

The Great Grid Upgrade

Sea Link

Sea Link

Volume 9: Examination Submissions

Document 9.100: Draft Statement of Common Ground Between National Grid Electricity Transmission and London Gateway Port Limited

Planning Inspectorate Reference: EN020026

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nationalgrid

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Version History

Date	Version	Status	Description / Changes
March 2026	A	DRAFT	Issued to PINS at Deadline 5

1. Introduction

1.1 Overview

- 1.1.1 This Statement of Common Ground (SoCG) has been prepared to support the application (“The Application”) for the Sea Link Project (“Proposed Project”) made by National Grid Electricity Transmission Ltd (“the Applicant”). The Application was submitted to the Secretary of State for a Development Consent Order (DCO) and accepted for examination on the 23 April 2025.
- 1.1.2 A Statement of Common Ground (SoCG) is an established means in the planning process of allowing all parties to identify and focus on specific issues that may need to be addressed during the Examination. It is prepared jointly between the applicant and another party(s) and sets out matters of agreement between both parties, as well as matters where there is not an agreement. It also details matter’s that are under discussion.
- 1.1.3 The aim of a SoCG is to help the Examining Authority manage the Examination Phase of a DCO application. Understanding the status of the matters at hand will allow the Examining Authority to focus their questioning and provide greater predictability for all participants in Examination. A SoCG may be submitted prior to the start of or during Examination and then updated as necessary or as requested during the Examination Phase.

1.2 This Statement of Common Ground

- 1.2.1 This SoCG has been prepared between the Applicant and London Gateway Port Limited (LGPL). It has been prepared in accordance with the guidance published by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, 2024).
- 1.2.2 This SoCG will be progressed during the examination period to reach a final position between the Applicant and LGPL and to clarify if any issues remain unresolved. This SoCG will be revised and updated as appropriate and/or required by the Examining Authority at relevant examination deadlines.
- 1.2.3 For the purpose of this SoCG, the Applicant and LGPL are jointly referred to as the “Parties”. When referencing LGPL alone, they are referred to as “the Consultee”.

1.3 The Role of London Gateway Port Limited in the DCO Process

- 1.3.1 The Consultee owns and operates the DP World London Gateway Port on the north bank of the Thames Estuary.
- 1.3.2 The Port is a nationally significant container port, currently handling over a third of the UK’s container throughput and serving as a critical hub for refrigerated container imports, which are vital to major supermarket supply chains. The Port’s ongoing expansion includes the construction of a fifth berth due for completion in July 2027, with further berths consented and planned to accommodate increasing vessel sizes and future trade growth.

- 1.3.3 The Consultee is the statutory harbour authority for London Gateway Port under the London Gateway Port Harbour Empowerment Order 2008, with jurisdiction and powers extending to dredging and navigation in the approaches to the Thames estuary, as well as obligations to ensure open access for port users under s.33 of the Harbours, Docks and Piers Clauses Act 1847.

1.4 Description of the Proposed Project

- 1.4.1 The Proposed Project is a proposal by National Grid to reinforce the transmission network in the Southeast and East Anglia. The Proposed Project is required to accommodate additional power flows generated from renewable and low carbon generation, as well as accommodating additional new interconnection with mainland Europe.
- 1.4.2 National Grid owns, builds and maintains the electricity transmission network in England and Wales. Under the Electricity Act 1989, National Grid holds a transmission licence under which it is required to develop and maintain an efficient, coordinated, and economic electricity transmission system.
- 1.4.3 This would be achieved by reinforcing the network with a High Voltage Direct Current (HVDC) Link between the proposed Friston substation in the Sizewell area of Suffolk and the existing Richborough to Canterbury 400 kV overhead line close to Richborough in Kent.
- 1.4.4 National Grid is also required, under Section 38 of the Electricity Act 1989, to comply with the provisions of Schedule 9 of the Act. Schedule 9 requires licence holders, in the formulation of proposals to transmit electricity, to:
- 1.4.5 Schedule 9(1)(a) '*...have regard to the desirability of preserving natural beauty, of conserving flora, fauna and geological or physiographical features of special interest and of protecting sites, buildings and objects of architectural, historic or archaeological interest;*' and
- 1.4.6 Schedule 9(1)(b) '*do what [it] reasonably can to mitigate any effect which the proposals would have on the natural beauty of the countryside or on any such flora, fauna, features, sites, buildings or objects*'.
- 1.4.7 The Proposed Project would comprise the following elements:

