The Great Grid Upgrade

Sea Link

Sea Link

Volume 9: Examination Submissions

Document 9.56: Statement of Common Ground Between National Grid Electricity Transmission and Network Rail

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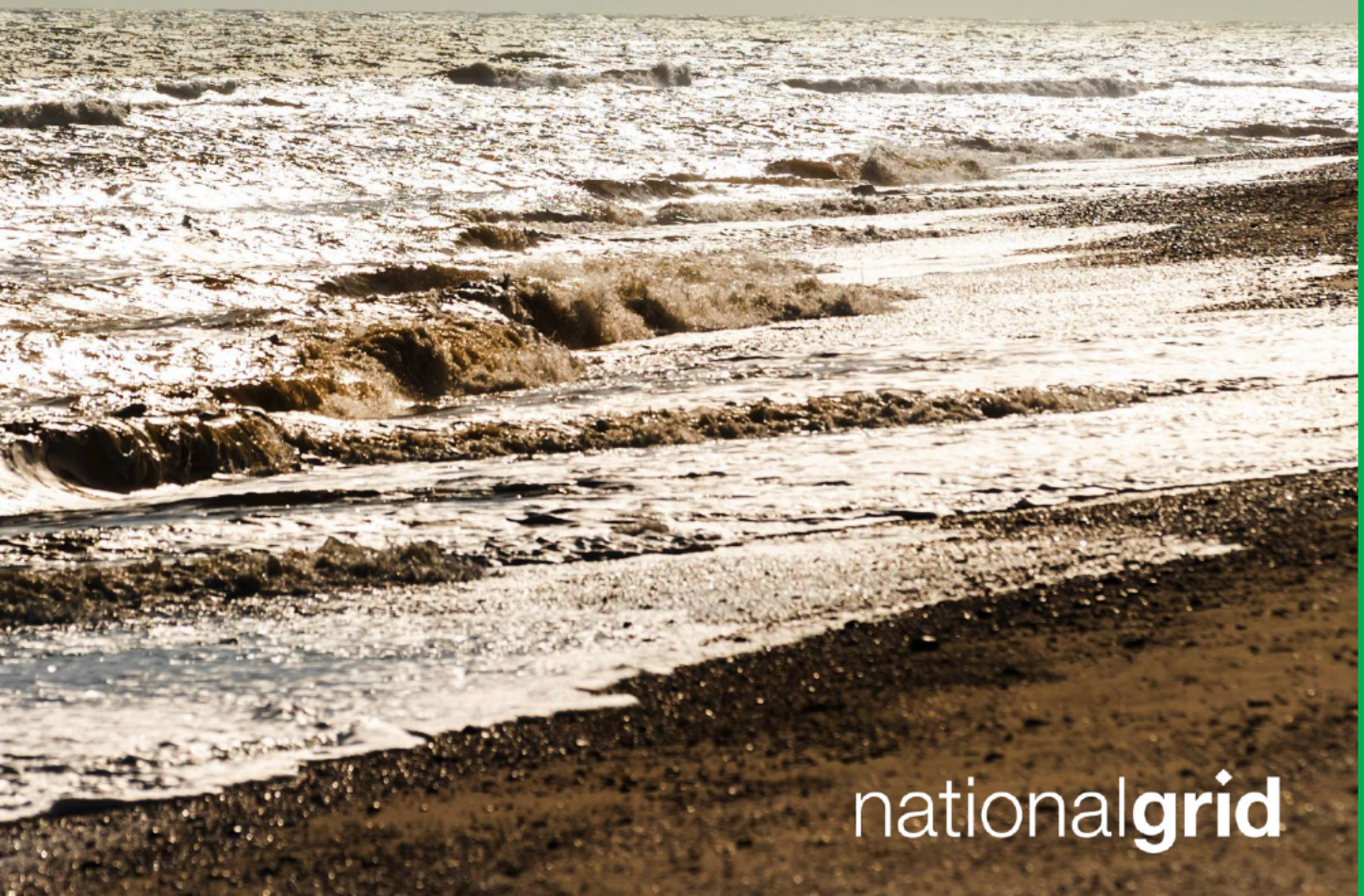

nationalgrid

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Version			
Date	**Version**	**Status**	**Description / Changes**
November 2025	A	Draft	Issued for Deadline 1
May 2026	B	Final	Issued for Deadline 7

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 matters 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

1.1.4 This SoCG is between the Applicant and Network Rail (NR). 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).

1.2.1 This SoCG has been sent to NR on the 15 of July 2025 for review and we are currently awaiting comments. The matters raised in Section 3 of this SoCG are written and agreed following meetings with NR.

