

Dear Secretary of State,

I am writing following your letter of 28 August seeking further information in relation to the Sea Link DCO.

I am not one of the listed recipients of your letter, but as someone directly affected by the proposed energy infrastructure in East Suffolk, I wanted to write because of the questions now being raised about the cost, need and value for money of both Sea Link and LionLink.

I strongly support the transition to Net Zero and the development of offshore wind. My concern is not about the principle of the energy transition, but about ensuring that the infrastructure we build to deliver it is genuinely necessary, properly coordinated and represents good value for consumers.

The recent National Audit Office report on upgrading the electricity transmission network seems particularly relevant. It raises important questions about oversight, transparency and the ability of the regulatory system to scrutinise costs effectively while the network is being expanded at such speed.

Sea Link provides a striking example of why this matters.

During the DCO examination, National Grid presented an estimated project cost of approximately £1.1 billion. Suffolk Energy Action Solutions challenged that figure at the time, suggesting that the true cost was likely to be closer to £3.2 billion. Ofgem has now assessed Sea Link at approximately £3.2 billion.

That is a very substantial difference. Whatever the reasons for it, it seems difficult to argue that a project of this scale should proceed without asking whether the original examination had a sufficiently realistic picture of the likely cost to consumers.

There is also the question of need. Sea Link was developed around an assumed 1,852MW export deficit at Friston associated with the proposed Nautilus interconnector. Nautilus was subsequently moved away from Friston before the Sea Link application was submitted, apparently reducing that deficit to around 352MW.

Ofgem has also identified unresolved harmonic issues that may require additional works elsewhere on the transmission network before Sea Link can operate compliantly at its intended 2GW capacity. Reinforcement between Richborough and Canterbury also appears to sit outside NGET's current £3.2 billion Project Assessment submission.

Taken together, these issues leave me with a fairly straightforward question: what is now the genuine need for Sea Link, and what will be the total cost to consumers of making it work?

This matters particularly because an alternative was put forward during the examination based on upgrading and reconductoring existing pylon corridors, at an estimated cost of

less than £300 million. Given the potential difference in cost, I find it difficult to understand why that alternative should not now be subjected to rigorous independent assessment before consumers are committed to expenditure of several billion pounds.

I have similar concerns about LionLink.

My wife and I live in Walberswick. We know this part of Suffolk extremely well and care deeply about it. I therefore see at first hand why people are concerned about the cumulative impact of major infrastructure projects on Walberswick and the surrounding coast, its protected landscapes and wildlife, the local economy and tourism, and the communities that live here.

But my concern about LionLink goes beyond the impact on our own community. If, as Ofgem expects, LionLink will operate predominantly as an export route from Great Britain to the Netherlands and could increase GB wholesale electricity prices compared with the position without LionLink, then I believe its consumer case deserves particularly careful scrutiny.

A regulatory decision taken in 2024 should not prevent Government asking whether the project still makes economic sense against the evidence available in 2026.

I would therefore urge you to ensure that, before consumers and communities are irrevocably committed to these projects:

- the lower-cost alternative to Sea Link is properly and independently assessed;
- the economic need and consumer case for LionLink are reassessed against current evidence; and
- coordinated offshore solutions and better use of existing infrastructure are fully considered before further major onshore infrastructure is approved.

There will inevitably be significant costs and difficult choices involved in achieving Net Zero. I accept that. But I do not believe that supporting Net Zero requires us to accept unnecessary expenditure or poorly coordinated infrastructure where credible, cheaper and less environmentally damaging alternatives may exist.

Indeed, I think the opposite is true. Public support for the energy transition will be much stronger if communities can see that Government is prepared to challenge costs, test assumptions and ensure that the infrastructure being imposed upon them is genuinely necessary.

I hope you will take these concerns into account when considering the Sea Link DCO and the wider implications for LionLink.

Yours sincerely,

John & Suzanne Ainley, [REDACTED]

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