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South East Anglia Link

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Dear Secretary of State,

I am writing following your letter of 28 August requesting further information from several parties in relation to the Sea Link DCO. Although I am not a listed recipient, I feel compelled to write in light of two recent and significant reports from Ofgem and the National Audit Office, which raise serious questions about the cost, deliverability and value for money of the proposed Sea Link project.

I welcome the Government's commitment to reducing household energy costs. With billions of pounds now being invested in the Great Grid Upgrade, it is essential that major projects are necessary, proportionate and provide genuine value for money for consumers.

The National Audit Office's recent report, *Value for Money — Upgrading the Electricity Transmission Network*, makes this particularly important. I am therefore writing to ask the Government to look closely at the proposed Sea Link project in East Suffolk, which appears to illustrate many of the concerns identified by the NAO.

Ofgem has now assessed Sea Link at approximately £3.2 billion — around three times the cost presented during the DCO examination.

This raises serious concerns about the reliability and transparency of the information presented during the Examination. National Grid presented an estimated project cost of approximately £1.1 billion, despite SEAS challenging that figure and presenting evidence that the true cost was likely to be around £3.2 billion. Ofgem has now assessed Sea Link at approximately £3.2 billion, broadly confirming the figure put forward by SEAS. The £1.1 billion figure presented during the Examination therefore proved wholly unrealistic. It is deeply concerning that a project of this scale was examined without decision-makers and affected communities being given a realistic assessment of its likely cost.

More importantly, the circumstances underpinning the original need for Sea Link have changed. The project was developed around an assumed 1,852MW export deficit at Friston, associated with the proposed Nautilus interconnector. Nautilus was subsequently relocated away from Friston before the Sea Link application was submitted, reducing the apparent deficit to approximately 352MW.

There are further concerns. Ofgem has identified unresolved harmonic issues which may require additional works elsewhere on the transmission network before Sea Link can operate compliantly at its intended 2GW capacity. The precise scope and location of these works have yet to be determined. In addition, identified reinforcement between Richborough and Canterbury in Kent is excluded from NGET's current £3.2 billion Project Assessment submission.

This raises a fundamental question: what is the true need and total cost to consumers of delivering Sea Link?

Beyond the financial concerns, I want to set out why this project matters to me personally. I live in Friston, a village in East Suffolk that would be directly affected by Sea Link, and the environmental consequences for our community and the surrounding landscape are profound.

Friston is already the community that bore the weight of the original justification for Sea Link — the 1,852MW export deficit used to drive the project's need case was located here. Now that Nautilus has been relocated away from Friston, the deficit has shrunk to approximately 352MW, yet our village is still being asked to absorb the infrastructure, the disruption and the long-term environmental harm. That is not proportionate.

The construction and operation of this infrastructure would bring sustained noise and light pollution into a rural setting that currently enjoys dark skies and a relatively undisturbed acoustic environment. For a village like Friston, that is not a minor inconvenience — it is a fundamental change to the character of the place and to the quality of life of everyone who lives here, particularly the elderly, the young, and those whose health is affected by sleep disruption.

More than that, I am deeply concerned about the impact on the non-human persons who share this landscape with us. The hedgerows, woods, fields and waterways around Friston are home to a community of living beings — birds, bats, mammals, pollinators, amphibians and countless others — whose lives and habitats would be damaged or destroyed by the construction footprint, the permanent presence of the infrastructure, and the ongoing disturbance it brings. These beings are not features of scenery to be weighed and traded in a planning balance. They are persons in their own right, with their own interests and their own claim to exist undisturbed in the places they inhabit. The environmental damage from Sea Link would not simply be a loss of biodiversity to be offset elsewhere; it would be a direct harm to members of more-than-human communities who have no voice in this process and no consent to give.

When the cheaper, faster alternative — upgrading and reconductoring existing pylon corridors — would avoid much of this new onshore intrusion entirely, it is surely incumbent on decision-makers to weigh that avoidance properly. The environmental and social cost of building new infrastructure through an established rural community

like Friston, and through the habitats of the non-human persons who live alongside us, cannot be treated as a price worth paying simply because the alternative route has not yet been fully and independently assessed.

Most importantly, there is a cheaper, faster alternative.

During the DCO examination, Suffolk Energy Action Solutions (SEAS) identified an alternative based on upgrading and reconductoring existing pylon corridors in Suffolk and Kent. This is estimated to cost under £300 million, compared with £3.2 billion for Sea Link — a potential saving to consumers approaching £3 billion.

The alternative could also potentially be delivered more quickly, while making better use of infrastructure that already exists and avoiding much of the new onshore infrastructure, environmental damage and disruption to communities associated with Sea Link.

I support the transition to Net Zero and recognise that Britain's electricity network needs substantial investment. But achieving Net Zero should not mean spending billions of pounds on new infrastructure without first properly examining whether the same network need can be met more quickly and at a fraction of the cost by upgrading existing infrastructure — and without properly weighing the environmental harm, noise, light pollution and damage to more-than-human communities that new construction would inflict on places like Friston.

Before consumers are committed to expenditure of £3.2 billion or more on Sea Link, I therefore urge the Government to ensure that the SEAS alternative is independently and transparently assessed against Sea Link on cost, delivery time, network capacity and environmental impact.

If a solution costing under £300 million can deliver the required network reinforcement faster than a £3.2 billion project, surely it should be properly examined before billions of pounds of consumers' money are committed — and before irreparable harm is done to the communities, human and non-human, that would bear the cost of the wrong choice.

Yours sincerely,

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Will Wright BA ([REDACTED]

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