1.2.2 This SoCG will be progressed during the pre-examination and examination periods to reach a final position between the Applicant and NR 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, National Grid and the NR will jointly be referred to as the "Parties". When referencing the NR alone, they will be referred to as "the Consultee".

1.3 Role of the NR in the DCO process

1.3.1 The Consultee is a Statutory Consultee under the Land Drainage Act 1991. Network Rail is the owner, operator and infrastructure manager of Britain's main railway network. It runs, maintains and develops the core physical infrastructure of the network and has to ensure efficient management of the assets over the short, medium and long-term

1.3.2 The consultee should provide guidance and comments on the Sea Link proposal and co-own the Statement of Common Ground between NR and National Grid.

1.3.3 NR has been encouraged to discuss and work with the Applicant at the pre-application stage of the application process for the Proposed Project. Early discussion include the possibility of crossing the NR has assets with a new bridge to the north of Saxmundham and also using an access route which cross under the transport route to site south of Saxmundham for the Proposed Project. The main point of discussion now is the transport route to site which includes a NR asset crossing underneath at Benhall Bridge.

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 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 (PRoW) and other ancillary operations.

1.5 Format of Document and Terminology.

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’ 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. The Parties have also indicated the likelihood that agreement will be reached on each item.

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

Table 1.1 Abbreviations

Abbreviation/Term	Definition
BAPA	Basic Asset Protection Agreement
DCO	Development Consent Order
HVAC	High Voltage Alternating Current
HVDC	High Voltage Direct Current
NR	Network Rail
PRoW	Public Right of Way
SoCG	Statement of Common Ground
TJB	Transition Joint Bay

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 NR

Date	Topic	Discussion points
12/01/2024	*Pre Construction Feasibility Start Up Meeting*	*Initial Meeting following the signing of the BAPA to discuss the access options for the Proposed Project and how they interact with the NR infrastructure.*
23/02/2024	*Progress Meeting on Construction Feasibility*	*Discussion on the progress of the options for access to the Proposed Project and the selection of the preferred option which doesn't involve a direct crossing of the NR Infrastructure. Discussion on the use of the Benhall Bridge, which is not a NR asset but does cross their network.*
18/04/2024	*Progress Meeting on Construction Feasibility*	*Confirmation that the preferred access route is the southern access which doesn't involve new structures being placed over the NR assets.*
04/03/2025	*Benhall Road Bridge Discussion*	*Meeting to discuss the Proposed Projects crossing of the NR network using the Highways Authoritys Benhall Bridge and the possible interaction with the NR assets if an overbridge was installed over the Benhall Bridge.*

3. Areas of Discussion Between the Parties

3.1 Use of the Benhall Bridge

Table 3.1 Use of the Benhall Bridge

Ref	Relevant Application Document	Summary of Description of Matter	NR Current Position	The Applicant Current Position	Status
3.1.1	N/A	Ownership of the Benhall Bridge	NR are not the owner of the Benhall Bridge.	Agree with NR position.	Agreed
3.1.2	N/A	Use of the Benhall Bridge	NGET can use the Local Highways Authority bridge for traffic as long as the loads that are transported are below the stated weight limit for the bridge (Currently 46 Tonnes).	Agree with NR position.	Agreed
3.1.3	N/A	Large Vehicles Crossing the Benhall Bridge (under the weight Limit)	The Local Highways Authority will need to be informed regarding the use of vehicles over 46 Tonnes and NR will require you to satisfy that adequate assessment has been undertaken to ensure the bridge will not be compromised. This will be in a Form B assessment	Agree with NR position.	Agreed

			and details of the vehicle data sheet.		

3.2 Over Bridge of the Benhall Bridge

Table 3.2 Over Bridge of the Benhall Bridge

Ref	Relevant Application Document	Summary of Description of Matter	NR Current Position	The Applicant Current Position	Status
3.2.1	N/A	Overbridging	An 'overbridge' on the existing one will need to be designed so that no loads are transferred to the existing bridge. This will need to be include in Form C (temporary work), in addition to the existing bridge verification assessment.	Agree with NR position.	Agreed
3.2.2	N/A	Overbridging	The detail in 3.2.1 and 3.1.3 is normally provided after consent for a project and NR is content for this to occur in this case	Agree with NR position.	Agreed
3.2.3	N/A	Overbridging	NR is not aware of any reason that an overbridge cannot be designed in a	Agree with NR position.	Agreed

	way that will meet requirements.	

4. Approvals

Signed	
On Behalf of	Network Rail
Name	
Position	
Date	

Signed	
On Behalf of	National Grid
Name	James Buckley
Position	Senior Project Manager
Date	29/04/2026

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

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