

Submission to the Planning Inspectorate concerning Great Waltham and the Waltham Gap, Essex by Jenny Micklem

This is not just a planning issue. It is about the permanent transformation of a historic landscape that has been shaped over centuries, and which we have a duty to protect.

The area in question is not ordinary countryside. It includes conservation areas, Grade II listed buildings, a Grade II* registered park and garden, and even a Grade I listed house of national importance. These are among the most significant heritage assets we have. Their value lies not only in the buildings themselves, but in their setting—the open, rural landscape that gives them meaning, context, and beauty. Take Ball's Farmhouse, a Grade II listed building. Under the current proposals, it will be surrounded by three pylons, one of which will be a tension pylon. The scale and proximity of these structures will completely alter its setting, enclosing it within an industrial framework that is entirely at odds with its historic character.

Urban sprawl from Chelmsford is already creeping ever closer to Great Waltham. For many years, my family—and others like us—have worked hard to preserve the farmland around the village, maintaining the rural character that defines this area and protects its heritage setting. I wish now that we'd allowed houses to be built on our land, because by keeping the landscape as farmland we have lost control of what happens to it. We did meet with NG's advisers to see if our alternative route (still across our land) would be considered (the Western alternative) but in National Grid's DDR April 2024, they give more weight to a Charity – The Wilderness Foundation (only a tenant) - than a Grade 1 Listed Building to justify using the original route. Had we covered the farmland with houses, I doubt the original route would have been considered.

National policy is very clear: the setting of heritage assets must be protected because it is part of their significance. When you harm that setting, you harm the asset itself. And when it comes to high-grade assets—like Grade I and Grade II*—that harm carries very great weight. There has been no meaningful consideration of less intrusive alternatives, such as HVDC underground cables (gas is transported underground across our land, could HVDC cables go in parallel?) or T-pylons, which are specifically designed to reduce visual impact. I feel this option not been seriously explored, in an area that is so clearly sensitive. However, I finally understood why T-Pylons haven't been considered when listening to the Russel Harris KC speaking on behalf of NG at the issue specific hearing 2 (ISH2) Day 2, Part 3 on the 31st April, as he said “..... the TEAM has taken the view they would not be an appropriate alternative to lattice pylons”. His answer demonstrated to me that the consultation was never a fair process – NG have made up their minds, before this process started. I believe a consultation is about asking for views from others, especially from those who will have to look at the pylons on a daily basis. A T-Pylon is far less obtrusive than the low lattice one yet is still 40m high, and as they are narrower, less hedgerows and trees would be lost. Whilst they would need concrete tracks, with a bit of planning through the Waltham Gap, these could be incorporated into farm tracks.

I must also address the way this proposal has been presented to the public. The visual guides produced by National Grid use selective and unusual angles that minimise the apparent scale of the pylons. They do not reflect what people will actually see, they haven't used views from footpaths – the Essex Way will be affected – or taken views from inside people's houses from the 1st or 2nd floor. That is not a fair or transparent way to present a project of this magnitude. People in this community deserve honesty—and respect—because we are the ones who will live with the consequences.

As for mitigation, I cannot believe that NG can ruin the countryside where I live and not have to plant extra trees to compensate for the loss of a view to heritage buildings. They should be planting trees to block the view of the pylons as an extra to their planned re-planting of 1:3 for those they fell. If they fell a 100-year-old oak tree, they plan to re-plant 3 tree whips to replace it. Tree whips are usually between 0.5-1m tall. How long will these trees take to grow? If they die, will they be replaced? If the deer eat or damage them, will they be replaced? Who will be maintaining them? Judging by the whips we've planted on our land, the survival rate is low (one in three), especially now that Essex has become so hot and dry in the Summer with reduced rainfall. Will NG maintain the hedgerows they will replace? Mature trees are available to purchase, albeit at a greater cost, and they do grow well, I have proof in my garden, so I do not agree with the answers I heard at the Issue Specific Hearing.

I ask you to really look at alternative routes around Great Waltham or the option to go down the A12 using existing infrastructure rather than allowing the destruction of what we have in Great Waltham. Or even better to use off-shore cabling – if this project is genuinely to bring off shore energy from Norfolk to London then surely it should go by sea rather than destroying the countryside.