The Suffolk Onshore Scheme

- A connection from the existing transmission network via Friston Substation, including the substation itself. Friston Substation already has development consent as part of other third-party projects. If Friston Substation has already been constructed under another consent, only a connection into the substation would be constructed as part of the Proposed Project.
- A high voltage alternating current (HVAC) underground cable of approximately 1.9 km in length between the proposed Friston Substation and a proposed converter station (below).
- A 2 GW high voltage direct current (HVDC) converter station (including permanent access from the B1121 and a new bridge over the River Fromus) up to 26 m high plus external equipment (such as lightning protection, safety rails for maintenance works, ventilation equipment, aerials, similar small scale operational plant, or other roof treatment) near Saxmundham.

- A HVDC underground cable connection of approximately 10 km in length between the proposed converter station near Saxmundham, and a transition joint bay (TJB) approximately 900 m inshore from a landfall point (below) where the cable transitions from onshore to offshore technology.
- A landfall on the Suffolk coast (between Aldeburgh and Thorpeness).

The Offshore Scheme:

- Approximately 122 km of subsea HVDC cable, running between the Suffolk landfall location (between Aldeburgh and Thorpeness), and the Kent landfall location at Pegwell Bay.
- The offshore cable would pass through important navigational channels and pilotage areas, including at the Sunk, Longsand Head and NE Spit.

The Kent Onshore Scheme:

- A landfall point on the Kent coast at Pegwell Bay.
- A TJB approximately 800 m inshore to transition from offshore HVDC cable to onshore HVDC cable, before continuing underground for approximately 1.7 km to a new converter station (below).
- A 2 GW HVDC converter station (including a new permanent access off the A256), up to 28 m high plus external equipment such as lightning protection, safety rails for maintenance works, ventilation equipment, aerials, and similar small scale operational plant near Minster. A new substation would be located immediately adjacent.
- Removal of approximately 2.2 km of existing HVAC overhead line, and installation of two sections of new HVAC overhead line, together totalling approximately 3.5 km, each connecting from the substation near Minster and the existing Richborough to Canterbury overhead line.

1.4.8 The Proposed Project also includes modifications to sections of existing overhead lines in Suffolk (only if Friston Substation is not built pursuant to another consent) and Kent, diversions of third-party assets, and land drainage from the construction and operational footprint. It also includes opportunities for environmental mitigation and compensation. The construction phase will involve various temporary construction activities including overhead line diversions, use of temporary towers or masts, working areas for construction equipment and machinery, site offices, parking spaces, storage, accesses, bellmouths, and haul roads, as well as watercourse crossings and the diversion of public rights of way (PROWs) and other ancillary operations.

1.5 Format of Document and Terminology used.

- 1.5.1 Section 2 of this SoCG summarises the engagement the Parties have had with regard to the Proposed Project.
- 1.5.2 Section 3 of this SoCG summarises the issues that are ‘agreed’, ‘not agreed’, ‘not agreed but not material’, or are ‘under discussion’. ‘Not agreed’ indicates a final position where the Parties have agreed to disagree, whilst ‘Agreed’ indicates where the issue has been resolved. ‘Not agreed but not material’ indicates that although the parties have not agreed a position on an issue, both parties agree that the issue is not material to determination of the DCO and the matter is considered closed.

1.5.3 Abbreviations used within the SoCG are provided in Table 1.1.

Table 1.1 - Abbreviations.

