

DEADLINE 7 - Objection to AS-167

By Glynis Robertson IP No: [REDACTED]

I write as an Interested Party to object in the strongest possible terms to the proposal identified as AS-167, submitted by National Grid Electricity Transmission in relation to the Sea Link Development Consent Order.

This proposal introduces, at a very late stage in the Examination, a mechanism whereby an unspecified future unit within the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero could assume responsibility for the discharge of Development Consent Order requirements. In effect, this would remove decision-making authority from the relevant local planning authorities in Suffolk, reducing their role to that of consultees. I consider this to be a fundamental and unjustified alteration to the governance of the project.

AS-167 cannot be regarded as a minor procedural amendment. It represents a material and far-reaching change. It would transfer decision-making powers away from democratically accountable local authorities and place them in the hands of a hypothetical body that does not yet exist, and for which there is no defined statutory basis, governance structure, or procedural framework. In doing so, it replaces a well-established and understood system with one that is entirely untested and lacks transparency. This strikes at the very core of how the project would be regulated after consent is granted.

The timing of this proposal is particularly concerning. Its introduction at such a late stage in the Examination limits the ability of Interested Parties, including myself, to properly scrutinise and respond to its implications. There has been no meaningful consultation on this significant governance change, nor has it been adequately examined through hearings or supporting evidence. This undermines the integrity of the Examination process and risks prejudicing those who have engaged with it in good faith. A change of this magnitude should have been presented much earlier, accompanied by full consultation and detailed justification.

Local authorities currently play a crucial role in the discharge of Development Consent Order requirements. They bring detailed knowledge of local communities, infrastructure, environmental constraints, and cumulative impacts. Importantly, they are democratically accountable to those most directly affected by such developments. The proposal set out in AS-167 would remove their decision-making powers entirely, reducing them to a consultative role with no determinative influence. This represents a clear erosion of local democratic accountability and runs counter to the principles underpinning the Planning Act 2008 regime.

Furthermore, the proposal lacks clarity and certainty. The DESNZ unit referred to does not yet exist, and there is no information regarding its legal powers, governance arrangements, or decision-making processes. There are no defined procedures, timelines, or appeal mechanisms, nor is there any assurance as to how transparency and accountability would be

maintained. Granting consent on the basis of such uncertainty would be wholly inappropriate and inconsistent with the need for robust and enforceable controls within a Development Consent Order.

There are also significant risks associated with removing local authority oversight. These include weaker scrutiny of detailed design, construction impacts, and mitigation measures, as well as a reduced ability to respond effectively to site-specific issues such as traffic, environmental concerns, and community impacts. Given the scale and sensitivity of the Sea Link project, particularly within Suffolk, the loss of this local oversight is unacceptable.

Notably, the Applicant has provided no compelling evidence to justify this change. There is no indication that the current system is inadequate, nor that local authorities are unable to fulfil their responsibilities. Equally, there is no evidence that the proposed alternative would lead to improved outcomes. In the absence of such justification, the proposal appears to be an attempt to reduce local scrutiny rather than a genuine effort to improve the regulatory framework.

If accepted, AS-167 would also set a troubling precedent. It would allow applicants to introduce substantial governance changes late in the Examination process and could enable future projects to sideline local authorities in a similar manner. This risks undermining confidence in the Development Consent Order process as a whole, and the Examining Authority should exercise extreme caution before endorsing such a departure from established practice.

For all of these reasons, I consider AS-167 to be a material and unjustified late change. It is procedurally unfair, lacking in clarity, evidence, and appropriate safeguards. It diminishes local democratic accountability and conflicts with the fundamental principles of the Development Consent Order regime.

I therefore respectfully request that the Examining Authority recommends that AS-167 be rejected in full.

End

29/4/26