



## Hearing Transcript

<b>Project:</b>	Sea Link
<b>Hearing:</b>	Recording of Open floor hearing 3 (OFH3) - Session 1 Part 4
<b>Date:</b>	24 March 2026

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FULL TRANSCRIPT (with timecode)

00:00:04:09 - 00:00:39:00

Okay. Good afternoon. All the time is now 315 and we will recommence the meeting and restart the live stream. Um, so the next group of people that we will hear from, um, is Councillor Richard Cooper, representing Milford Parish Council, Matthew Denny, uh, Stephanie Bunn and I don't believe we have any of the other people within this group here yet. Or may I just check if Glynis Robertson is available, please?

00:00:42:18 - 00:00:50:27

Okay, well we'll continue. Start with the group anyway. So firstly, please come here from Councillor Richard Cooper. You have six minutes. Thank you.

00:00:53:05 - 00:00:53:20

Oh.

00:01:02:13 - 00:01:05:08

Do we have Councillor Cooper on the on the call?

00:01:10:07 - 00:01:14:12

Nope. Not so. Can we move on? Do we have Matthew? Danny, please.

00:01:28:20 - 00:01:31:22

Um, do we have Glenn Robertson on the call, please?

00:01:36:03 - 00:01:43:06

Yes. Good afternoon. You have three minutes if you'd like to present to us. Thank you.

00:01:43:08 - 00:01:47:26

Thank you very much. Just getting it up on my computer. Bear with me.

00:01:52:04 - 00:02:32:01

All right. Thank you. My name is Glynis Robertson, and I am a resident of Aldeburgh. Over the past three years, I have followed this project closely and I wish to register a clear, calm and reasoned objection to the proposals. However, maintaining that position is becoming increasingly difficult for me and for many others. When National Grid continues to obfuscate and avoid providing the evidence needed to substantiate its proposals, while I support the transition to net zero, the Sealink proposal is poorly planned, misleadingly presented and places an unfair and excessive burden on Suffolk communities.

00:02:32:06 - 00:03:15:27

I share widespread concerns that the application was premature, supported by insufficient evidence to justify the granting of a development consent order in the first place, and yet has not adequately demonstrated how it will protect the Suffolk Coast and Heaths national landscape, nor how it will meet its statutory duties under section 85 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act. The ecological evidence underpinning the proposal is weak. The Habitats Regulations assessment appears to rely on inadequate baseline surveys, particularly in relation to protected species such as marsh harriers and nightjars associated with nearby Special Protection Areas.

00:03:16:04 - 00:03:53:21

There are also serious concerns regarding traffic assessments. Peak HGV movements are understated and key local roads have been excluded from the study area. These risk masking the true cumulative impact of construction traffic on rural routes that are already unsuitable for heavy use. In addition, there has been no meaningful assessment of the impact on the nature based tourism economy. This landscape, designated in the 70s 1970s as a Heritage Coast, has taken over 50 years to develop into one of the UK's most treasured national landscapes.

00:03:53:24 - 00:04:28:26

It risked being significantly damaged within a decade, with recovery likely to break many, many more years. There's also a growing and justified concern about cumulative impact. This is not a standalone project. It is already facing multiple energy infrastructure proposals, including onshore substation, grid reinforcements and other connections. The lived reality for residents is one of combined impacts traffic noise, visual intrusions, train and local services and the gradual erosion of a rural character.

00:04:29:02 - 00:04:59:04

The impact on health and mental well-being is also being overlooked, despite clear indications that the stress associated with these developments is already affecting members of the community. Crucially, there has been no meaningful joined up strategic planning that considers the totality of these impacts. There are viable alternatives that do not appear to have been given fair or adequate consideration. Offshore coordination, alternative routing and different connection strategies.

00:04:59:15 - 00:05:19:29

With only a few weeks remaining in the examination period, I urged the examining authority to require Njit to provide clear and robust evidence addressing these outstanding concerns. Feeling that I ask that these unresolved issues are fully and transparently detailed in your report to the Secretary of State. Thank you.

00:05:20:27 - 00:05:22:10

Thank you for that.

