

Subject: Formal Objection to the Norwich to Tilbury (Great Grid Update) Overhead Pylon Proposal

The Parish Council of Offton & Willisham is formally objecting to National Grid's Great Grid Update proposal due to the significant adverse impacts it will have on the villages, community, and environment. While we acknowledge the need to improve infrastructure and bring power from the North Sea to London, the National Grid Norwich to Tilbury (N2T) overhead pylon proposal is not an acceptable solution for Offton & Willisham or the wider region.

This objection is based on the concerns expressed in our consultation responses from 2022, 2023, and 2024, as well as those from the Essex Suffolk Norfolk Pylons Action Group, whose submissions we endorse. Our objections include:

- **Deficient Consultation Process:** The consultation has been insufficient, failing to properly engage all affected parties and provide adequate information for informed decision-making.
- **Failure to Consider Alternatives:** The proposed route is not the only viable option, and alternative, less damaging solutions—such as HVDC undergrounding or subsea cabling—have not been properly considered.
- **Lack of Impact Assessment:** No comprehensive impact assessments have been provided, particularly in relation to traffic management, environmental harm, and community disruption. The village of Offton will be split in two, and this must be treated with the same level of concern as the protected Dedham Vale Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).
- **Inadequate Consultation Events and Accessibility:** The consultation process has been marred by poor accessibility for residents, including inaccessible event locations, inconvenient timings, and an overreliance on digital platforms, alienating many members of our community.

1. Deficient Consultation and Lack of Transparency

The consultation process for the N2T proposal has been ineffective and flawed, undermining the integrity of the statutory consultation. Key issues include:

- **Inaccessible Drop-in Events:** Consultation events were held in locations difficult for many residents to reach. Furthermore, the timings were not suitable for those working full-time, and individuals with disabilities faced additional barriers.
- **Overreliance on Digital Media:** The consultation heavily relied on digital media, excluding residents who are not digitally literate or who lack reliable internet access. Even library staff were unaware of their responsibilities in facilitating access to key documents.
- **Lack of Alternatives and Information:** Valid alternatives to the proposed overhead pylons, such as undergrounding and subsea options, were not properly explored or presented. Additionally, the consultation materials were insufficient, with critical details such as traffic management plans or environmental impact assessments either missing or inadequately explained.

We are particularly concerned by the lack of information regarding compensation for the impacted individuals and communities. The scale of disruption to daily life, local businesses, and residents' quality of life has not been sufficiently acknowledged, and there has been no clear communication on compensation or mitigation for those affected.

2. Environmental and Visual Impact

Offton is a rural parish with significant environmental and heritage value. The proposed overhead pylons would cause irreparable harm to the landscape, wildlife, and local ecosystem. Offton is home to Middlewood, a medieval coppice and Site of Special Interest (SSI), which houses diverse flora and fauna, including rare orchids, dormice, water voles, and otters. The disruption caused by the construction process will severely damage this delicate environment.

The visual impact of the pylons would be significant and irreversible, with long-term effects on local views and the character of the village. Given the rolling nature of the landscape, it is unclear whether this has been adequately considered within a Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA). The failure to properly account for this in the consultation documents is a significant oversight.

While Dedham Vale is designated as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), the environmental impacts on Offton are equally severe, and National Grid's own documentation (indeed these are the only two areas in the proposal that are specifically highlighted in as suffering significant harm), specifically flags that the impact to Offton and Dedham is the same in terms of environmental harm. Therefore, Offton must be treated with the same level of protection and consideration as Dedham. The destruction of vital wildlife habitats, including ancient hedgerows, woodlands, and protected ecosystems, poses a long-term threat to biodiversity in both areas. This is not only a direct violation of national environmental policies but also contravenes the Environment Act 2021, which mandates a net gain in biodiversity and requires that planning decisions do not contribute to irreversible ecological damage.

Furthermore, the National Policy Statements (NPS EN-1 & EN-5) clearly state that the environmental impacts of development should be minimized and alternatives such as undergrounding or subsea cabling must be fully explored where there is potential harm to sensitive areas. The same mitigation measures proposed for Dedham Vale, such as undergrounding, must be considered and applied to Offton to ensure fair and equitable treatment. Ignoring this equivalence in environmental impact between the two areas would be both unjust and inconsistent with the government's own policies on environmental protection and sustainable development.

We request a comprehensive assessment of the environmental impacts on Offton and Willisham, including a full Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA).

3. Traffic Management and Community Disruption

The proposed construction corridor will split Offton village in two, severing essential travel routes and causing significant disruption. Offton's narrow, single-track roads, with limited passing opportunities, will be ill-equipped to handle the influx of heavy construction traffic. This poses serious risks, particularly for pedestrians and cyclists who use these roads regularly. There has been no consideration in the consultation documents of proposed safety measures to mitigate the increased danger during construction.

