

Planning Inspectorate – Application by National Grid Electricity Transmission (NGET) for an order granting development consent for the Norwich to Tilbury Project

Linda Smith - Interested Party Reference Number: [REDACTED]

Written submission supplemental to oral submission made at the Open Floor hearing in Norwich on 12th February 2026

Good Afternoon

My name is Linda Smith. I am speaking in a personal capacity, although with the knowledge and approval of Norfolk Gliding Club (NGC) and Priory Farm Aviators (PFA). I am a pilot, flying instructor and examiner with 39 years flying experience, and my interest in NGET's proposals relates to the impact they will have on flying at Tibenham and Priory Farm airfields.

Tibenham airfield lies about 25 miles south of Norwich. It is a busy airfield, home to the only gliding club in Norfolk, over 50 gliders and other light aircraft, two flying schools and a model aircraft club. Ballooning events and the provision of helicopter support operations (including for the air ambulance and police) are due to start this summer. Priory Farm is one kilometre to the west of Tibenham. It is home to about 30 light aircraft and hosts ballooning events and fly-ins from other airfields throughout the year. Both airfields have club houses and thriving club atmospheres: something to be cherished given the “epidemic of loneliness” afflicting today's society.

NGET proposes to erect a line of pylons up to 200 feet high which, according to its published plans, will run north to south just 750 metres to the west of Priory Farm. In fact, its Development Consent Order (DCO) submission identifies corridors rather than precise pylon locations, so that if the DCO is granted, the pylons could be even closer to Priory Farm.

The dangers to aircraft flying out of Tibenham and Priory Farm should be obvious. To provide some context, the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) has confirmed that the safeguarded radius around both airfields should be 5 km. A map showing the circuit patterns flown by aircraft taking off from and landing at Tibenham and Priory Farm is set out at the end of this submission.

The hazards to aircraft include:

- the loss of a substantial amount of land that is currently available for safe forced landing in the event of engine failure after take-off/on approach to land or in the event of some other serious fault occurring at low height. These are relatively rare occurrences but having suffered an engine failure after take-off myself only last year, I am horrified by the danger that NGET's proposals present;
- as can be seen from the map, all aircraft taking off from or landing at Priory Farm currently turn to the west away from Tibenham ie over the proposed line of pylons.

If they were to be forced to fly north or south until reaching a safe crossing height, this would increase the risk of collision with gliders and other aircraft flying out of Tibenham and take them close to obstacles such as Tacolneston mast which rises to 700 feet agl;

- Tibenham has a number of runways but wind conditions sometimes dictate taking off to the west. (Prevailing winds in the UK are from the southwest). Tests have shown that tug/glider combinations taking off in this direction might not clear the line of proposed pylons not just in the event of an emergency, but if caught in even a slight downdraught;
- for gliders coming in from the west seeking to land at Tibenham, a miscalculation or unexpected downdraught could mean that they fail to clear the the pylons. This represents a particular risk for gliders participating in competition flights;
- balloons have limited directional control and would be particularly at risk when ascending;
- NGET has not revealed whether it plans to use drones to service the pylons. Any such use would create an even more dangerous environment for both airfields by increasing the risk of airborne collisions.

NGET is clearly responsible for ensuring that its proposals do not present a safety risk to aviation. The National Planning Policy Framework makes it clear that local authorities should avoid any development close to an airfield which is incompatible with existing or potential aviation operations. The National Policy Statement EN-1 states at paragraph 5.5.7 that, "It is essential that new energy infrastructure is developed collaboratively alongside aerodromes ... so that safety, operations and capabilities are not adversely affected by new energy infrastructure."

NGET claims that the proposed route for the pylons has been carefully researched and chosen, but Tibenham is clearly marked on OS maps, both Tibenham and Priory Farm are clearly marked on standard aviation maps, and both airfields are well known locally. When it made its initial route presentation, NGET had not consulted either airfield and seemed to be oblivious to their existence and the risks to aviation safety that its proposals present.

Despite representations made by NGC, PFA and others, to date NGET's proposals are unchanged. NGET seeks to justify its intransigence by relying on an impact assessment whose methodology the CAA has described as flawed and unsafe. Although it has acknowledged that aviation safety issues at Tibenham and Priory Farm still need to be resolved, it has failed to engage with NGC and PFA in any meaningful way, in particular refusing to provide documents and displaying reluctance to meet with NGC and PFA representatives to progress matters.

I submit that unless NGET abandons its pylon proposals in favour of offshore routing, the onus is on it to either:

- re-route the pylons so as to remain outside the 5 km safeguarded zones around both airfields; or
- where the pylons infringe the 5 km safeguarded zones, to take the cable underground.

On a more general note, I submit that NGET (which despite its name is a profit-seeking commercial enterprise, not a government institution) must not be allowed to erect pylons across huge swathes of East Anglia, blighting lives and livelihoods as it goes. NGET seems determined to use out-dated pylon technology not because it is the cheapest option, but because it is the cheapest short-term option. NGET says that its proposals are vital in order to bring more renewable electricity to London. If this is so important, it should be prepared to achieve this in a way that does not have such serious adverse effects on the lives of the millions of people who do not live in the London area. If a thing is worth doing, it is worth doing well and should not be done 'on the cheap'.

Thank you.