00:05:24:15 - 00:05:42:23

Um, I had introduced, uh, Stephanie Bond to speak, but I don't believe that she's on the call at the moment. So with that being the case, I'd like to thank that group for making your representations. And if we could move on to the next group of speakers, please. Who I will introduce now.

00:05:43:01 - 00:05:43:16

Hello.

00:05:45:00 - 00:05:48:13

Um, firstly, we have Councillor Andrew Turner.

00:05:51:00 - 00:05:57:13

Sorry, sorry. Um, Glennis Robertson, could I ask you to turn your camera off, please? Thank you.

00:05:59:00 - 00:06:34:00

Introducing the next group of people then. Firstly, I believe we have Councillor Andrew Turner representing West Melton Parish Council and I believe we have Councillor Robin Sanders representing Woodbridge Town Council. Um, then I believe we have councillor Abbey Smith representing Thanet villages and also Irina to Loka. Um, so if we could go through those that particular group now please, starting firstly with Councillor Andrew Turner, you have six minutes.

00:06:34:02 - 00:06:34:26

Thank you.

00:06:36:16 - 00:07:09:07

Good afternoon. I'm Andrew Turner, chair of Littleton Parish Council. West Alton is a village five miles north of Bristol and Saxmundham, and one mile inland from the Suffolk coast, where Salter and its residents are already suffering the effects of seasonal construction. Notably, significantly increased peak time traffic through the village, heavier traffic on local roads and the destruction of the surrounding environment and its habitat, much of which is natural landscape and sites of Special Scientific Interest. Sealink will add to these adverse impacts.

00:07:10:06 - 00:07:46:05

Weston Parish Council supports the comments made by East Suffolk Communities Energy Partnership, Substation Action, Save Suffolk and the Suffolk Energy Action Solutions, which note the project's extensive impacts. We also support the comments made by the parishes and residents closest to the construction sites and the resultant infrastructure. In particular, we are concerned that the needs case for the Sealink project has not been adequately made by National grid energy transmission, nor has in get adequately demonstrated how it will transport abnormal, invisible loads over the bridge to the converter station site.

00:07:46:15 - 00:08:24:19

Both of these are of sufficient concern to warrant sufficient in-depth examination before decision can be taken on the project. More specifically, West Alton Parish Council is very concerned about the additional traffic. The construction of the project will put on to the local road network. In addition to the already heavy, sizeable Sea and ScottishPower renewables traffic, have noticed that sizeable sea peak construction will coincide with the ceiling and lining projected timelines. The local network is already suffering as a consequence of the size of C and ScottishPower renewables traffic, and Suffolk County Council seems to be in a running battle to repair the damage being caused to the A12.

00:08:24:22 - 00:09:01:16

The local B roads are faring no better for Weston. Our primary concern is the B1 125. As we noted in our deadline to submission. The road is suffering a 45% increase in traffic volume and high speeds

during peak hours because of the sizeable sea traffic. In recent weeks, this traffic has included HGV tipper trucks. We're currently trying to ascertain their destination. As a consequence, the road's condition is worsening with increased potholes, verges becoming gullies and both made worse when the road floods, as it does when it rains through the village of Weston.

00:09:01:18 - 00:09:36:19

The increased peak time traffic is creating noise and air pollution, and making junctions and pedestrian crossings within the village dangerous to navigate. Our concerns with the B1 25 are that Njit does not plan to impose restrictions on its worker access routes to site, so peak time traffic on the road will likely increase further. Secondly, the Njit documents do not adequately explain how Njit will police its construction traffic. We note this is also a concern of the examining authority. As per its question 3264 answered by the applicant before April 13th.

00:09:37:09 - 00:10:10:18

We therefore do not know how Njit will ensure that HGV is originating from the North, will stay on the A12 and do not try to use the B1 125 as a shortcut. This will be particularly acute if the proposed northern route is eventually chosen. Further to the previous point, N gates have upset that 15% of its HGV traffic will come from the north. However, as we've seen with size, we'll see this is not necessarily what will happen as a high percentage of heavy traffic has been originating from north of the sizeable sea site than was originally planned.