The construction process will result in increased noise, dust, and air pollution, negatively impacting the mental health & well-being of our residents. We are particularly concerned about the absence of a traffic management plan or impact assessment to address these issues. The fact that Offton will be split by haul roads, with diversions in place, only exacerbates this concern.

The lack of transparency regarding the compensation and mitigation measures for these impacts is concerning. We urge the Planning Inspectorate to require National Grid to provide detailed plans for compensation and mitigation for those affected.

There is a significant lack of clarity regarding the sequence of events concerning the undergrounding of existing pylons and the installation of the proposed new development. Our key question remains: Why is UK Power Networks undertaking the undergrounding of the existing 132kV powerlines, only for National Grid to come along and install new 400kV overhead lines directly alongside them? This raises serious concerns about both the rationale and the cost-effectiveness of the proposed solution.

In our view, the existing 132kV lines could remain in place, and National Grid should be considering the undergrounding of the new 400kV lines instead of introducing new overhead pylons. This alternative would not only minimize the visual and environmental impact on both Offton but it would also provide a significant financial saving for National Grid by reducing the need for duplicate infrastructure. The costs and disruption caused by the overhead lines could be substantially lowered, and many of the problems currently impacting Offton, such as community disruption and environmental degradation, could be resolved.

There has been no detailed information shared on how the existing and new infrastructure will be integrated or how these two separate developments will be sequenced, particularly in relation to the proposed undergrounding of existing lines. The lack of transparency in the planning and sequencing of these developments raises concerns about whether National Grid is genuinely exploring the most efficient, sustainable, and cost-effective options.

Undergrounding the new 400kV lines would directly align with National Grid's obligations under NPS EN-5 to reduce visual and environmental impact, and it would also address many of the local concerns regarding community disruption. This solution should be given serious consideration before proceeding with the proposed overhead pylon route.

4. Comparison to Dedham Vale and the Need for Equitable Treatment

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5. Community and Social Impact

The proposed overhead pylons will severely impact local farming in Offton & Willisham, which depend on agricultural land for their livelihoods. Construction will disrupt crops, especially during the growing season, as heavy machinery damages soil, delays planting, and harms crops, leading to financial losses and long-term farmland degradation.

In addition to direct crop damage, the pylons' construction will threaten soil fertility and drainage. Heavy machinery will compact the soil, reducing its ability to retain nutrients and increasing the risk of waterlogging. The disruption to natural drainage systems will exacerbate these issues, causing further soil erosion and heightening flooding risks.

Offton already suffers from a high flood risk, as supported by flood maps, and the pylons' construction could worsen this problem. The disruption to drainage and natural water flow could lead to increased surface runoff, further elevating flood risks and damaging both farmland and local infrastructure.

Farming in the parish is already vulnerable, and disruption to land and infrastructure could make some farms financially unviable. The loss of productive land would harm not only farmers but also local businesses like suppliers and markets, negatively impacting the entire rural economy.

Additionally, Bildeston Road is a key access route for national emergencies, particularly for Wattisham Airbase, which plays a critical role in defense operations. Any disruption to this route—due to construction traffic or the pylons themselves—could impede emergency responses and military operations, further compromising local infrastructure and security.

The permanent loss of agricultural land will reduce the parish's overall productivity, threatening the local economy and way of life. These impacts must be fully addressed in the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA), as they are likely more severe than currently acknowledged. The consultation process has not adequately considered the effects on farming, flooding, or emergency access. We urge the Planning Inspectorate to ensure National Grid fully considers the economic, agricultural, and infrastructure consequences of this project.

6. Conclusion

Offton & Willisham Parish Council strongly objects to the proposed Norwich to Tilbury overhead pylon route in its current form. We believe that National Grid has not adequately assessed or considered viable alternatives such as underground HVDC cabling, maintaining existing infrastructure and undergrounding AC Cabling or offshore transmission. Furthermore, the consultation process has been deficient in reaching all affected parties, and we are concerned by the lack of transparency regarding costs, compensation and mitigation for impacted individuals.

We respectfully request that the Planning Inspectorate:

1. Reject the overhead pylon proposal in its current form and require National Grid to fully assess alternatives such as those already referenced.
2. Address the significant deficiencies in the consultation process, particularly in relation to accessibility, information availability, and the lack of meaningful engagement with the community.
3. Ensure a detailed, transparent evaluation of the environmental and social impacts on Offton & Willisham, including specific plans for compensation and mitigation of those affected by construction traffic, disruption, and visual impacts.

It is essential that any decisions made prioritize the preservation of our parish's unique character and the well-being of our community, and that they align with national energy strategy, environmental commitments, and planning policies.

We trust that our concerns will be fully considered, and we look forward to the opportunity to engage further in this important matter.

Yours sincerely,

[Your Name]

[Your Position]

Offton & Willisham Parish Council