Abbreviation/Term	Definition
ALARP	As Low as Reasonably Practicable
DCO	Development Consent Order
EIA	Environmental Impact Assessment
ES	Environmental Statement
RAM	Restricted Ability to Manoeuvre
RRZ	Recommended Restricted Zones
SIMOPS	Simultaneous Operations
TSS	Traffic Separation Scheme
UXO	Unexploded Ordnance

2. Record of Engagement

2.1 Summary of discussions

2.1.1 Table 2.1 summarises the consultation and engagement that has taken place between the Parties.

Table 2.1 - Record of meetings and correspondence with London Gateway Port Limited

Date	Topic/Format	Discussion points
10 June 2025	Relevant Representation from LGPL	Representation by LGPL covering LGPL concerns and possible impacts [RR-3236]
12 November 2025	Meeting between both Parties	Discussion on navigational, dredging, and safeguarding requirements relating to the Sea Link project and London Gateway Port.
18 November 2025	Written Representation from LGPL	Setting out LGPL positions, key issues being surrounding preserving Safeguarded Depths, potential impacts to LGPL and securing commitments [REP1-142] and [REP1-143]
19 November 2025	Monthly Port Call	Teams meeting with PLA, HHA and LGPL and Applicant to discuss Relevant Rep and Water depth Safeguarding
9 December 2025	Applicant's Response to Relevant Representation from LGPL	Applicant's response to LGPL's Relevant Representation on initial key concerns [REP2-022]
9 December 2025	Applicant's comment on LGPL Written Representation	Applicant's comments on the further responses raised in the LGPL Written Representation, with key issues being surrounding preserving Safeguarded Depths, potential impacts to LGPL and securing commitments [REP2-034]
9 December 2025	LGPL Comments at Deadline 2	Comments on any further information/ submissions received by deadline 1 and deadline 1A [REP2-055]
19 December 2025	Monthly Port Call	Teams meeting with PLA, HHA and LGPL and Applicant to discuss Relevant Rep and Water depth Safeguarding
9 January 2026	Applicant's Comments on LGPL Submissions Received at Deadline 2	Responses to LGPL's concerns [REP3-064]
9 January 2026	LGPL Submissions at Deadline 3	Comments on any further information/ submissions received by deadline 2 [REP3-114]
19 January 2026	Monthly Port Call	Teams meeting with PLA, HHA and LGPL and Applicant to discuss Relevant Rep and Water depth Safeguarding
23 January 2026	Emails on Protective Provisions	Emails discussing approach to Protective Provisions or private contractual agreements.

Date	Topic/Format	Discussion points
28 January 2026	<i>Emails on Protective Provisions</i>	<i>Protective Provisions confirmed and LGPL's preference.</i>
19 February 2026	<i>Monthly Port Call</i>	<i>Teams meeting with PLA, HHA and LGPL and Applicant to discuss Relevant Rep and Water depth Safeguarding</i>

3. Areas of Discussion Between the Parties

3.1 Shipping and Navigation


Table 3.1 – Shipping and Navigation

Ref	Relevant Application Document	Summary of Description of Matter	LGPL Current Position	The Applicant's Current Position	Status
3.1.1	DCO/DML	Protective Provisions	<p>The DCO should include protective provisions for the benefit of LGPL. LGPL is a statutory harbour authority with no less status than the PLA or the other Authorities. Indeed, its statutory powers and interests are arguably more infringed than those of the PLA, given LGPL has statutory powers that extend to the Sunk.</p> <p>Protective provisions should provide for the approval of the draft cable specification and installation plan and the draft navigation installation plan before they are submitted to the MMO for approval and related matters (and any other plans that govern how works or operations within Work No.6 are carried out) OR alternatively, provision to the same effect in the deemed marine licence (if you would prefer to avoid duplicate provision across sets of Protective Provisions).</p>	<p>Draft Protective Provisions with the LGPL have been issued for review alongside this SOCG on the 29 January 2026.</p> <p>The Applicant has received comments on PPs from LGPL and is currently reviewing.</p>	Under discussion
3.1.2	DCO/DML	A Requirement in Schedule securing the relevant dredge depths.	<p>As has been LGPL's position throughout, the provision safeguarding the dredging depths themselves should rightly be included as a Requirement in Schedule 3 to the DCO. Such a Requirement avoids unnecessary duplication across different sets of protective provisions which I expect you would wish to avoid. The provisions not to preclude the specified dredge depth should be seen as a fundamental parameter to, or restriction on the carrying out of the authorised development – it is in a sense akin to an upwards limit of deviation. It is for the principal provisions of the Order itself to specify such a restriction – this is in accordance with the Guidance on the content of a Development Consent Order required for a Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project and would follow accepted practice across other development consent orders and harbour orders under the Harbours Act 1964.</p>	<p>The Applicant acknowledges LGPL position on this and will collaborate with LGPL and legal teams to come to a suitable agreement on where best to secure these commitments to safeguarded depths.</p> <p>Further to the above, the Applicant confirms that Application Document 9.104 Areas of Safeguarded Water Depth [REP4-098] was submitted at Deadline 4. The Applicant also confirms that Application Document 9.92 Outline Cable Specification and Installation Plan [REP4-090] was submitted at Deadline 4 which is secured within the Deemed Marine Licence (DML). Condition 4 of the DML requires the Cable Specification and Installation Plan to be submitted to and approved by the MMO before works can commence. This Plan needs to be in accordance with the outline Plan. Once submitted to and approved by the MMO it forms part of the licensed activities which are enforced by the existing and comprehensive regulatory regime under the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009.</p> <p>The Applicant also confirms that following discussions on the 19th February 2026, the DCO / dML is being reviewed, updated</p>	Under discussion

