

**Text of Open Floor Hearing delivered on Wednesday 5 November 2025 by Councillor Fox,  
Energy Lead for Benhall and Sternfield Parish Council.**

Before I begin, I would just like to highlight the fact that, although the converter station site is referred to as the Saxmundham site, the villages of Benhall and Sternfield will be right at the centre of the Suffolk end of Sea Link because the B1121 that will be accessing the site runs through Benhall and the Sea Link converter station will actually sit in Sternfield, not Saxmundham.

Lack of holistic, long-term planning is leading to a chaotic imposition of infrastructure in East Suffolk with little or no regard for the disproportionate and unacceptable burden that this is imposing on the local population. One twin reactor nuclear power station is enough for this region, but in addition to Sizewell C, East Suffolk is also set to host two substations, a connection hub, at least two converter stations, hundreds of new homes, an industrial retail unit, a 1,000acre 250MW solar park, major water and road network upgrades. And it won't stop there because more and more projects such as multiple battery storage units and a 600MW solar park have already appeared on the horizon for development in this region – world-famous for its unique biodiversity, birdlife, internationally renowned concert hall and breathtaking landscapes.

So how on earth did we get here....?

Initially, the output from all four Scottish Power Offshore Wind Farms was due to be transmitted to Bramford via a single cable route, but an extraordinarily short-sighted decision to reduce the cost of this route by substituting AC cables for the DC cables initially proposed that was inexplicably allowed to proceed as a non-material change meant that only half of Scottish Power's electricity could be transmitted to Bramford after all. Thus, a whole new connection point costing billions of pounds had to be identified at which to connect the other half of Scottish Power's electricity and National Grid's connection point at Friston was born. It is this connection point that is at the heart of everything because it can act like a gigantic socket into which any future electricity projects can be plugged. When summing up after the substation examinations at Friston, the examiners stated that the adverse impacts of Scottish Power's projects were so substantial that it was only just possible to mitigate for them and that caution would have to be applied were further projects to be added at the connection point in the future.

Sea Link is being added now... caution needs to be applied now.

Sea Link will not produce a single amp of electricity nor will it connect directly to any source of electricity generation. It will simply move electricity between Suffolk and Kent – like an extension cable taking excess electricity that has been brought into or generated here – where it is not needed – down to the South East – where it is. Thus, by moving electricity directly from Suffolk to Kent, Sea Link has the capacity to lift the lid on electrical

infrastructure development here with the local supply set to become 20 times greater than demand and 30% of the country's electricity due to be generated in or transmitted through this region.

Saxmundham wasn't even considered as a potential converter stations site originally and, even though it is basically inaccessible and is way too close to the local population, it suddenly popped up as the preferred option at the last minute. Had it been scrutinised in the same way and at the same time as the other sites and had it already been established that construction of the Sizewell Link Road was guaranteed to proceed, maybe a different site such as the Leiston Airfield would have emerged as a more appropriate preferred option instead.

At drop-in events, Sternfield has previously been identified by National Grid reps as being an industrial agricultural location, but this title is not justified. Yes – we do have duck-rearing barns and a cold storage unit and, yes – despite the totally unsuitable roads, we do have HGVs coming into Sternfield to access these sites, but the cold storage unit was developed even though it would never have been awarded planning consent had this been applied for prospectively and anyway, its agricultural scale is miles away from being industrial. Therefore, please don't be misled by our barns and the HGVs travelling through our village.... Sternfield is not an industrial site and remains a small rural agricultural village with considerable heritage, history and charming landscape appeal.

Benhall stands to be significantly disrupted by construction of Sea Link as a result of the transport of super-heavy loads over the Benhall Railway Bridge and increased traffic flows – especially of HGVs – on the B1121 as it runs through the village. Had the worst-case scenario principles of the Rochdale Envelope originally been applied in an open and transparent way to the problem of transporting loads weighing 300 tonnes over a railway bridge only able to withstand loads of 46 tonnes, would the Benhall route still have emerged as the preferred option? And since the word on the street is that Lion Link may well adopt a Northern approach to the converter stations site, should the Northern route that was excluded in favour of the Benhall route during the Sea Link statutory consultation be put back on the table now as the access route for both projects? Or better still, should the Saxmundham site be taken off the table altogether and an alternative site such as the Leiston Airfield – at which adverse impacts would be much less harmful to the local community – be reassessed now?

The effect of so much infrastructure development in our little local area is significantly impacting every aspect of our lives. For example, our mental health and wellbeing is suffering and, as a parish council, our workload has increased to the extent that it is reaching unmanageable extremes and it is becoming more and more difficult to recruit and retain fellow councillors.

Shoehorning so much large-scale infrastructure so close to established communities in this small area served by its constrained rural road network is leading to cumulative impacts that are already affecting our daily lives and with more and more NSIPs popping up right, left and centre, still more infrastructure is due to be developed in the region in the near future. To the local population this feels as though an irrational, ill-conceived, profit-driven scramble to decarbonise the grid by an overambitious, unrealistic arbitrary date has led to all reasonable decision-making going out of the window. If major infrastructure development after major infrastructure development continues to be crammed into this region, come what may, at what point will cumulative impacts reach such unjustifiably disproportionate levels that they begin to resemble cumulative chaos and may even exceed the wider sense of *Wednesbury* reasonableness?

Proceeding with construction of Sea Link when the area is already under such duress threatens to push us over the edge. We simply can't take any more so please take great care to test for proportionately, recognise when enough is enough and acknowledge when the harm of development on the local community threatens to outweigh the benefits of the project. Thank you.