

Dear Members of the Examining Authority,

I am a concerned resident of Friston. I make this submission at Deadline 4A regarding Change Request 1. I set out my issues below.

I have two principal concerns: firstly the vulnerability of the Benhall Railway Bridge and secondly the Needs Case put forward by the Applicant.

1. Benhall Railway Bridge

The adequacy of the Benhall Bridge to take AILs has always been a concern to local residents and Suffolk County Council (SCC), who, as the Highways Authority, have responsibility for the bridge structure.

I cannot comment from a technical point of view, but I have noted SCC's comments in REP 1-130 Suffolk County Council Local Impact Report at paragraph 11.153, where it is stated that although an overbridge could in principle be constructed, the impacts in terms of disruption to the highway network, users and local residents, including those affected by any diversion, have not been considered. SCC understands that temporary overbridging would require the Benhall Bridge to be closed for at least three days for each AIL movement. This would significantly hinder access between the A12 and Saxmundham and is likely to lead to serious road user delay and pressure on diversion routes.

I believe the Applicant has underestimated the seriousness of the disruption that such closures would cause. The Benhall Bridge route into and out of the Applicant's site is not, in my view, a sustainable option.

In REP3A-031 (SCC Relevant Representation on Change Request 1, 19 January 2026), despite continued engagement with the Applicant, SCC states at paragraph 5.2 that it continues to have concerns regarding the feasibility and acceptability of using the B1121 and the Benhall Railway Bridge as an access route for construction traffic, particularly AIL movements. SCC goes on to say that if an acceptable solution cannot be identified, the Applicant will be unable to construct the project.

This reflects the deep frustration felt locally. It appears that National Grid is not properly addressing well-founded and legitimate concerns regarding Benhall Bridge.

Given SCC's stated doubts about the viability of the project if Benhall Bridge cannot be used, I urge the Examining Authority to consider whether this project is in fact deliverable, and to recommend refusal if this fundamental issue remains unresolved.

2. Needs Case Not Proven

I recognise that the needs case is complex. However, I note that East Suffolk Council in its Local Impact Report was unconvinced about the immediate need for Sea Link.

The need for Sea Link has been presented as dependent on Sizewell C, LionLink and Nautilus all being operational. However, Nautilus has now been moved to the Isle of Grain. North Falls and Five Estuaries offshore wind farms are also no longer proposing to connect at Friston. Sizewell C is unlikely to be completed for at least another ten years, and LionLink remains at consultation stage with no guaranteed consent.

This significantly alters the cumulative position that originally justified concentrating infrastructure at Friston. In those circumstances, the urgency and necessity of Sea Link are open to question.

Work undertaken by Suffolk Energy Action Solutions (SEAS) suggests that there is sufficient transmission capacity in Suffolk until around 2040 when Sizewell C may be operational, and that alternative and significantly cheaper solutions may be available through upgrading existing infrastructure.

I would ask the Examining Authority to give careful consideration to SEAS REP3-144 (Late Deadline 3 Submission – SEAS Rebuttal to 1GEN49), particularly paragraph 23, which requests that the need for Sea Link (as distinct from the general need for network reinforcement) be properly examined at an Issue Specific Hearing.

I strongly support that request.

3. Impact on Mental Health and Wellbeing

I also ask the Examining Authority to consider the cumulative impact of these repeated and overlapping energy proposals on the mental health and wellbeing of residents in Friston, Knodishall, Sternfield, Saxmundham, Benhall and surrounding villages.

For many years now, local communities have lived with continuing uncertainty, consultation processes, and the prospect of large-scale industrial infrastructure being imposed on what is a small rural area. The stress and anxiety caused by this prolonged situation should not be underestimated.

This is not simply inconvenience. It affects sleep, relationships, community cohesion and people's sense of safety and stability in their own homes. The concentration of multiple nationally significant energy projects within such a confined geography places a particular psychological burden on residents, especially older and more vulnerable members of the community.

These cumulative human impacts should be given meaningful weight in the overall planning balance.

4. Evacuation and Safety Concerns

Finally, I am deeply concerned about the practical ability of the local population to evacuate safely in the event of a catastrophic accident or military incident affecting infrastructure in this area.

We already host a nuclear facility at Sizewell and are facing proposals for additional major substations, interconnectors and associated infrastructure. The road network serving Friston and neighbouring villages is limited and already under strain. Access routes are few and easily congested.

If a serious incident were to occur — whether industrial, environmental or otherwise — it is difficult to see how a safe and orderly evacuation of the local population could realistically be achieved.

Before additional large-scale infrastructure is concentrated in this area, there should be clear and transparent evidence that emergency access and evacuation arrangements are robust, practical and capable of protecting residents.

Request for Open Floor Hearings

Given the seriousness of the concerns outlined above — particularly regarding the deliverability of the Benhall Bridge access, the robustness of the needs case, the cumulative impact on residents' wellbeing, and the practical realities of emergency evacuation — I respectfully request that the Examining Authority convene Open Floor Hearings to allow affected residents to speak directly to these matters.

These issues go to the heart of community safety, confidence and long-term wellbeing. It is essential that local voices are heard fully and transparently before any recommendation is made.

Yours sincerely,

Sheridan Steen

