

**Suffolk County Council ( [REDACTED] )**

**Kent County Council ( [REDACTED] )**

**East Suffolk Council ( [REDACTED] )**

**Thanet District Council ( [REDACTED] )**

Dear Examining Authority,

**Location of the future hearings for the Sea Link Examination (EN020026)**

Suffolk County Council, Kent County Council, East Suffolk District Council and Thanet District Council (“the Councils”) are writing to you, as host authorities for the proposed Sea Link DCO project actively engaged in its Examination, to set out their profound concern relating to the emerging procedural decisions for the location of future hearings for the Sea Link Project.

The Councils note from the final Examination Timetable, as set out in Annex A of the Rule 8 letter [PD-013], that potential future hearings are provisionally reserved for the weeks commencing on 26 January 2026, 23 February 2026, and 23 March 2026. The Councils also note from the Procedural Decisions set out in Annex B of the Rule 8 letter that the future hearings for the week commencing 26 January 2026 will be held as blended events at a venue (yet to be identified) in London. Whilst concerned at this Procedural Decision, the Councils do not seek to re-open it, given its relative proximity and the likelihood that logistical arrangements may have already been made on the basis of a London venue.

The Councils also note that the venue for future hearings was discussed at the Preliminary Meeting and that the Examining Authority expressed its concern that it was not able to travel between Suffolk and Kent for any future hearings because it just takes too much time out of the six months timetable (see Transcript Part 1 at 00:44:10:07 – 00:44:36:16 in [EV2-003]), but that for any subsequent hearings after January 2026 the venue would be decided later depending on the progress of the Examination (see Transcript Part 1 at 00:45:36:27 – 00:46:08:01).

The Councils consider that a fair, robust and accessible approach to the location of hearings, that supports the confidence of interested parties, especially parish councils, non-government organisations, campaign groups and individuals, is essential if trust and confidence in the process of infrastructure consenting is to be supported and maintained. This is particularly important given the very high level of public interest in this matter.

The Councils are keen to ensure that local Interested Parties would not be disadvantaged by the need to travel potentially very considerable distances to attend the hearings in person in a central location. Not only would this result in them incurring significant travel costs and potentially overnight accommodation costs, but it would also absorb time, which is particularly valuable for Suffolk residents engaging with several NSIPs across different stages of the Development Consent Order process.

Indeed, the same applies to attendance by the Councils' specialist officers, and the Councils are keen to not expend time and resources that could be better spent dealing with other NSIPs, or their day-to-day duties. Whilst the Councils acknowledge the Examining Authority's Procedural Decision to require the Applicant to arrange for satellite venues in Suffolk and Kent for such hearings, the Councils see this as a poor substitute compared to presence 'in the room', especially in circumstances where the Applicant's core team can be expected to be present in person in front of the Examining Authority at the venue in London.

The Councils note that the Applicant shares their concerns, with its Response to the Rule 6 Letter [[PDA-001](#)] making clear its view that it should be possible to arrange hearings so that they are held close to the location of the issues being discussed. The Applicant also brought to the attention of the Examining Authority in this letter that there is limited overlap between the issues on the project in Suffolk, Kent, or the marine element of the project. This means that having separate hearings in Suffolk and Kent, with hearings on marine issues or the terms of the Development Consent Order perhaps held in a central location or virtually, is unlikely to lead to any significant duplication in discussions. Whilst the Councils appreciate that there are some logistical challenges facing the Examining Authority as a result of the geographic extent of the Sea Link project, the Councils are concerned to ensure that the valuable expertise and insights that can be provided by local authorities, organisations and residents inform the Examination as fully as possible.

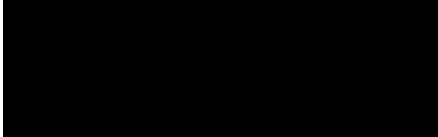
Therefore, the Councils heavily encourage the Examining Authority to reconsider its proposed approach to the location of hearings in light of the points raised in this letter and elsewhere in representations submitted into the Examination.

As set out by Michael Bedford KC for Suffolk County Council at the Preliminary Meeting, the Councils consider that an approach to the location of hearings should be informed by that used previously for the Lower Thames Crossing, which involved hearings in three locations (Essex, Kent, and London). That approach is set out in detail in the appendix to this letter.

A final point is that the Councils would hope that the agenda for each hearing could be published as early as possible to enable time for the relevant experts to programme

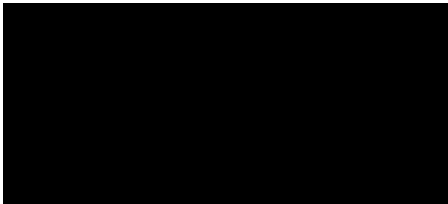
availability. If the Examining Authority do decide to proceed with a central location for hearings, this would make the timely publication of a detailed agenda (including clearly identifying where matters will be focused on the Suffolk part of the scheme, the Kent part of the scheme, or a combination of the two) all the more important, helping to ensure that only the necessary officers travel to and attend the hearings.

