

NORWICH TO TILBURY PROPOSAL

INTERESTED PARTY REFERENCE NUMBER: [REDACTED] (VILLAGES AGAINST PYLONS)

Dear Sir,

Many thanks for the opportunity to speak at the recent hearing held at Ipswich. You requested that those speaking submit a summary of their key points made and invited attendees to add additional information in the event that there was insufficient time for comments. Please find attached below the summary of my speech, which was shortened in presentation in the interests of time at the hearing. For the avoidance of doubt this submission is supplemental to and does not replace our previous submissions.

1) Thankyou for your time and allowing us to speak today.

2) Villages Against Pylons is a group representing approximately 500 residents of the rural villages north of Colchester and along the southern border of the Dedham Vale (which is a protected national Landscape). These include Boxted, Great Horkesley, Little Horkesley, West Bergholt and Fordham.

3) This is a predominantly rural community where landscapes have remained unmodified for many generations. Our members are typically elderly and many lack access to digital technology. Indeed, being a rural area many of our residents experience a lack of modern facilities: many of the homes in question are far from bus routes, heated using Oil, lack gas supplies, make use of septic tank systems for waste disposal. Electricity supplies are notoriously subject to failure with power cuts several times each year. Broadband can be lacking, slow or expensive. Why then do our residents choose to live in these areas? Predominantly due to the very rural nature of the environment and the natural beauty which is now under attack by National Grid and their proposals.

4) These proposals have caused significant distress amongst our members. That they harm the Dedham Vale is not contested, National Grid make many references to this throughout their document pack. The proposals also cause significant harm to the landscapes of the Fordham and Colne Valleys which - as you will see from the submission made by Colchester City Council as highlighted in National Grids Draft Statement of Common Ground (APP-096) - are held to be of equivalent natural beauty landscape value to the Dedham Vale itself. This is not merely the position of Colchester City Council by the way, it is a view uniformly held by residents across North Colchester as well as in and around the Colne Valley. This area ought to have been treated equivalently to the Dedham Vale itself, just as the Stour Valley Project Area has been.

5) That the Dedham Vale and its setting will be greatly damaged is not, as I say, a matter of dispute. National Grid's document packs have acknowledged this from their very first consultation. Their document "Corridor and Preliminary Routing and Siting Study" (APP-356 in final version) made extensive mention of this. Later the "Preliminary Environmental Impact Report" did the same, although by this time National Grid were seeking to 'downplay' the impacts. More recently:

- Document 6.13.f9 at pages 6,7,8 demonstrate that infrastructure will be greatly visible throughout the Dedham Vale, although our own analysis submitted to you previously demonstrates that the impact is significantly understated in National Grids report.

- Document 6.13.f19 demonstrates that between 11 and 23 pylons will be visible across more than half of the Vale. In some places in the West of the Vale up to 35 pylons will be visible due to the extremely poor choice of location for the Western Sealing End Compound (Great Horkesley - Tilbury Side).

- All major routes into the Vale from the South will pass beneath new pylons. Remember: the Vale is already bounded to the North and West by existing pylons and traversed in the East by the same. At Little Horkesley, immediately adjacent to the proposed site of the aforementioned Sealing End Compound the pylons to the north of the Vale at Assington are already readily visible. In short, if these proposals proceed as submitted then the Vale will be encircled in a "Ring Of Steel". Its setting will be devastated.

6) As mentioned, the view fall locations selected by National Grid are extremely selective and not designed to give a true and fair representation of the harm which will, in fact, occur. Why then do National Grid downplay the impact? The answer to this question was provided in a meeting between David Burns (Villages Against Pylons), Rosie Pearson (ESNP) and John Pettigrew (CEO, National Grid) held on Thursday 15 September 2022 at 10:30am. Mr Pettigrew made statements including the following (which are paraphrased from contemporary notes):

- National Grid do not make more or less profit depending on the route. They are paid a regulatory return on the capital estate. Their focus therefore is to get assets built in the simplest and fastest way possible to increase the estate.
- National Grid are required to make use of undergrounding within the AONB as that eliminates harm.
- National Grid are required to make use of overhead line immediately the project transitions out of the AONB as that eliminates cost.

