

Cotton Parish Council

Response to the Planning Inspectorate from Cotton Parish Council regarding the National Grid's application for its Norwich to Tilbury project

Context

1. Cotton is a small rural village in Mid-Suffolk with a population of just over 500. It is set among valuable arable land, with a Grade 1 listed Church, plus many other listed, mostly medieval properties, and two significant historic houses (past both of which the 50m pylons will run close). More modern development is of a ribbon or standalone kind.
2. There are 15 of the 50m plus high pylons planned within the Parish, running north-south down the eastern side, the cumulative effect of which will be devastating while they are being constructed and for decades to come once built. Cotton is situated on high plateau clay-land, with extensive open views, rich in wildlife, dotted with well-used footpaths. Its history is rooted in farming and it attracts residents who seek a quiet countryside life and pursuits. No mitigation is possible given the topography of the land in question and it seems to the Council that both the Holford Rules and Schedule 9 of the Electricity Act 1989 have been disregarded in the National Grid's proposals.

The National Grid's Approach

3. The Parish Council understands the nature of this stage of the Norwich to Tilbury project and the fact that the Planning Inspectorate (P.I.) has accepted the National Grid's Development Consent Order (DCO) application for examination. The Council will therefore aim to focus its comments on aspects relevant to the P.I.
4. However, we would not be serving the interests of Cotton residents if we fail to state some major concerns about the way the National Grid (NG) has approached this significant Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project (NSIP). And how it bodes ill for the future implementation of the scheme.
5. The Council and a large number of its residents have consistently engaged in writing and in person with the NG from the outset. We support the need for renewable energy but at no stage, along with many thousands of others, have we felt we have been seriously listened to by the NG. Alternative, viable proposals which are less damaging in the long-term to the countryside, environment, nature, farming etc., were not consulted on. Despite constant

requests, proper comparative cost/benefit analyses of the construction and maintenance of HVDC and Off-Shore cabling versus the pylons have never been presented.

6. We all believe, despite the elaborate machinery of NG consultations, that we have been presented with a fait accompli and basically told this is what you're getting.
 - A. Why are we being fobbed off with technology that may have suited the mid/late 20th century, when many of our European and Scandinavian neighbours have shown far greater enlightenment and care for their communities in delivering renewable energy via HVDC or off-shore cabling and energy hubs.
 - B. Why is so much of the East Anglian countryside being sacrificed with a route that brings energy in from the North Sea on a route starting in Norwich, and running 180km when the vast majority of it is headed to London and the South-East?
 - C. How is it that a private company – there to make a profit - plans to bring renewable energy 4000km under the sea from Morocco into the UK? But an off-shore solution is dismissed out of hand.
 - D. Why has the NG come up with undergrounning and off-shore solutions in other parts of the UK but is only prepared to underground a minor proportion of the Norwich to Tilbury route (i.e., Dedham Vale)?

Heritage and Property

7. Valued and historic buildings and property in Cotton referred to earlier, will have their settings and views blighted by the sheer size and number of pylons in this small village. The impact is exemplified by Hempnalls Hall, a Grade II listed house and bridge over its moat, whose long-time owners – or current custodians as they see it – are battling hard to protect its historic setting. They have supplied detail to the Grid and the P.I. of its important history, as among other things, the former home of Anne of Cleves. Additionally, though, it is an asset to the village by virtue of the two very popular footpaths running through its grounds. These will be permanently impacted by 3 pylons and closed during the construction phase, with much wildlife disturbed in the process.

One of the many unfairnesses of this whole project is that the value of a property such as Hempnalls Hall can be dramatically reduced (30-50%), but because the pylons causing that are not their land there is NO compensation.

- A. The PC wishes to know why Hempnalls Hall and Cotton Lodge, an equally historic house in the village have not been given sufficient weight in terms of being important Heritage Assets;
- B. we urge the P.I. to challenge the NG as to why not only pylons RG128,129 and 130 can't be moved further east, but much of the run of pylons north – south down to Lamberts Lane. (See sections below on agriculture and The Wimble)

8. The Wimble, Stonham Road IP14 4RU

This medieval property lies isolated at the southern edge of the village, amidst the high Suffolk uplands, open farmland and with an abundance of largely undisturbed wildlife. It is probably the single most impacted and endangered property on the pylon line through Cotton. The pylons, at 10 times higher than the old house, come very close, RG138 being around 100m away. In effect the wires then pass almost over the property to an angle pylon RG139, and encircle the property on three sides. Their position means that pylons in double figures will cut across their visible countryside and around their property.

The owners are responding in detail to the P.I., as they have consistently to the NG. While there has been some minor re-alignment by the Grid, the core issues remain the same. The wildlife in this part of the village is at its richest and most diverse, including rare species. The owner has no confidence that the NG has carried out a meaningful assessment of the habitats and bio-diversity, given the perfunctory visit by NG hired ecologists.

This historic property has no foundations but has stood undisturbed for hundreds of years. The owners have had to be vigilant in its maintenance and are now fearful of the pylons' impact on the fabric of their house, especially the volume of construction which will take place all around it and the permanent damage it will cause to their access and the single lane road servicing it, to vegetation and wildlife . They have family health issues which they will relay to you.

