

Southwold Town Council's submission for Deadline 2, Sea Link DCO.
Registration Number [REDACTED]

Southwold Town Council (STC) recognises the general requirement to strengthen and widen the transmission capability in England, but this should be undertaken in an holistic manner which is cognisant of other projects, including NSIPs, impacting the environment and local communities. Sizewell C (SZC), EA2 and EA1N have been consented and are already having a huge negative environmental and socio-economic impact on the localities surrounding and leading to their onshore sites which are within the Suffolk Heritage Coast, part of a National Landscape. To add Sea Link, which by its very nature would enable a significant regional connection hub attracting additional energy projects (interconnector, windfarm and solar) would impose an undue burden on this relatively small area of the Heritage Coast, renowned for its tranquil beauty, dark skies, coastal walks, ancient woodland, diversity of wildlife, medieval churches and rich cultural heritage.

Need

National Grid Electricity Transmission (NGET) argues that Sea Link is vital to export power from Kent to Suffolk at times of low wind and high interconnector imports, but East Anglia already has sufficient power through Sizewell B and prospectively C. It also asserts that it is needed as a backup in a scenario where there is a transmission fault between Canterbury and Kemsley, but no substantive evidence is presented of reliability risk.

NGET further argues that Sea Link is required at times of high wind as an additional route for power to flow out of East Anglia into the network, but the only new wind farm projects currently consented are EA2 and EA1N for which there is existing capacity through the overhead lines from Sizewell to Bramford. Again they assert that Sea Link is needed as a backup in case of a fault between Sizewell and Bramford preventing transmission from what they call the Sizewell Generation Group, but no substantive evidence is presented of reliability risk, and the introduction of the term "Sizewell Generation Group" hides NGET's intention to create a connection hub at Friston into which other potential energy projects may connect which would require extra transmission capability. SZC is delayed and will not be online until 2040, and no mention was made during the extensive and robust DCO for SZC of any need to supplement the network to accommodate it. Indeed, transmission concerns were not raised or examined. Nautilus is now connecting at Grain, Lion Link and Helios Solar Farm and other potential energy projects are not consented, so there is no present necessity for Sea Link, and there is time to design a better solution which would obviate the additional turmoil and impact on this relatively small area of East Suffolk. We would ask the ExA to press for proof of present constraints and reliability risks before accepting NGET's justification.

Cumulative Effect

It is noticeable that NGET in its many submissions regards Sea Link's impact in isolation as having no significant adverse effect when it should be impossible to view the project in isolation in this way but as part of multiple overlapping projects whose cumulative effect on this small area of East Suffolk, when added to the already consented SZC and EA2/EA1N, has enormous impact. Despite this self-fulfilling approach, NGET is quick to acknowledge other unconsented projects such as Lion Link to substantiate its needs case. STC's contention is that the cumulative effect of Sea Link and the projects it will attract on top of the consented SZC and EA2/EA1N is overburdening to local communities and requires far

more robust analysis and assessment than currently undertaken by NGET across in particular Traffic and Transport, Recreation and Tourism, Health and Well-being, Environment and Ecology to reveal the true impact.

Suffolk County Council and East Suffolk District Council LIRs

STC fully supports the issues raised by both SCC and ESDC in their LIRs which demand proper resolution and should not in critical instances (such as access over Benhall Bridge, new bridge access over the River Fromus and siting of the converter station) be dismissed by NGET as easily resolvable as part of the ongoing consent process.

Regional Effects

NGET has assessed the likely significant socio-economic, recreation and tourism effects of Sea Link over a broader study area being within a 60 minute drive-time catchment from the Suffolk Onshore Scheme Boundary. This includes Southwold.

The base data used by NGET is outdated (2022) and the assessment is based on the Sea Link project in isolation, concluding that there are no anticipated significant adverse effects on local businesses, tourism or community facilities and consequently no mitigation measures are proposed. On the other hand, NGET assesses potential beneficial socio-economic effects, all be them minor, during construction in particular by generating jobs and increased workforce spend.

Southwold Specific Response

SZC and EA2 are already having a substantial impact and Sea Link would only add to the potential harm.

Southwold, very much like Aldeburgh and Thorpeness, is a coastal town whose economy and community well-being is highly dependent on tourism and visitor accessibility (90% of visitors are day trippers). Local employment, hospitality, retail and seasonal businesses rely on visitors who travel via a limited number of rural access roads (Southwold has only one road into town). Even modest congestion or journey-time uncertainty leads to measurable reductions in visitor numbers, especially outside peak season when local businesses depend on predictable access.

The A12 south from Blythburgh to Woodbridge is currently plagued by traffic management and closures related to SZC and SPR/EA2, and Sea Link and other consequential projects would only add to and extend the disruption. Traffic accidents are prevalent, travel times and routes are unpredictable, and HGV, abnormal loads and worker traffic are already placing a disproportionate strain on a wider fragile road network with no capacity for diversion or widening. These effects will inevitably discourage day visitors due to uncertainty of travel times, extended queues at pinch points and reduced reliability of travel during bank holidays, festivals and peak season months.

November 2025 footfall numbers produced by East Suffolk DC for Southwold show total footfall for the year to November has decreased by 5% based on the same period as last year. Anecdotal feedback from Southwold High Street retailers is that takings this year are markedly down and there have been a number of shop closures.

Taking data produced by Destination Research Ltd using the Cambridge Model for East Suffolk's visitor economy (there is no smaller regional breakdown), tourism value for 2024 was £743m and supported 15,500 jobs. Even modest declines translate into significant economic and employment losses concentrated in frontline sectors. A 5% decline results overall in £37.1m lost value and 775 job losses.

Southwold is disproportionately reliant on tourism with local economies dominated by hospitality, retail and accommodation sectors and businesses operating on tight seasonal margins, so a small percentage drop in visitor numbers will have magnified and long-lasting economic consequences to Southwold with businesses finding it hard to survive.

Tourism underpins local identity and vitality and any decline erodes social cohesion and cultural vitality. Residents are impacted taking local journeys south, blue light services are constrained, businesses struggle to recruit staff given the difficulty of commutes and higher wages on offer at the energy projects, skill-based labour (electricians, plumbers, construction workers) is being displaced, High Street shops are closing. The very fabric of Southwold as a vibrant seaside resort is under threat.

Request to ExA

Given all the above, STC respectfully requests the ExA:

1. Further tests NGET's assertion that Sea Link is needed at the current time.
2. Requires NGET to engage and address upfront the critical issues raised in SCC's and ESDC's LIRs.
3. Requires NGET to assess tourism-related economic harm within the 60 minute drive-time catchment area on a cumulative basis including consented NSIPs and energy projects with offered connections to the Friston sub-station e.g. Lion Link and Helios solar farm.
4. Requires NGET to carry out cumulative traffic modelling on the same basis and produce a robust, enforceable Construction Traffic Management Plan.
5. Requires economic mitigation for tourism-dependent towns if Sea Link is to be consented.