Signed:



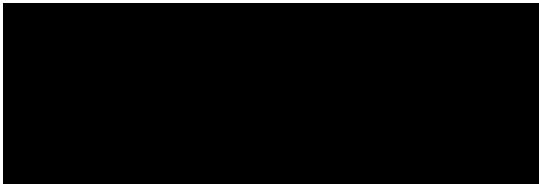
**Zachary Farndon**

Senior Planning Officer  
Suffolk County Council



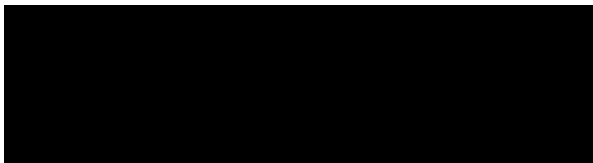
**Stephanie Holt-Castle**

Director of Growth & Communities  
Kent County Council



**Martyn Fulcher BSc (Hons), PGDip, MRTPI**

Head of Energy Planning and Coastal Management  
East Suffolk Council



**Iain Livingstone**

Planning Applications Manager  
Thanet District Council

## Appendix

Date	Time	Hearing	Mode	In Person Location
Tuesday June 6 <sup>th</sup> 2023	10am	Preliminary	Blended	London Stadium, Stratford, London
Tuesday June 20 <sup>th</sup> 2023	6pm	Open Floor 1	Virtual only	N/A
Wednesday June 21 <sup>st</sup> 2023	10am	Issue Specific 1	Virtual only	N/A
Thursday June 22 <sup>nd</sup> 2023	10am	Issue Specific 2	Virtual only	N/A
Friday June 23 <sup>rd</sup> 2023	10am	OFH1/ISH1 & 2 reserve date	Virtual only	N/A
Wednesday June 28 <sup>th</sup> 2023	10am	Open Floor 2	Blended	Orsett Hall Hotel, Prince Charles Avenue, Orsett, Grays, Essex
Thursday June 29 <sup>th</sup> 2023	10am	Open Floor 2 reserve date	Blended	Orsett Hall Hotel, Prince Charles Avenue, Orsett, Grays, Essex
Tuesday July 5 <sup>th</sup> 2023	10am	Open Floor 3	Blended	Dartford Bridge Hilton Hotel, Masthead Close, Crossways Business Centre, Dartford, Kent
Wednesday July 6 <sup>th</sup> 2023	10am	Open Floor 3 reserve date	Blended	Orsett Hall Hotel, Prince Charles Avenue, Orsett, Grays, Essex
Tuesday September 5 <sup>th</sup> 2023	10am	Issue Specific 3	Blended	Orsett Hall Hotel, Prince Charles Avenue, Orsett, Grays, Essex
Wednesday September 6 <sup>th</sup> 2023	10am	Issue Specific 4	Blended	Orsett Hall Hotel, Prince Charles Avenue, Orsett, Grays, Essex

Date	Time	Hearing	Mode	In Person Location
Thursday September 7 <sup>th</sup> 2023	10am	Issue Specific 5	Blended	Orsett Hall Hotel, Prince Charles Avenue, Orsett, Grays, Essex
Friday September 8 <sup>th</sup> 2023	10am	Issue Specific 6	Blended	Orsett Hall Hotel, Prince Charles Avenue, Orsett, Grays, Essex
Monday September 11 <sup>th</sup> 2023	10am	Issue Specific 7	Virtual only	N/A
Friday September 15 <sup>th</sup> 2023	10am	Compulsory Acquisition 1	Blended	Orsett Hall Hotel, Prince Charles Avenue, Orsett, Grays, Essex
Tuesday October 17 <sup>th</sup> 2023	10am	Compulsory Acquisition 3	Blended	Mercure Dartford Brands Hatch Hotel. Brands Hatch, West Kingsdown, Dartford, Kent
Wednesday October 18 <sup>th</sup> 2023	10am	Compulsory Acquisition 4	Blended	Mercure Dartford Brands Hatch Hotel. Brands Hatch, West Kingsdown, Dartford, Kent
Thursday October 19 <sup>th</sup> 2023	10am	Issue Specific 8	Blended	Mercure Dartford Brands Hatch Hotel. Brands Hatch, West Kingsdown, Dartford, Kent
Monday October 23 <sup>rd</sup> 2023	10am	Issue Specific 9	Blended	Mercure Dartford Brands Hatch Hotel. Brands Hatch, West Kingsdown, Dartford, Kent
Tuesday October 24 <sup>th</sup> 2023	10am	Issue Specific 10	Blended	Mercure Dartford Brands Hatch Hotel. Brands Hatch, West Kingsdown, Dartford, Kent

Date	Time	Hearing	Mode	In Person Location
Wednesday November 22 <sup>nd</sup> 2023	10am	Issues Specific 11	Blended	Hilton London Tower Bridge, Tooley Street, London
Thursday November 23 <sup>rd</sup> 2023	10am	Issues Specific 12	Blended	Hilton London Tower Bridge, Tooley Street, London
Thursday November 23 <sup>rd</sup> 2023	7pm	Open Floor 5	Blended	Hilton London Tower Bridge, Tooley Street, London
Monday November 27 <sup>th</sup> 2023	10am	Issue Specific 13	Blended	Hilton London Tower Bridge, Tooley Street, London
Tuesday November 28 <sup>th</sup> 2023	10am	Issue Specific 14	Blended	Hilton London Tower Bridge, Tooley Street, London