00:10:11:15 - 00:10:53:21

Therefore, if the project is approved, Western Parish Council urges the inspectorate to require the DCO to include the conditions that firstly, no Sealink work for construction and HGV traffic may use the B1 125. Secondly, that the Sealink vehicle ban be policed by trackers placed in all Sealink worker construction and HGV vehicles. Thirdly, that worker and concerned contractors contracts require they abide by the routeing rules. Fourthly, that all Sealink vehicles be marked as such on the front and back of the vehicles and lastly, that net be required to contribute to a Suffolk County Council fund for road repairs.

00:10:54:00 - 00:10:54:26

Thank you.

00:10:57:04 - 00:11:08:26

Thank you, counselor. And next, please, could we hear from Counselor Abby Smith representing Planet Villages? You also have six minutes. Thank you.

00:11:17:23 - 00:11:32:08

Thank you. And forgive me for my lack of control over my connection. Um, my name is Abby Smith. I'm a district councillor for representing the planet Villages.

00:11:36:05 - 00:11:36:20

Um.

00:11:38:26 - 00:12:09:25

I spoke last November about the overwhelming opposition to this DCO. Today I want to focus on one question. Why Minster marshes? Why build Europe's largest converter station on a flood prone March marsh, requiring 40,000 lorry loads of aggregate and 20 at a 20 metre concrete columns that may or may not reach bedrock.

00:12:10:16 - 00:12:52:16

We just why destroy one of its last refuges for wildlife when we're already. Hence, most densely populated district we face losing 32 red listed bird species. The marsh accounted for 90% of Kent's woodcock, 90% of its jack snipe, and 50% of all skylarks ringed last year. Kent Wildlife Trust has confirmed the presence of critically endangered European eels here, a species that's declined 95% since the 1980s.

00:12:54:10 - 00:13:06:16

We stand to lose a critical wildlife corridor. It became so precisely because so much around it has been developed or disturbed.

00:13:08:10 - 00:13:42:18

What do our residents get? Four years of construction, seven days a week. 40,000 lorry movements at bare minimum. The green space where people walk and find peace. Buried under concrete. Tourism damaged and we lose access to nature in one of Kent's most depleted areas, where destroying one of the last places residents can experience wild space.

00:13:43:23 - 00:14:17:09

Now, the profound, profound irony is that National Grid claims this is essential to achieve net zero. Yet Yep. Our solution is to pour a square kilometre of concrete onto a marsh. Concrete production is responsible for 8% of global CO2 emissions. For every tonne of Portland cement, 931kg of CO2 are released.

00:14:17:16 - 00:14:43:29

The calcination process releases CO2 directly and fossil fuels heat the the kilns to 1450 degrees. So National Grid proposes to destroy a natural carbon sink and replace it with one of the most carbon intensive materials in construction

00:14:45:29 - 00:15:03:07

40,000 loads of aggregate alone. A square kilometre concrete platform 20 metre concrete columns. All to build infrastructure. Supposedly fighting climate change.

00:15:04:22 - 00:15:10:08

This is not green energy. This is greenwashing.

00:15:12:02 - 00:15:35:18

A national grid wants to do this not because it's the only option, but because it's the cheapest option. The engineering, to my eye, is absurd. The carbon logic is backwards. The site logic, the site choice is indefensible.

00:15:37:19 - 00:15:59:24

I own the examining. I urge the examining authority demand that National Grid prove every viable alternative has been exhausted before destroying one of its last wild places in the name of saving the planet. Thank you.

00:16:01:11 - 00:16:11:13

Thank you for that. And next, please, could we invite Irina to Laska to speak, please? And you have three minutes. Thank you.

00:16:15:07 - 00:16:52:22

Good afternoon. Today I want to raise a very simple but fundamental question. How can this project be trusted at all when the way concerns are handled showed such consistent disregard for evidence for people around for truth? I have spent considerable time analyzing and commenting the applicants responses. I'm in Mental health and Well-Being chapter of the environmental statement and the subsequent response tables in particular, and I found a deeply concerning pattern.

00:16:52:24 - 00:17:28:21

Instead of engaging with a substance of concerns, the applicant repeatedly relies on copy and paste responses. Procedural references. Omission of uncomfortable issues. Circular reasoning that means where the document under challenge is used to justify itself and go on and go on. Its not assessment. This is avoidance. Mental health is obviously not meaningfully evaluated. It is reduced to indirect proxies, noise, traffic, light, you name it, while real human experience is dismissed.