- A. The Parish Council urges that the P.I. focuses on this section of the route, examines how the Grid's plans can possibly accord with the Holford rules and Schedule 9 of the Electricity Act 1989 in terms of preserving valued landscapes and protecting the natural environment.
- B. As mentioned earlier why can the line not be run further east, avoiding the existing gas pipeline, by crossing Hoggets Road before resuming the route further south?

C. If there is no movement in relation to this, what rights do The Wimble owners have if their fears of permanent structural damage to their property comes to pass?

Agriculture

9. We have stressed in all our dealings with the NG, the devastating effect of the pylons and their construction on the small farms in our village. The short and longer-term effects on the land, its productivity and profitability/viability are most worrying. The farmers report the great difficulty in extracting information from the NG and their agents. It's important to stress that farmers such as ours share the concerns about the wider environmental impacts of this project. They have planted many trees and hedgerows and sought to manage their land in ways that has attracted new breeding wildlife. Much of this effort will be destroyed.
10. One of our village farming businesses, whose home will be very close to and in direct line of sight of pylons, estimates that 40 of his 130 acres could be lost for three years. He is at the top of Willow Farm Road. The affected land, once the haul roads to the two pylons (RG128 and 129) are removed, would be anaerobic and take years to recover. The compensation per pylon at £8k single payment is regarded as derisory.
11. He has asked how long the haul roads on his land will be in place and what compensation he will get. He knows it will be out of action well beyond the removal and has asked if the time and cost of restoring the land from its compaction, including repair of any collapsed drains will be met. He has not received any satisfactory answers.
12. Another farming family at Church Farm and Boundary Farm, will have eight pylons on the land that they farm (RG 132 -139). The proposed pylons currently run through the middle of the fields, rendering continued farming over an extended period difficult if not impossible. Like everyone else, they have pushed for the pylon route to be moved further East and more closely paralleled with the older, smaller pylons. The level of anxiety, given the threat to the viability of the business was already high, but has risen exponentially with the disclosure of the nature and scale of the construction phase. 30% or more of the land could be out of action for several years, and the long-term damage to the soil extensive. Drainage measures are essential and expensive on this type of clay-land and remedial work would be necessary on much of the land. The sums being offered for this scale of disruption are derisory.
13. They have tried to engage with the plans as presented in the Statutory Consultation, suggesting that certain paths at the edges of fields could be used to absorb some of the

width of the haul roads and for siting the pylons to minimise the percentage of the fields put out of action for several years. No movement has been forthcoming. They also regard the compensation for each pylon as totally inadequate and have no idea if there will be further payment for any permanent damage to the land.

14. A third, the smallest family farm in Cotton of 100 acres will have two pylons (R129 & 130) which will split their farm and give very limited access to the far side of the pylons during the three years of construction and massive disruption.
 - A. Cotton PC urges the P.I. to pay particular attention to decisions over the siting of the pylons and the building and access to the haul roads from the perspective of smaller farmers trying to remain viable.
 - B. Will the P.I. get the NG to clarify their policy and plans on compensation for farmers? How can farmers forward plan their businesses and investment against a background of such uncertainty and opaqueness?

Construction

15. The peaceful rural character of Cotton is what residents most value as well as the ability to walk, cycle, ride safely down its lanes and along its footpaths.
16. There is widespread concern and anger about the scale of construction traffic and machinery to erect 15 pylons in a small village, where many of the roads were built for horse and cart, or cars and tractors, not 20ton Lorries loaded with aggregate/stone. Concerns include damage to roads, more potholes, noise and vibration, road safety with very few pavements in the village and many cyclists dog walkers and horse riders. Given the nature of the rural road network, any closure of the B/C roads and connecting lanes leads to long detours affecting access to schools, convenience stores, doctors etc all of which are based in villages adjacent to Cotton and hampers emergency services. We have little idea how long the active construction phase will span. It is essential that such works are kept to a minimum in terms of disruption and safety.
17. For the farmers, the construction phase is especially brutal. The extent of the haul roads and their impact on the fields during the build and long after the pylons are up, is a major worry. The width of land required for them, including the displaced topsoil, could be 21m – the width of a motorway.
18. The Grid's project was originally called East Anglia Green (no joke intended) but many pointed out that the need to shift tens of thousands of tons of aggregate/stone for the haul roads from distant quarries was the most environmentally unfriendly action, leaving a massive carbon footprint. And this is before transporting the pylon steel, the wires, scaffolding etc to all the sites.
19. In the 21st Century, are there really no viable alternative methods to haul roads of this kind?

There are systems such as Geogrid and Geotextile, using material to stabilise the soil and reduce the amount of imported granular fill required for access roads; temporary matting or trackway systems; or specialised ground stabilisation which is quicker to instal than stone roads and with lower environmental impact.

A. Cotton PC requests the P.I. to challenge the N.G. about these or other alternatives to the planned haul roads and why they cannot be applied to this project ?

Conclusion.

The Parish Council and residents of Cotton are deeply troubled to be put in this position as a result of this DCO Application. It has been a complex process from the outset for non-experts and remains so. We are grateful for the work undertaken in Suffolk by our District and County Councils and their planning departments in responding to this NSIP and articulating opposition to the pylons to the National Grid.

At this stage, we urge the Planning Inspectorate to pay careful attention to the specific points we have raised in this submission and press the NG for answers and explanations. We are talking about people's quality of life and livelihoods and all avenues must be explored to mitigate the worst impacts of the Norwich-Tilbury Project.

Cotton Parish Council
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