Ref	Relevant Application Document	Summary of Description of Matter	LGPL Current Position	The Applicant's Current Position	Status
3.1.3	Application Document 9.74 Shipping and Navigation Under-Keel Clearance Marine Engineering Technical Note [REP1A-038]	Three Areas of Safeguarded Depth	<p>LGPL stated that they are in alignment with the three Areas of Safeguarded Depth established by the PLA and which are agreed with Harwich Haven Authority (HHA) and the Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA) as well:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Sunk Pilot Boarding Area”; (where dredging to 22m below CD must not be precluded) • “Long Sand Head Two-Way Route Crossing area” (where dredging to 12.5m below CD must not be precluded); and • “North East Spit area” (where dredging to 12.5m below CD must be precluded). <p>To each of these limits, a 0.5m dredging tolerance must be added.</p> <p>Consistent with other cable schemes in the area, LGPL requires future access for vessels with a draught of 20m and, accounting for 10% UKC, this means that a future water depth of 22m below CD must not be precluded by Sea Link in the vicinity of the Sunk Pilot Diamond. This has been accepted by applicants on the North Falls and Five Estuaries DCOs. The ability to maintain this depth is required regardless of existing water depths.</p> <p>The Long Sand Head Two-Way Route is a designated shipping route forming part of the approach to the Port from the North East Spit pilot station via the Deep-Water Routes hence a depth of -12.5m CD must be maintained in this area.</p> <p>Vessels bound for the Port regularly use the North East Spit pilot station with vessels transiting from the pilot station via Prices Channel or the DWRs. For these routes to remain viable, a depth of -12.5m CD must be maintained.</p>	<p>and submitted at Deadline 5 which will secure a <u>DCO Requirement</u> for the three Areas of Safeguarded Depth outlined by the Port Authorities.</p> <p>The Applicant acknowledges LGPL’s position of alignment with the PLA’s defined Areas of Safeguarded Depth. Sea Link to use same three navigational safeguarding areas as PLA, unless refined through ongoing discussions.</p> <p>The Applicant agrees in principle with the need to safeguard water depths to ensure sufficient under-keel clearance within the Areas of Safeguarded Water Depth identified by the port authorities and described in Application Document 9.74 Shipping and Navigation Under-Keel Clearance Marine Engineering Technical Note [REP1A-038]. The Applicant is currently assessing the engineering implications of these requirements, specifically the additional cable Depth of Lowering (DoL) that may be necessary in parts of the “Sunk Pilot Boarding Area” where depths are already less than the 22 m CD safeguard level.</p> <p>Further to the above, the Applicant confirms that Application Document 9.104 Areas of Safeguarded Water Depth [REP4-098] was submitted at Deadline 4. The Applicant also confirms that Application Document 9.92 Outline Cable Specification and Installation Plan [REP4-090] has been submitted at Deadline 4 which is secured within the Deemed Marine Licence (DML). Condition 4 of the DML requires the Cable Specification and Installation Plan to be submitted to and approved by the MMO before works can commence. This Plan needs to be in accordance with the outline Plan (which already features the commitment). Once submitted to and approved by the MMO it forms part of the licensed activities which are enforced by the existing and comprehensive regulatory regime under the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009.</p> <p>The DCO / dML is being updated and submitted at Deadline 5 which will secure a <u>DCO Requirement</u> for the three Areas of Safeguarded Depth outlined by the Port Authorities.</p> <p>The Applicant is also reviewing the text in Condition 4 of the DML i.e. in accordance vs in general accordance and will update for Deadline 5.</p>	Under discussion