00:17:28:24 - 00:18:00:13

But the reality in Suffolk is very different. We are not discussing abstract receptors or population. We are talking about people living for years under uncertainty, disruption and cumulative pressure from multiple major infrastructure projects looming. Residents report anxiety, sleep disturbance, emotional exhaustion, loss of security and control, and even suicidal ideation and attempts. This is not theoretical.

00:18:00:15 - 00:18:39:08

This is lived experience which has been never, never been taken seriously by the applicant. Even when evidence is presented from community surveys, from public health data, from live testimony, it is discounted as non representative rather than examined. So again I ask if concerns are handled like this. Now dismissed. Minimized. Deflected. How can communities have confidence in how this project will be delivered? Because this is not just about methodology, it is about trust.

00:18:39:10 - 00:19:13:15

It is about whether a developer that does not listen nor respect can be relied upon to act responsibly when impacts arise. We are told this is a project of national importance. Yes, but importance does not justify harm and it does not excuse inadequate assessment. Suffolk is already under strain from multiple overlapping energy projects on rushing to treat each one in isolation and to declare no significant effect is not precautionary.

00:19:13:17 - 00:19:49:12

It is in reality a failure to see the whole picture. And when you fail to see the whole picture, you make wrong decisions. By the way, a detailed analysis of the applicant's most recent rebuttals regarding

mental health and well-being will be submitted in due course. Finally, I kindly ask the examining authority to consider this carefully. This is not simply a technical disagreement. This is a question of whether the current assessment can be trusted as a safe and reliable basis for decision making.

00:19:49:14 - 00:19:52:25

In my view, it cannot. Thank you.

00:19:53:10 - 00:20:27:12

Thank you for that. And thank you to that group of speakers. At this stage, I'd like to thank those involved for their involvement today. And I'm aware that there are several people who we invited to speak earlier who didn't get to do so. And I also see there is a remote hand up. And at this stage, I'm just going to give those people another opportunity to speak, if I may. Um, so firstly, may I just check? Do we now have Humphrey Hawksley on the call at all?

00:20:29:19 - 00:20:32:02

I'm not seeing any hand.

00:20:32:04 - 00:20:33:12

I'm on the call.

00:20:33:20 - 00:20:35:00

Okay. Um.

00:20:35:15 - 00:20:36:00

Yeah.

00:20:36:02 - 00:20:42:09

If if you'd like to, um, contribute, you have three minutes to do so now. Thank you.

00:20:42:11 - 00:20:44:15

Okay. Thank you. Um.

00:20:48:28 - 00:21:22:26

Thank you very much. There's issues of trust that we just heard about. Important. I'm Humphrey Hawksley and I'm a journalist. And as a BBC correspondent for many years, I reported on and investigated multinational corporations. I'd like to pick up on the many superb insights, particularly on the Benham Bridge, where I come from, in which a multinational corporation submitted an application that involved taking equipment across a village bridge that could never have borne the weight. All of that was public knowledge, so I don't know what that signals.

00:21:22:28 - 00:22:00:18

Incompetence, dishonesty, failure in its duty of candour. Whatever it is, it should be ringing alarm bells up and down the country, as we just heard from the previous speaker. This multi-billion pound company is deeply embedded in our critical national infrastructure. It's owned mostly by interests outside of the United Kingdom, and its first duty is to deliver profit to its shareholders. Now, under

our system in this country, that money driven incentive is meant to be kept in line through regulatory checks, the government, Ofgem, the National Energy System operator and so on.

00:22:00:20 - 00:22:34:22

But that way of doing things also appears to be fractured. First, all of this comes under the umbrella of being a national priority, as we've heard, in order to meet net zero targets. So the government is pushing very hard for it to happen regardless. Second, those involved in regulations seem to be working in a quagmire of cross-pollination the same faces in different jobs, from multinational to regulator and a quorum of Westminster advisers to muscle through this net zero policy.

00:22:35:03 - 00:23:09:18

So National Grid has the power of government behind it, and it believes it can operate with impunity, which is why so many questions raised by those with deep knowledge and authority that we've heard today remain unanswered. Why here? Why not brownfield sites? Why not this alternate way? Which is cheaper? Why not this other way? That creates a fraction of the damage so many months or years and so little clarity in this morass of what seems to be politics and profit, when it should be driven by science and technology.

