 statutory consultation page 213 states that *“The results from the comprehensive geophysical survey, preliminary imagery and survey logs are being integrated with our existing 2021 data and supplemented with existing environmental information from available sources such as One Benthic to provide confidence in the assessment. The final results of the most recent survey campaign will be provided prior to examination as supplementary information in order to provide an additional confidence in the conclusions.”*

Please explain your programme for submission of the supplementary information.

It is assumed that these are the only outstanding submissions but in responding, please confirm whether there are any other outstanding or pending submissions proposed for any subject and, if so, their anticipated date of submission.

Flood Risk Assessment (Doc 6.8)

The Environment Agency (EA) released updated flood risk and coastal erosion data in March 2025, shortly before the application was submitted. The flood risk assessment (FRA) has therefore not been based on the most up to date EA data. The applicant is requested to review the latest EA flood risk data and confirm any implications for the FRA. An updated FRA should be submitted as soon as possible before commencement of the examination if necessary following this review.

The FRA states that localised areas of the proposed development are in Flood Zone 3 (shown on Figure 1 of Appendix A). It does not distinguish between Flood Zones 3(a) and 3(b). The applicant is requested to provide plans showing Flood Zones 3a and 3b differentiated or explain why this information is not required in respect of the proposed development.

Funding Statement

Paragraph 3.2.17 of the Funding Statement states that “*The estimated cost of implementing the Proposed Project is approximately £1.1bn (18/19 price).*” This cost estimate is based on prices from circa six years ago. Please can this be updated or otherwise explain why this estimated cost is still relevant to the proposed development.

Minor errors and omissions

There are minor errors and omissions, as reflected in Box 30 of the acceptance checklist.

The Planning Inspectorate has noted minor labelling and typographic errors in the documents as listed in box 30 of the s55 checklist, with examples given below. We advise that the applicant takes these comments into account and completes a comprehensive review to correct these and to identify and correct any other formatting errors and omissions before submitting any updated versions of application documents in future.

Draft Development Consent Order (dDCO) (Doc 3.1)	
Schedule 3 Requirement 7(4)	Item n) duplicates h).
Article 60	Three instances of “Error! Reference source not found..”
Cross referencing of Schedules and Articles	Please check and review to ensure all schedules and articles are cross referenced correctly
Environmental Statement Non-Technical Summary (NTS) (Doc 6.1)	
Paragraph 3.5.20	kVv and Kv instead of kV
Paragraph 5.2.7	'pong' habitat - pond habitat

Paragraphs 5.2.7, 6.4.6, 6.10.4, 6.10.10, 6.11.3	References to Kent/Suffolk appear to be wrong
Paragraphs 5.8.8 and 5.8.10	Potentially contradictory text suggests that during construction receptors are within 200m but during operation there are no receptors within 200m therefore effects are not significant.
Paragraph 6.2.6	Typos/punctuation errors make it difficult to understand meaning of text.
Paragraph 6.2.18	residaul - residual
Paragraph 6.9.3	'study area for varies' should read 'study area for noise and vibration varies'
Paragraph 7.4.1	The potential impacts two groups...
Paragraph 7.4.6	Airbourne south and visual
Paragraph 7.8.9	Reference to ecology and biodiversity effects but should be commercial fisheries
Paragraph 7.9.4	Reference to fish and shellfish ecology effects but should be other sea users
Paragraph 7.11.4	disturbnace - disturbance
Paragraph 8.2.4	and bird in – and birds in
Paragraph 8.2.5	co,nined - combined
Paragraph 8.2.5	signifcaint - significant
Plates 1.1 and 1.2 Suffolk and Kent Environmental Constraints	Special Area of Conservation (SAC) not shown with hash and not labelled on plan for Suffolk. Flood zones make it difficult to read base map. Consider changing flood zone notation to make base map visible.
Plate 3.2 Kent Onshore Order Limits	Converter station labelled as Saxmundham in legend but should be Minster.
Plates 3.1 and 3.2 Kent and Suffolk	Clearly label the overhead and underground sections.
Environmental Statement Part 1 Introduction Chapter 4 (Doc 6.2.14)	
Paragraph 4.1.6	The list of supporting figures describes a number of figures as application documents e.g. “ <i>Application Document 7.5.7.1.1 Saxmundham Converter Station Outline Landscape Mitigation</i> ” but does not make it clear that these are figures appended to documents 7.5.7.1 and 7.5.7.2.
ES Part 3 Kent Chapter 11 Health and Wellbeing (Doc 6.2.3.11)	
Heading of Social cohesion and community identify after paragraph 11.9.70	The text description of the effects to health and wellbeing from impacts to social cohesion and community identity during operation of the proposed development is missing and should be inserted.
ES Part 4 Marine – various chapters (Doc 6.2.4)	
References to Electromagnetic Deviation Study	Several of the ES aspect chapters refer to an ES Appendix 4.7.B Electromagnetic Deviation Study. This document is not listed in the Electronic Application Index. It appears that the relevant information is presented in the Electro and Magnetic Field Compliance Report. This should be checked and clarified in all chapters where the reference is used.

ES Appendix 4.2.D Interim Subtidal Survey Report (Additional Surveys) (Doc 6.3.4.2.D)	
Appendices I to M	The appendices are not included, an icon of a link to a pdf document or excel spreadsheets is shown. A copy of these documents should be submitted.
ES Appendix A Marine Archaeological Report 6.3.4.6.A	
Title page	Reference number on the title page is 6.3.4.7.A
Habitats Regulations Assessment (Doc 6.6)	
Section 7.3	At section 7.3 the paragraph numbering reaches 7.3.42 and starts again at 7.3.1 in the next paragraph. This should be corrected.
Appendix B	Appendix B is missing and should be inserted.
Statement of Reasons (Doc 4.3)	
Unnumbered paragraph on page 41 between paragraphs 7.2.6 and 7.2.7	Cross referencing with paragraphs 1.3.5 and 1.3.6 of Appendix C Special Category Land Report indicates there is an error in the last sentence of the paragraph where National Grid should be National Trust. Paragraph numbering also needs to be corrected.
Planning Statement (Doc 7.1) Various errors including:	
Paragraph 7.2.6	Error reference source not found
Paragraph 7.3.27	Should be National Grid has avoided altogether locating the converter station and substation inside (not outside) the AONB
Paragraph 7.13.34	Reference to Suffolk Onshore Scheme but should be Kent

Please pay close attention to the advice set out in this letter and act on it accordingly. It is requested that you action these points before the commencement of the relevant representation period. This will contribute towards a more efficient examination and give any future Examining Authority comfort that the documentation is complete and accurate.

We trust you find this advice helpful, however if you have any queries on these matters please do not hesitate to contact our office using the contact details at the head of this letter.

Yours sincerely

Louise Harraway

Louise Harraway
Case Manager

This communication does not constitute legal advice.

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