These statements were never in line with the requirements of NPS-EN5. Although the wording of NPS-EN5 between September 2022 and today has been evolved, the focus was always on harm to the National Landscape, including its setting, and there was never a statement that only infrastructure within a National Landscape could cause it harm. Nor was there ever a statement that harm was considered to be eliminated by undergrounding, which is clearly fanciful.

Mr Pettigrew, when challenged about the use of the word 'required' in both sentences was dismissive: 'we will need to agree to disagree on that'.

The subsequent draft of NPS-EN5 - applicable to this inspection - has put these matters entirely beyond doubt.

7) This is a planning hearing, so what are the requirements?

Firstly, these are set out in NPS-EN5 2.9:

- 2.9.12: 'even residual damage is likely to be unacceptable in planning terms'
- 2.9.19 that National Grid must "seek to avoid altogether internationally and nationally designated areas of the highest amenity, cultural or scientific value by the overall planning of the system connections".
- 2.9.21 the first consideration should be to re-route in order to avoid impact, stating that the route can only impact a National Landscape when the "...natural beauty of these areas cannot feasibly be avoided by rerouting overhead lines..." and makes it clear that it is the impact **to** the beauty of these areas which matters, not the location of the infrastructure: "In these areas, AND where harm to the landscape, visual amenity and natural beauty OF these areas cannot feasibly be avoided by re-routing overhead lines, the strong starting presumption will be that the applicant should underground the relevant section of the line.". There is no statement that the infrastructure in question needs to be within the National Landscape, only that it causes harm to it.
- 2.9.22 details the exemptions to the presumption to undergrounding which applies in NPS-EN5 2.9.20 and 2.9.21. There are only two exemptions: (i) "where it is infeasible in engineering terms"; and (ii) "where the harm that it causes is not outweighed by its corresponding landscape, visual amenity, and natural beauty benefits". COST considerations are NOT referenced in relation to National Landscapes and their setting. COST per NPS-EN5 is ONLY considered in respect of mitigating factors in the context of additional cases where "no part of the proposed development crosses a designated landscape" (National Policy Statement for Electricity Networks Infrastructure, 2.9.23). Only in such cases, the Secretary of State must "weigh the feasibility, cost, and any harm of the undergrounding or subsea option against the adverse implications of the overhead line proposal" (National Policy Statement for Electricity Networks Infrastructure, 2.9.24).

Secondly, there is the requirement imposed by the Levelling-Up and Regeneration Act 2023 (LURA) which goes further, requiring that developers must 'seek to further the aims' of the National Landscape. It is self-evident that aims cannot be furthered in circumstances when the very thing protected is harmed.

It is beyond question that the harm to the Dedham vale is far beyond the merely 'residual' which would itself have been unacceptable in policy terms. The arguments of Cost made by Mr Pettigrew himself, and repeatedly by National Grid in their submissions, are in policy terms irrelevant in the context of harm to the setting of the Dedham Vale.

8) Against this background, the key question is whether there exist ANY alternatives to the proposed route.

- National Grid themselves say that there is. The Strategic Options Backcheck and Review makes the statement that any combination of Northern and Southern routes would suffice and identifies a viable route EAS1 in the South which avoids the Dedham Vale entirely, aligns with existing lines, and is £140 million cheaper over its lifetime. Despite this, National Grid have failed to present or consult upon this alternative at any stage. Their only objection to the use of this route appears to be that they had already pre-determined the currently proposed route and that it would cost them money to change their mind now.

- The East Anglia Review by NESO offered several further alternatives, competitive in cost save for the impact of delays caused by National Grids failure to consult on these options, which avoided the Dedham Vale entirely or minimised harm to it.

These alternatives are real and align with National Policy. The current proposal does not.

9) Why then are we here with this proposal today? Quite simply National Grid selected at the outset the location for the East Anglia Connection Node in Tendring and have back-fit the entire project to that choice of location. Their statement that the route must go through the Dedham Vale is conditioned on that choice. The requirement to underground through the Vale, to destroy the setting of Ardleigh, to damage the Dedham Vale through pylons along its southern boundary would all have been avoided entirely had the connection node been placed elsewhere.