00:23:09:20 - 00:23:41:24

Now, in a better world, we should be able to trust what National Grid says. Ben Bridge is one of many examples which proves that this is not the case. Therefore, everything is going to have to be scrutinized and scrutinized to ensure safety, use of public money, a duty of candour to avoid corruption and corner cutting. And if it doesn't check out, it cannot be allowed. Now, sadly, Britain has been or is in this situation too many times before.

00:23:41:27 - 00:24:08:18

Thames Water, Grenfell Tower, the Post Office, Covid contracts to name a few. So let us all here today ensure that we steer clear of joining that bleak and destructive culture. Let's avoid pressure from on high, and continue to do our duty within civil society, and keep pressing for those answers. Thank you very much.

00:24:09:08 - 00:24:23:05

Thank you for that. Um, and at this stage, please manage us. Check. Do we now have Matthew Danny available to contribute? Yes. I'm here. Uh, you have three minutes. Thank you. Thank you.

00:24:23:07 - 00:25:00:26

Thank you for allowing me to speak. My name is Matthew. Doctor. Matthew Denny. I'm a resident of Walbrzych and a professional ecologist. It seems astonishing that we find ourselves a month away from the conclusion of this examination, and are discussing major changes to the proposal. There are also many other unresolved issues, not least the case for the need for this project, which obviously underpins everything else, but I'll focus instead on a few of the key ecological issues that are outstanding, which are also largely relevant to some of the proposed changes being discussed today.

00:25:02:06 - 00:25:36:15

First, there are still no adequate baseline surveys for the Pego Bay airport without knowing what cracks and fissures and vegetation are present. There is no way of assessing or addressing potential

impacts on legally protected reptile and invertebrate species. Second bats. Despite nine species being recorded, which correlates to national importance for species assemblage, the applicant now downgrades this value to regional, citing the relatively lower bat encounter rates.

00:25:36:24 - 00:26:14:03

But this assessment method should not incorporate encounter rates, only the number of species recorded. Therefore, this downgrading is flawed. The applicant's own surveys and assessment. Acknowledge there is likely to be a barber style bat roost near to the Friston substation, yet they do not utilize the standard tracking surveys to find the location and status of this roost instead. They have largely ignored this issue. Nearby hedgerow sections, which could form important dispersal corridors for the roost, are to be removed.

00:26:15:09 - 00:26:56:21

Barn owls are rare, and any disruption to a maternity colony would be an impact at a national or possibly even international level. The improvised mitigation currently proposed, which is introducing fake hedge lines to fill gaps created during the works, would surely need to be upgraded to minimise potential impacts if found to be a maternity roost. The applicant is employing obfuscation here, hiding behind their inadequate survey methods to brush aside any issues without any surveys being done, so that no data is there to prove them wrong.

00:26:57:22 - 00:27:41:05

Lastly, there remains disagreement over the issue of red throated diver disturbance impacts, and for good reason. The outer Thames Estuary supports 16% of the European wintering population, more than any other site in Europe. Statutory and non-statutory NGOs all say the offshore works will result in significant disturbance, but this has been continually refuted by the applicant. Is it not time for them to acknowledge there is too much uncertainty in this case, and to apply for a derogation order for this predicted residual impact? In conclusion, the applicant the applicant needs to acknowledge the limitations of their ecological surveys assessment and propose mitigation.

00:27:41:21 - 00:28:00:04

And it is clear that an underprepared, insufficient DCO application has been submitted and we urge. I urge the examiners to recognize this and continue to. Press the applicant on the above points, amongst many others. Thank you.

00:28:01:02 - 00:28:02:14

Thank you for that.

00:28:05:26 - 00:28:12:04

And can I just chat? Um, do we have Sheridan Stein now available?

00:28:16:05 - 00:28:22:08

Um, I don't believe that we do. Um, I think at this point, we.

00:28:24:22 - 00:28:58:07

Have heard from everybody who I believe is online and with expressed a wish to speak. Can I just say at this point, um, if you haven't had the opportunity to submit anything verbally today, please do

submit that in writing. The next deadline. Deadline six. And we will give equivalent consideration to everything that we see in writing. Um, and but I also at this stage, please just check if there is anybody else who didn't preregister and express, um, a desire to speak today.

