

Benhall and Sternfield Parish Council's Submission for Deadline 6 of the Sea Link DCO

There is no doubt amongst the local population (many of whom experienced construction of Sizewell A and B), that the beginning of construction at Sizewell C (SZC) has been much more impactful than anyone was expecting and with extreme levels of disruption already having been experienced, it feels to the local community as though there has been a shift towards a whole new experiential "impact baseline". It is understandable therefore that people are concerned that when levels of construction at SZC increase further and multiple other projects are added to this new impact baseline, East Suffolk's community will be driven towards cumulative impacts that will have an unacceptable interference on our daily lives, especially our mental health and wellbeing. It seems that Sea Link's infrastructure impacts are not being considered in the context of this shifting baseline though and NGET's reference to construction impacts from SZC as "background noise" during Issue Specific Hearings 3 is evidence that NGET is considering Sea Link as a separate entity and that the changing impact baseline is not being taken into account.

In addition to this apparent lack of assessing impacts cumulatively, it is evident throughout the Sea Link DCO that NGET has consistently played down Sea Link's adverse impact profile: The vast majority of impacts have been assessed as negligible, minimal or insignificant etc and NGET seems to be maintaining a fixed, inflexible position with respect to any challenges made to these assessments.

A clear example of this downplaying of impacts was seen in the Sea Link Community Update (attached) that was sent out to hundreds of local households in November 2025 and presented a completely unrealistic, deliberately misleading view of seemingly trivial construction impacts and made almost no mention of permanent infrastructure.

One of the few impacts in the Sea Link DCO that has been deemed to be significant is in relation to compromise of a PRoW at the converter station site, but even in this openly acknowledged case, NGET has remained steadfast that it has no responsibility to mitigate for it by providing a new PRoW alongside the B1119, as proposed by ESC, because this would be an enhancement rather than mitigation. Surely in the light of a complete absence of benefits and the considerable adverse impacts being faced by the local community, creation of a new footpath would be a small "price" to pay to keep the public onside?

The same apparent resistance to making amendments that would result in a "less-worse" situation for local people was seen during both Compulsory Acquisition Hearings (CAH) in relation to a hedge due to be planted as a form of mitigation planting at Red House Farm in Sternfield that threatens to impede access to the farmer's land. In this case, NGET is insisting that it must proceed with this mitigation planting despite the adverse impacts that it will cause to the farmer and it was clear during discussion that, even though the farmer said he had been "banging on" about this issue for many months, he felt thoroughly disheartened that all his pleas seemed to have fallen on deaf ears with NGET refusing to make any compromise.

Another example of the asymmetry between benefit to the Applicant versus benefit to the community was also seen during CAH1 when compulsory acquisition of large swathes of land alongside the access route to the site through the Fromus Valley was compared with the tiny little strip being acquired for mitigation planting to the South side of the converter station. In this case it appears that acquisition of land which would be beneficial to the Applicant is much more achievable than when compared with acquiring land for mitigation planting in order to minimise the extreme visual impacts of the converter stations that will be observable from Sternfield.

One of the few points on which NGET was prepared to change its position during ISH3 was when impacts to the red throated diver bird were being discussed and it was interesting to see that, when recommendation for consent for development was threatened, a change in position was immediately adopted....

Benhall and Sternfield Parish Council (the PC) is concerned that, not only will our parish be hosting the Sea Link converter station, but that our two villages will also have to endure the majority of the adverse impacts arising from accessing the Saxmundham converter station site via the B1121 through Benhall. With its asymmetric approach to the DCO in mind and considering the prospect of such a heavy infrastructure burden to our villages, the PC would like to consider how NGET has – or more significantly, has not – applied the mitigation hierarchy, specifically with reference to the proposed access route.

A major problem with the Saxmundham site that was not really addressed when the site emerged as the preferred location is that accessing it is fraught with difficulty. This inaccessibility has become more and more evident as the application has progressed with previously undisclosed problems associated with transporting AILs over Benhall Railway Bridge only emerging after the DCO examinations had already begun. Whenever advising on the feasibility of the proposed access route to the site through Benhall, [REDACTED] from Suffolk Highways (who has a wealth of experience and local knowledge), has repeatedly expressed his particular concerns relating to the A12/B1121 junction and the challenges presented by crossing Benhall Railway Bridge. There are also considerable problems with landscape and visual, heritage, environmental and flood risk impacts associated with building a bridge over the River Fromus, not to mention the major traffic and transport impacts that will affect Benhall, Sternfield, Saxmundham and the wider community from use of the Benhall access route. If the mitigation hierarchy is applied to all these issues, it is obvious that many of them can be completely avoided by using the alternative access route as proposed by Suffolk County Council (SCC) that shares the Sizewell Link Road (SLR) and then accesses the Saxmundham site via the old Leiston airfield. Obviously, SCC's proposed Northern route would increase impacts in other ways and to other local communities which is of course highly regrettable, but relates more to the underlying inaccessibility of the site rather than to the SCC route *per se* and on balance, impacts associated with SCC's route are considerably lower and would affect fewer people than the impacts associated with the route through Benhall.

However, NGET has dismissed SCC's alternative route primarily on the basis of increased journey distances which demonstrates a failure to properly apply the mitigation hierarchy and displays a lack of acknowledgement of the community's cumulative infrastructure burden.