10) As demonstrated by the EAS1 route, or the alternatives set out by NESO in their review, the EACN never needed to be in Tendring. There were alternatives. There are brownfield sites in Essex further to the south. Connection could have been made at Tilbury itself, or as in the EAS1 solution further west. Any of these would have easily 'avoided altogether' the Dedham Vale.

11) Importantly, National Grid have never consulted on alternative locations for the EACN. Although they belatedly have sought to dismiss the option of Boxted Airfield, this is to miss the point: Boxted Airfield and Ardleigh are identical locations in the topological sense when considered from the perspective of the Dedham Vale.

12) National Grid have argued that the EACN needs to be in Tendring to accommodate the North Falls and Five Estuaries windfarms, and lately have added the Tarchon interconnector to their list. This is an interesting point: were it to be true then it would be necessary for this Inspectorate to consider the cumulative impact of all of the infrastructure arising from all of those projects. If the Inspectorate arrive at the conclusion that the choice of the EACN is necessary then this is what they must proceed to do. Unfortunately there has been no examination of the cumulative impact by National Grid, meaning that the proposal in its current form would need to be rejected and re-submitted.

13) But, is it indeed the case that the EACN location is necessary because of those two wind farms? David Burns representing this group met with Five Estuaries at 9am on July 14th 2022 and subsequently at 11:30am on March 27th 2023. He also met with North Falls at 10am on September 9th 2022 and on March 24th 2023. There was one very clear statement made by the wind farms throughout these meetings: they had no desire whatever to connect in Tendring and no say in the matter: the choice was entirely that of National Grid and they were required to connect 'wherever they were told'. On discussion of alternatives the wind farms were similarly clear: they would be ready to connect offshore to an integrated grid (which would indeed be cheaper for them), or to connect to an alternative site as instructed. There was no particular benefit to Tendring in their view. Tarchon have not offered a meeting, although they came along far later when the site had already been selected and - as evidence by changes of location of other interconnectors from much further north to much further south - are not likely to have any preference either, especially given their significantly longer offshore route.

14) In short, the currently proposed route is contrary to explicit requirements in NPS-EN5 and real alternatives existed. The route has been pre-determined as a result of National Grids choice of location for the EACN, which was itself arbitrary, has never been subject to meaningful consultation and which itself causes the dramatic harm to the Dedham Vale and its setting.

15) Even had there been **NO** other alternatives, even had the location of the EACN been **absolutely necessary**, which for the avoidance of doubt is **NOT** the case, then the other requirements if EN5 and LURA would have applied:

i) Pylons between Ardleigh (TB1) and Great Horkesley (TB34) must be removed.

ii) The Sealing End Compound at Little Horkesley (TB35/36) must be moved much further South, away from the Dedham Vale, so as to remove the impacts on the Vale highlighted throughout documents and summarised in 6.13.f9 and 6.13.f19: between 11 and 23 pylons visible across half of the Vale and up to 35 pylons visible from individual locations within.

16) In determining how far South the infrastructure would need to be moved, we take note of the position of Colchester City Council as set out in document 5.9.8 that the area from West Bergholt, past Fordham and Oldham, and into Marks Tey and Great Tey must also be underground for landscape reasons across the Colne Valley and neighbouring amenity reasons in Aldham, in particular. Colchester City Council position is that the Colne Valley is a landscape of exceptional quality and value, and residents agree in full.

Conclusion

It is National Grids positions that 'The project has been designed to reduce as far as practicable the potential adverse effects on the Dedham Vale National Landscape'.

Unfortunately for National Grid, this is not the requirement in Policy and in Law. The requirement is to **avoid this area altogether** and to **further the aims of the National Landscape**.

The threshold for allowable damage is extremely low: even residual impact is unacceptable.

The terms to allow the route to approach the Dedham Vale are extremely narrow: only in cases where there are no other routes AND where it is technically infeasible to go elsewhere or when to go elsewhere would cause more harm to the National Landscape does it become permissible in principle.

Whilst it may be inconvenient for National Grid to go back to the drawing board now, this is a situation of their own making resulting from a pre-emptive choice of location for the EACN and a failure to appropriately consider or to consult upon alternatives.

The route for Norwich to Tilbury should be entirely different.

Even if not, then significantly more undergrounding and mitigation would be required in and around the Dedham Vale and Colne Valley.