00:28:58:24 - 00:29:06:20

Um, if there is anybody in that category who now wishes to contribute, please do raise a virtual hand.

00:29:18:12 - 00:29:23:06

To contribute. To raise a virtual hand.

00:29:32:26 - 00:29:35:21

Hi. Um, is it Sheridan Stein?

00:29:36:12 - 00:29:49:28

Yes. Um, I don't know if you can see me, and I, um, this is very, very brief, but I just wanted to add a couple of thoughts about the Benaud bridge. If you don't mind. I'm a resident. I'm.

00:29:51:29 - 00:29:53:09

Yes it is. Yes.

00:29:57:09 - 00:30:01:10

Sorry. You have three minutes. So? So please do carry. Carry on. Thank you.

00:30:05:21 - 00:30:16:27

Hello. I'm a resident of Friston. My name is Sheridan Stein and I was very closely involved with the ScottishPower renewables plans for Friston.

00:30:18:21 - 00:30:23:12

I want to raise the issue of the Benwell Bridge, which was.

00:30:34:17 - 00:30:37:07

I'm not sure whether this is actually working.

00:30:38:05 - 00:30:39:10

We can hear you.

00:30:39:15 - 00:30:49:02

Okay. Right. I'm just going to cut to the chase. Right? Um, the Bennell bridge was raised at the ScottishPower um

00:30:50:20 - 00:31:24:26

application and it was absolutely both right. Both the Bennell Bridge and the Snape Watering Bridge were deemed to be completely unacceptable, to take the wait for the Scottish Power Project. National grid were at involved in those discussions, so I do not understand how they can say and come along and say they had not considered it in the past when it was deemed that the bridges would not work.

00:31:25:11 - 00:32:06:20

Scottish Park said no problem. We will go through Leiston and bring the Transformers to Friston through Leiston Centre. Suffolk County Council pointed out very strongly their concerns and in fact said that they were in fear that the sewers of Leiston would buckle under the weight of the transformers. So I have to just raise this issue that I believe. National grid have not been fully clear with yourselves about how long they have been aware that, um, the Venice Bridge would not take the weight.

00:32:06:22 - 00:32:35:11

That's all I've got to say. We have been overwhelmed by all of these years and years and years of examinations. And today I missed this morning slot because I was with some people who said, what is the point? The examiners have already made up their mind, and what is the point of trying to stand up to National Grid any longer? Thank you very much for your time.

00:32:36:26 - 00:32:58:00

Thank you for that and thank you all for your contributions today. Um, please my, at this stage, just revisit the question I posed a few minutes ago and give one final opportunity to anybody else who didn't pre-register that may now be involved in the online meeting that wishes to speak. Now is your chance to do so.

00:33:07:06 - 00:33:31:16

I'm not seeing any other hands. So at this stage. Again, thank you all for your contributions. And as we noted earlier on today, the applicant will be providing a detailed written response to everything we have heard through all of the open floor hearing sessions at deadline six. And I now like to hand over to my colleague to close this hearing. Thank you.

00:33:33:10 - 00:33:34:12

Thank you very much.

00:33:34:18 - 00:34:07:12

And I'd just like to reiterate to thank you all for contributing so fully to the meeting. We found it extremely helpful and we will consider all your submissions really carefully. Can I remind you again to submit your post hearing submissions, including written submissions of oral cases and anything extra that you wanted to say but you did not have time to do so by deadline six, which is the 13th of April. The next event for this application will be Compulsory Acquisition Hearing two, which is scheduled for 10 a.m. tomorrow. Like today's event, this hearing will also be a blended event.

00:34:07:14 - 00:34:38:13

So for those of you who are proposing to attend virtually, the joining conference is from 9:30 a.m. for those who are proposing to attend in person. The event will be held in this room, which is accessible from 9 a.m. and for those attending the satellite venues in Suffolk and Kent. Those rooms will also be accessible from 9 a.m.. The agenda for this event is available on the project page of the NI website, with examination library reference Iva 801. So the time is now 1549 and open for hearing three for the Sealink project is now closed.

00:34:38:15 - 00:34:39:09

Thank you.