Ref	Relevant Application Document	Summary of Description of Matter	LGPL Current Position	The Applicant's Current Position	Status
3.1.4	Application Document 9.74 Shipping and Navigation Under-Keel Clearance Marine Engineering Technical Note [REP1A-038]	Cable crossings in the three Areas of Safeguarded Depth	<p>LGPL's position is that there should be no cable crossings in the Sunk and Long Sand Head areas of Safeguarded Depth.</p> <p>In the NE Spit Area of Interest, the Applicant has confirmed that there will need to be cable crossings in this Area. LGPL's position is that all such crossings should be in deeper water in the Area to the extent practicable. In no event should any crossing impact the dredge depths to be secured as set out above.</p> <p>These matters should be secured by condition to the DML.</p>	<p>Regarding the requirement for no cable crossings within the three PLA Areas of Safeguarded Depth which have been agreed with ports ("Sunk Pilot Boarding area", "Long Sand Head Two-Way Route Crossing area", and "North East Spit area"), the Applicant can confirm that there are no cable crossings planned within the "Sunk Pilot Boarding area", or the "Long Sand Head Two-Way Route Crossing area". However, there are two known cable crossings foreseen within the "North East Spit area" (please see Application Document 9.74 Shipping and Navigation Under-Keel Clearance Marine Engineering Technical Note [REP1A-038]).</p> <p>The Applicant can confirm the clarification was sought with the PLA and LGP during the monthly online meeting on the 19 December 2025 regarding the requirement for no crossings at all to be located in North East Spit Area. All parties agreed that this statement is incorrect, and planned crossings within this Area of Interest are permitted providing they do not exceed the 12.5 m below Chart Datum (and 0.5 m overdredge) which is preserved for future safeguarding.</p> <p>The DCO / dML is being updated and submitted at Deadline 5 which will secure a <u>DCO Requirement</u> for the three Areas of Safeguarded Depth outlined by the Port Authorities. The Applicant also confirms that bespoke dML Conditions will also be included at Deadline 5 with regards to cable joints, exclusion zones and wet storage based on discussions on the 19th February 2026.</p>	Under discussion
3.1.5		GridLink crossing within the Area of Safeguarded Depth "North East Spit area"	See above.	<p>Grid Link crossing at NE Spit will be a co-engineered solution with GridLink and discussions are ongoing, however both parties are confident that moving the cable route into the deepest possible water within the Sea Link red line boundary will allow sufficient headroom for the 12.5 m below Chart Datum constraint to be met.</p> <p>The Applicant agrees with the LGPL that the aim is to secure these commitments through appropriate mechanisms, such as Protective Provisions and DCO provisions as necessary, and is working collaboratively with the port stakeholders to agree both the mechanism and the wording.</p> <p>The DCO / dML is being updated and submitted at Deadline 5 which will secure a <u>DCO Requirement</u> for the three Areas of Safeguarded Depth outlined by the Port Authorities. The Applicant also confirms that bespoke dML Conditions have</p>	Under discussion

