

Planning Inspectorate Open Hearing on Norwich to Tilbury

Tuesday 10 February 2026

Good morning. I am Cllr Sarah Wenban CBE representing Cotton Parish Council in Mid-Suffolk.

Thank you for the opportunity to address you today. To date we certainly don't feel as if we've been properly consulted, given considered alternatives, nor have we been taken seriously by the National Grid.

What a pity that the Grid did not adopt as a Mission Statement the words of Hippocrates,
"First, do no harm"

This project causes great harm on so many levels and is a big mistake. How paradoxical that a scheme designed to deliver very welcome green, renewable energy should do so with last century solutions, which are highly intrusive and environmentally damaging, not least in the construction phase. Other countries in Europe and Scandinavia have shown a much more enlightened approach.

So deeply felt is our opposition to the Grid's pylon plans that several residents of Cotton will address you tomorrow. Their concerns will focus on heritage assets, agriculture, health and welfare, the natural environment and wildlife. There are many species of conservation concern or in decline which are undisturbed here.

Of course, we all strongly prefer an off-shore or HVDC undergrounding solution. Why?

Well, one key reason is because the route through Cotton, and some adjacent affected parishes, is situated on high plateau open clay-land, mostly given to agriculture. The ability to mitigate the visual impact of 15 x 50m high pylons through the parish is absolutely minimal, as the Grid admitted at the very first consultation event I attended.

Just imagine 15 of these giants striding across fields with wide open views, hedgerows, much varied wildlife, popular footpaths, and productive fields. Mid-Suffolk District Council (MSDC) point to "under-recognition of landscape quality" and "significant adverse landscape and visual impacts" from the scheme, and cite "current mitigation and compensation measures" as inadequate. The nature and character of our small village will be changed forever. HVDC undergrounding would be far preferable to the pylons.

In our written submission we spoke of cumulative impact. I'll expand. The Grid has followed the shortest, straightest route wherever it can, regardless of the cumulative impact on certain communities, individuals and businesses. Three family farms in Cotton have their viability threatened in the short and possibly long-term as 12 pylons are to be sited on their land, and built by putting high proportions of that land out of use for indeterminate periods. We believe that diversions of the route to minimise the harm to them have not been seriously considered. Given Government policy is to protect the best and most versatile agricultural land, MSDC argue that "agricultural impacts must be safeguarded and potential for land sterilisation mitigated". We agree.

In the time remaining to me, I want to highlight the section of our submission on the construction phase and the plan to build the pylons via miles of haul roads. This is an especially difficult area for non-engineers. But logic tells you that thousands and thousands of

tons of stone/aggregate will have to be shipped into East Anglia from distant quarries to build these temporary haul roads. Add in their subsequent removal and the carbon footprint will be huge. In our village most roads were not built for heavy lorry traffic at all and are currently disintegrating. The haul roads will leave a harmful legacy.

What more environmentally-friendly alternatives might exist, such as temporary matting or trackway systems, and specialised ground stabilisation which may do less harm to the soil. We hope you will not accept haul roads as a fait accompli, will ensure that the Grid is challenged on this and that environmental considerations will be properly weighed against costs.

I hope I have persuaded you of the validity of some of the concerns in Cotton. We are energy consumers and we want the best for all energy consumers, measured over the lifetime of this NSIP. But please let's not go down the route of knowing the cost of everything and the value of nothing.

Thank you.

Addendum to Cotton Parish Council oral and written evidence on Norwich to Tilbury.

In our evidence to the Planning Inspectors, we asked that they press the National Grid on alternatives to the NG's planned haul roads along the route, especially when valuable agricultural land and rural roads will suffer significantly.

We approached a company called Tensar for advice in principle on the suitability of their geogrid systems for building out pylons. The paragraphs below are from a Civil Engineer (MSc, BEng, EngTech MICE). I have not named him/her as I have not asked permission to do so but I can if that would be helpful. Here is what they told me.

“My background is civil with environmental engineering, as well as a masters in sustainable development. My goal is building better infrastructure that is conscious of the materials we use, the money we spend and considers all people. I often focus on communication between those who use, design and make decisions on public/ private infrastructure to ensure we are all benefiting from inclusive engineering, both in the short-term and long-term as well.

Tensar produce multiple types of geogrids which are predominantly aimed at reducing materials required on site. The built environment industry is one of the highest contributing sectors to carbon, not to mention the community impact and costs these projects have. We have been working with contractors, designers, councils and other stakeholders to work towards providing a value engineered solution for the same or improved performance, but with a reduction of stone transported. This results in cost and carbon savings, plus less lorries on the road transporting stone also means less damage to public roads and disturbances to local communities.

We have attached a few case studies and documents explaining what our products do and haul road applications for major schemes we have successfully contributed to already.”

We can let you have the case studies but you may not require these. But it appears there are systems available which could significantly reduce many forms of damage that the Grid's current scheme presents.

N.B. The Parish Council has no interest to declare in this commercial company and simply approached it to learn more.

SW

25.02.26