

Andre Wegner [REDACTED]

South East Anglia Link

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Dear Sir or Madam,

I am writing in response to the Secretary of State's letter of 22 September inviting comments on the responses received in relation to Sea Link.

I would ask the Secretary of State, in considering those responses, to ensure that four issues have been properly resolved: the continuing need for Sea Link, its full cost to consumers, whether that need could be met through lower-cost upgrades to existing infrastructure, and the environmental consequences of the proposed route.

These questions have become more important since the Examination closed.

Ofgem is now undertaking its Project Assessment of Sea Link. Separately, the National Audit Office published its report on upgrading the electricity transmission network on 11 September. The NAO specifically identified the need for stronger oversight, transparent monitoring and sufficient regulatory capability to scrutinise costs if the required upgrades are to be delivered at the lowest cost to consumers.

I therefore ask the Secretary of State to take this newer evidence into account before reaching a decision, rather than relying solely on the cost and need case considered earlier in the DCO process.

There also appears to be a very substantial difference between the cost associated with Sea Link and the cost claimed for alternatives based principally on upgrading and reconductoring existing transmission infrastructure. I am not suggesting that the alternative figures should simply be accepted. I am asking that the alternatives be independently assessed on a genuinely like-for-like basis before an irreversible decision is made.

That comparison should consider the full system cost necessary for each option to deliver the required capacity, including related reinforcement and remedial works, rather than excluding costs because they happen to fall outside the immediate Sea Link project budget.

I am particularly concerned about the proposed Suffolk landfall between Aldeburgh and Thorpeness. The current route still takes the cables through RSPB North Warren and the Leiston-Aldeburgh Site of Special Scientific Interest.

I recognise that National Grid proposes to use trenchless techniques beneath North Warren rather than open-cut construction. That is preferable to excavating directly across the marshes, but it does not remove the environmental risk or answer the more fundamental question of why this exceptionally sensitive location should be used at all.

North Warren contains important grazing marsh, reedbed and wetland habitat. The RSPB continues to object to the location of the proposals and has stated that, in its view, National Grid has not convincingly demonstrated that alternative routes avoiding important wildlife sites are unavailable. It also continues to raise concerns about construction disturbance and effects on water.

That seems particularly important here. Avoiding permanent surface excavation does not make routing major infrastructure beneath a protected wetland environmentally neutral. The starting point should be to avoid such sites where a reasonable alternative exists, rather than relying on engineering techniques to reduce the damage after the route has been selected.

I therefore ask the Secretary of State to require compelling evidence that there is genuinely no reasonable alternative to routing Sea Link through North Warren before permitting works within this nationally important site.

I support the need to modernise Britain's electricity network and accommodate greater renewable generation. That makes choosing the right infrastructure more important. Where billions of pounds of consumer expenditure and potentially irreversible effects on protected habitats are involved, the alternatives, total costs and environmental consequences should be tested particularly carefully.

Before determining the application, I would therefore ask the Secretary of State to ensure that the responses now before her genuinely resolve:

1. whether Sea Link remains necessary in its proposed form;
2. whether lower-cost reinforcement of existing infrastructure could meet the underlying network requirement;
3. the full, like-for-like cost to consumers of each credible option; and
4. whether routing the project through North Warren can genuinely be justified when the RSPB continues to challenge whether less damaging alternatives have been adequately ruled out.

Yours sincerely,

Andre Wegner

Interested Party number: [REDACTED]