Ref	Relevant Application Document	Summary of Description of Matter	LGPL Current Position	The Applicant's Current Position	Status
				also been included at Deadline 5 with regards to cable joints, exclusion zones and wet storage.	
3.1.6		Dredging rights area	<p>LGPL is, by virtue of art. 8 of the London Gateway Port Harbour Empowerment Order 2008 (S.I. 2008/1261) (the HEO), the statutory harbour authority for London Gateway Port. It has a defined area of jurisdiction, and has additional powers outside that jurisdiction in relation to dredging of the approaches to the Thames estuary (as detailed further below).</p> <p>LGPL enjoys specific statutory powers under the HEO (art. 13 and Schedule 13) to dredge the channel all the way from its quayside along the Yantlet Channel, The Oaze, the Knock John Channel and parts of the Black Deep through to the Sunk, as well as to provide a deep-water anchorage at Zulu 3, 0.54 nautical miles from Shoebury Beacon. The grant of such extensive powers in the HEO reflected the importance and significance of the channel in providing deep water access to the Port. In particular, LGPL may dredge (and maintain dredged) areas of the Sunk down to a depth of 17.5m below Chart Datum (CD).</p>	<p>The Applicant requested that London Gateway Port provide further detail on the geographic extent of their dredging powers, via a map figure, to enable the Applicant to have full understanding of how this may relate to Sea Link cable route.</p> <p>The applicant confirms this information has been received.</p> <p>The DCO / dML is being updated and submitted at Deadline 5 which will secure a <u>DCO Requirement</u> for the three Areas of Safeguarded Depth outlined by the Port Authorities. The Applicant also confirms that bespoke dML Conditions have also been included at Deadline 5 with regards to cable joints, exclusion zones and wet storage.</p>	Under discussion
3.1.7	Application Document 9.12 (B) Outline Navigation and Installation Plan [REP4-075]	Required plans/documents	LGPL has stated that there are further required plans which they would wish to see: outline CSIP, navigation installation plan, sediment disposal plan. London Gateway noted they may require approval rights for certain plans depending on level of detail provided.	<p>The Applicant confirms that Application Document 9.92 Outline Cable Specification and Installation Plan [REP4-090] was submitted at Deadline 4. This document also incorporates the outline Sediment Disposal Management Plan (oSDMP). An update to this document will be submitted at Deadline 5.</p> <p>The Applicant has submitted a draft Outline NIP to PINS on 1st September 2025, as part of the Applicant's response to the ExA's s89(3) letter dated 5 August 2025. An update to this document was also submitted at Deadline 4, see Application Document 9.12 (B) Outline Navigation and Installation Plan [REP4-075].</p>	Under discussion
3.1.8	Application Document 6.2.4.7 (C) Part 4 Marine Chapter 7 Shipping and Navigation [REP4-035]	Marine Plans and alignment with policy	It is LGPL's view that the Sea Link project does not align with Policy PS1, Policy PS3, Policy DD1 of the East Inshore and East Offshore Marine Plan, with regard to potential reduction in under-keel clearance and the associated risk of reduced access to ports and infringement on future ports expansion. It is further LGPL's view that without the protections LGPL seeks, the project will present an unacceptable risk or interference to navigation, falling outside the CNP Infrastructure provisions of the Overarching National Policy Statement for Energy (EN-1) and more broadly outside the policy balance.	The DCO / dML is being updated and submitted at Deadline 5 which will secure a <u>DCO Requirement</u> for the three Areas of Safeguarded Depth outlined by the Port Authorities. The Applicant also confirms that bespoke dML Conditions will also be included at Deadline 5 with regards to cable joints, exclusion zones and wet storage.	Under discussion

Ref	Relevant Application Document	Summary of Description of Matter	LGPL Current Position	The Applicant's Current Position	Status
3.1.9	-	Wet storage and cable joints	<p>It is LGPL's position that there should be no wet storage activities or cable joints in the Areas of Interests. LGPL understands that the Applicant has confirmed this is the case.</p> <p>This should be secured by way of a condition to the DML.</p>	<p>The DCO / dML is being updated and submitted at Deadline 5 which will secure a <u>DCO Requirement</u> for the three Areas of Safeguarded Depth outlined by the Port Authorities. The Applicant also confirms that bespoke dML Conditions will also be included at Deadline 5 with regards to cable joints, exclusion zones and wet storage.</p>	

4. Approvals

Signed

On Behalf of London Gateway Port Limited

Name

Position

Date

Signed

On Behalf of NGET

Name

Position [senior consents officer/lead project manager/ lead project director]

Date

5. References

Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government. (2024). *Planning Act 2008: Examination stage for Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects*. Retrieved from <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/planning-act-2008-examination-stage-for-nationally-significant-infrastructure-projects>

National Grid plc
National Grid House,
Warwick Technology Park,
Gallows Hill, Warwick.
CV34 6DA United Kingdom

Registered in England and Wales
No. 4031152
nationalgrid.com