The Scottish Power (SPR) AIL access route was also discussed briefly during ISH3 because, although NGET claims that the route is "certain" because it has already been consented as part of the SPR projects, actually, it has not been assessed yet and [REDACTED] holds concerns regarding the certainty of this route too, especially where it crosses the Victorian sewers in Leiston. At an SPR drop-in event in Friston on 26th February, the SPR transport representative acknowledged that there were uncertainties with the SPR AIL route where it crosses two culverts on the A12 – one at Little Glemham and the other at Kelsale. He went on to say that Suffolk Highways have the final say with AIL routes which, in other words, means that if [REDACTED] [REDACTED] says a route cannot be used, then the route cannot be used. SPR's AIL route uncertainty should be investigated immediately in conjunction with proper examination of SCC's proposed Northern route because, in addition to possibly providing access to the Saxmundham converter station site, it may transpire that SCC's route could potentially also provide access to the SPR Kiln Lane site as well.

SCC's proposals for an alternative access route allows for meaningful application of the mitigation hierarchy with a significant avoidance of many impacts arising from accessing the site through Benhall. It also shows proper project coordination with sharing of the SLR – a route specifically designed to carry construction traffic – with SZC, Sea Link, Lion Link and possibly even EA1N and EA2 too. It would relieve extensive traffic problems in Saxmundham that would be experienced by the wider community in the face of frequent or prolonged road closures in Benhall. It would completely avoid the adverse visual, landscape, heritage, flood risk and environmental impacts of building a bridge over the River Fromus and would lead to a significant reduction in the local community's massive infrastructure burden. The PC therefore hopes that there will still be enough time during the examination for SCC's route proposals to be properly examined.

Community update

November 2025



National Grid is upgrading the electricity transmission network between Kent and Suffolk via Sea Link, a new underground cable link which is primarily offshore.

Earlier this year, we submitted an application for a development consent order (DCO) to build Sea Link. The application is very detailed, so in this update we are providing a clear summary of what our proposals do (and do not) include.

88%

of the Sea Link cables would be offshore with cables coming onshore underground.

No new pylons

would be built in Suffolk as part of Sea Link.

No digging on Aldeburgh beach

or North Warren RSPB reserve would be required to build Sea Link.

100%

of the cable is underground in Suffolk.



expected to lower energy bills



boosting energy security



supplying power to 2 million homes



Cross-section of underground cable

1 How would Aldeburgh Beach be affected by Sea Link?

Sea Link would not impact Aldeburgh beach or RSPB North Warren. Cable would be installed approximately 20 metres (equivalent in height to around four and a half double decker buses) beneath the beach and the reserve using trenchless technology. No disturbance would occur to the beach or the reserve, which would both remain open for public use during construction and operation.

You can watch a video about how we use trenchless technology to install cables beneath environmentally sensitive sites and the coast by scanning the QR code with your phone's camera:

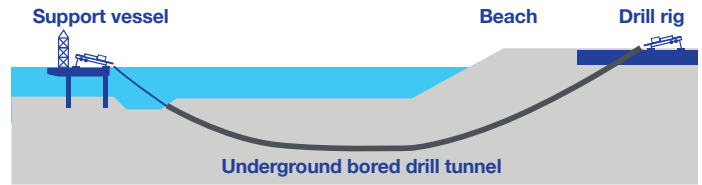


Diagram showing trenchless crossing

What's happening now?

The detailed Examination of our application began on 5 November 2025 and will run until 5 May 2026. This process is being run by the Planning Inspectorate.

During the Examination, there will be hearings where those who have registered in advance can attend and give their views about our application. The first round of hearings in Suffolk took place between 5 and 6 November 2025, with further hearings to be held in early 2026.

For more information, please visit the Planning Inspectorate's website by scanning the QR code with your phone's camera or search online for 'Sea Link Planning Inspectorate'.

2 Why can't Sea Link connect somewhere else, like Bradwell?

We need to reinforce the network in the Sizewell area, due to the amount of new generation that will be connected here.

Bradwell in Essex is too far south from where Sea Link must connect. Connecting Sea Link at Bradwell would mean building more new infrastructure between Bradwell and the Sizewell area.

3 How is National Grid coordinating with other developers in Suffolk?

We meet with Sizewell C, Scottish Power Renewables (SPR) and National Grid Ventures every month to discuss coordination between our projects.

Our proposed converter station site is shared with LionLink, allowing the landscaping and design to be cohesive and reducing the construction impact of building on two separate sites.

We will build Kiln Lane substation near Friston under SPR's DCO at the same time as they build their two substations. This will reduce overall construction time and disruption. If LionLink receives consent before late 2028, that project could connect into Kiln Lane in the same set of works.

With Sizewell C, we are exploring the possibility of sharing their Park and Ride and accommodation facilities to reduce local impacts.

4 Why can't you build Sea Link offshore?

Sea Link is almost entirely offshore, but to connect to the electricity transmission network we still need to come onshore somewhere. Whilst that involves building some new infrastructure onshore in Suffolk, we are proposing to bury as much of this as possible beneath the ground.

There is no such thing as a fully offshore grid. In Europe, as in Britain, some new onshore infrastructure like cables and pylons are still needed to bring power ashore. This is needed even when infrastructure like energy islands exist, or are being proposed, out at sea. No matter how far out to sea you go, electricity still needs to reach homes and businesses on land.



Example of subsea cable drum

Contact us

You can find out more about our proposals by scanning the QR code with your phone's camera or visiting nationalgrid.com/sealink

Contact us:

contact@sealink.nationalgrid.com
0808 134 9569

nationalgrid