

Application by National Grid Electricity Transmission for an Order Granting Development Consent for the Sea Link Project

Open Floor Hearing 2 – 24 March 2026

Interested Party: Saxmundham Town Council

Geraldine Barker, speaking on behalf of Saxmundham Town Council

Our representation relates to bridges - both physical and metaphorical. Specifically, the existing Benhall Railway Bridge and the proposed new bridge over the River Fromus.

Benhall Railway Bridge

We refer to the Applicant's *Benhall Railway Bridge – Crossing Feasibility Study* (REP14-101). We have significant concerns regarding Option 3, which proposes “do nothing to Benhall Bridge” with Abnormal Indivisible Loads using an alternative access route.

The removal of extensive construction works to Benhall Bridge would reduce impacts on the vulnerable residents of White Arch Park, eliminate disruptive road closures and diversions through Saxmundham, and prevent closure of the rail line which is vital both for passengers and for freight serving Sizewell C. Those elements are welcome.

However, the alternative route proposed under Option 3 is not satisfactory. It would transfer significant traffic impacts to communities already experiencing cumulative effects from Sizewell C and the Friston Substation, particularly Middleton and Theberton until the Sizewell Relief Road is completed, and the parishes of Leiston and Knodishall. Furthermore, Option 3 does not materially alleviate existing traffic pressures within Saxmundham.

Proposed Bridge over the River Fromus

Under the Applicant's proposals, HGVs and workforce vehicles would continue to access the site via the B1121 through Benhall and/or Saxmundham. A new road and bridge over the River Fromus would then be constructed to provide access to the converter station.

Saxmundham Town Council has consistently expressed concerns regarding the proposed River Fromus bridge due to its impacts on ecology, heritage assets and landscape character. We therefore maintain our objection to this element of the scheme. However, we believe there is an alternative approach that more appropriately considers the interests of host communities.

Building Bridges

Saxmundham, Benhall and Sternfield are host communities for this nationally significant infrastructure. It should be incumbent upon the Applicant to work constructively with those communities to identify solutions that mitigate the impact of 21st-century traffic demands on a 20th-century road network.

Suffolk County Council's proposal (REP4-149) to avoid works to Benhall Railway Bridge through the use of a permanent haul road offers such an opportunity. A haul route using the Sizewell Link Road, via the former Leiston airfield to connect with the B1119, would:

- Remove construction traffic from the parishes of Benhall and Saxmundham;

- Prevent cumulative traffic impacts in Leiston and Knodishall;
- Avoid harm to the historic parkland setting of Hurts Hall;
- Maintain the operational rail link serving Sizewell C and local communities;
- Remove NGV LionLink traffic from Saxmundham; and
- Increase resilience in emergency planning for Sizewell B and C.

This approach would demonstrate meaningful coordination between NSIPs, both operational and at statutory consultation stage, and would represent a constructive, cooperative response to cumulative infrastructure pressures.

We acknowledge that revising traffic arrangements may create delays. However, the National Energy System Operator's *"Advice on achieving clean power for Great Britain by 2030"* indicated that projects such as Sea Link have delivery dates beyond 2030, and that the projects needed bringing forward to meet the clean energy target. Given the current delivery timetable, this will not be achieved. The imperative to accelerate delivery should not override the need for coherent planning, coordination and appropriate mitigation of cumulative impacts.

We strongly endorse that the Applicant should review its traffic strategy, engage constructively with Suffolk County Council's alternative proposal, and seek to build a lasting and positive metaphorical bridge with its host communities through coordinated and sustainable infrastructure planning.

|