

# Written post-hearing submissions; summaries of and responses to oral submissions made at Hearing ISH2: Day 2: Item 8 - Landscape and Visual

## By the North-West and South-West of Chelmsford Parishes Group (F53AF0A8A)

### Introduction

North-West and South-West of Chelmsford Parishes Group ('the Parishes Group'/'the Group') is an alliance of 9 parish councils: Broomfield, Chignal, Great Waltham, Highwood, Ingatestone and Fryerning, Little Waltham, Margaretting, Roxwell and Writtle.

### Landscape and Visual Effects – General Issues (8.2)

1. The Parishes Group's oral contribution responded to the question posed by the Inspector regarding the Holford Rules and whether they are still relevant for a project in today's world.
2. The Group agrees that the Holford Rules are still legally effective, as they are re-stated in EN-5 (para 2.9.17-18). EN-5 para. 2.9.20 also refers to the forthcoming Electricity Transmission Design Principles which NESO has recently consulted upon. The consultation document indicates that one reason for needing a further set of Principles is that the Holford Rules can be interpreted differently by different parties. As different Holford Rules can conflict in any particular situation, there currently needs to be a balanced judgement by applicants and stakeholders – potentially a weakness.
3. That said, the Group's position is that applying the Holford Rules in its own area of Chelmsford should be a relatively straightforward judgement. Holford Rules 4 and 5, which relate to using topography and vegetation to minimise the visual impact, are common sense and clearly indicate that a route to the east of Chelmsford is likely to perform best. Holford Rule 2 is also clearly relevant to local route options, as it encourages that smaller areas of high amenity (including conservation areas, listed buildings and listed parks and gardens) – such as the Walthams – be avoided.
4. The Group's concerns are therefore primarily with how the Holford Rules have been applied in the Chelmsford area rather than with the Rules in principle. The Group believes that insufficient weight has been placed on Rules 2, 4 and 5. These concerns are set out in more detail in our comment REP3-101.
5. The Group is also concerned that Rule 6 (dispersing new lines away from existing ones to avoid wirescape) may have been given too much weight. Rule 6 needs to be applied with other sections of EN-1 and EN-5 in mind, specifically:
  - EN-1, para. 5.10.4, which emphasises that effects are in part due to the nature and magnitude of change within a landscape; and
  - EN-5, para. 2.10.5, which includes within the Mitigation Strategy *'the rationalisation, reconfiguration, and/or undergrounding of existing electricity networks infrastructure in the vicinity of the proposed development.'*

Both these encourage applicants to avoid dispersing lines into new corridors if there is an opportunity contain them within existing, especially if there are opportunities for rationalisation. In the Chelmsford context, this suggests that the Application should seek to establish its new infrastructure within the existing corridor east of Chelmsford rather than opening up a new corridor to the north and west.

## **Great and Little Waltham (8.3) and Methodology (8.1)**

1. The Parishes Group supports the concerns raised by numerous Interested Parties (IPs) at the Hearing and in writing about the impact of the Application on heritage assets such as the Great and Little Conservation Areas, Grade II Langleys Registered Park and Gardens, Grade 1 Langleys House and numerous Grade II Listed buildings. These concerns are picked up in the Group's written representation (REP1-261) in para 4.2.4 of the Explanatory Paper (Impact on areas of smaller areas of high amenity value) and in more detail in the Alison Farmer Landscape Report at paragraph 2.2, Table 1, The Upper Chelmer Valley/Walthams Area.
2. At the Hearing, we also drew the ExA's attention to the wider landscape context and its interrelationship with the heritage assets (for instance the churches at both Great and Little Waltham). The specific points we raised are set out below.
3. The Great Waltham Village Design Statement (VDS) recognises the Chelmer River Valley as a Special Landscape Area due to its undeveloped natural beauty (Map 1, p.5). This incorporates a designation in the Chelmsford Borough Local Plan (1997). The VDS notes that the landscape quality of parish is in part due to '*a lack of electricity pylons and mobile telephone masts*' (p. 4).
4. The Chelmer Valley is also designated as a Valued Landscape in the Broomfield Neighbourhood Plan (NP) and is described in the associated *Review of Local Green Space, Valued Landscape and Key Views* (REP3 – 106). Whilst the NP Area/Parish boundary defines the Valued Landscape, its characteristics continue northwards into the Walthams. (By contrast, the assessment in the Review recognises that Valued Landscape features do not continue southwards towards Chelmsford – see p.11).
5. The Broomfield NP also designates an area to the west of Church Green ('Land west of Church of St Mary with St Leonard, Broomfield') as a Valued Landscape. Being only 600 metres from the proposed OHL alignment at its closest point, this Valued Landscape would also be impacted.
6. In terms of methodology, the Parishes Group believes these points taken together reveal a lack of weight given to local landscape studies, such as those produced for VDSs and NPs. These tend to be more up-to-date and are more detailed and granular than the higher level, more generic studies evidenced in the Application. This is explained in more detail in our comment at REP3-102. The Group note that although the Applicant state they have taken Neighbourhood Plans into account, neither the Neighbourhood Plans, nor more importantly, the technical assessments which underpin them, are listed in the Bibliography of APP 227.

## **Great and Little Waltham (8.3) – Consideration of Alternatives**

In Section 9.2 of the Design Development Report (APP-122), the Applicant refers to consideration of alternative routes, including to the east of Chelmsford and West of Great Waltham. The Parishes Group maintains that neither of these alternatives have been considered in sufficient detail.

### **West of Great Waltham**

1. An 'indicative route' is illustrated in Figure 9.2 of the Design Development Report. It leaves the Preferred Route at Pylon 126, travelling west, then south-west. An eastern arm rejoins at Pylon 156, whilst an alternative western arm appears to rejoin around Pylon 160 (though this junction is not shown on the map).

2. This indicative route seems to be very indicative and somewhat haphazard because:
  - The initial westward alignment oversails 2 listed buildings and encroaches on Chatham Green quite unnecessarily. A straight alignment would avoid these and be slightly more direct (Holford Rule 3).
  - There is an unnecessarily sharp deviation in the north-western corner.
  - The north-south section could also be straighter, with less impact on listed buildings.

This suggests that the alternative has been considered and dismissed without due analysis of its optimal alignment.

3. **Distance:** para 9.2.4, 4<sup>th</sup> bullet, states that *'the western alternative would be in the order of up to 3km longer'*, which appears to be the main reason for its rejection. However, our calculations show this is incorrect:
  - Eastern arm (TB126 – TB156): **1.36km additional** (10.7km, minus 9.34km Preferred Route equivalent)
  - Western arm (TB126 – TB160): **2.03km additional** (12.59km, minus 10.56km Preferred Route equivalent).
4. The alternative also potentially complies better with Holford Rule 3 in that it has fewer sharp changes of direction compared to the preferred Route, so would require fewer angle towers.
5. Para 9.2.4 makes some broad comparisons between the two routes, as follows. Overall, these seem to support the alternative, despite the opposite conclusion being reached:
  - Bullet 1 states that the alternative *'would generally be located within a less sensitive landscape'*, would *'avoid some pinch points between settlements'* and *'reduce effects on long distance routes'*
  - Bullet 2 says that *'the western alternative would offer the opportunity to reduce potential heritage effects, routed through cropped farmland where there are relatively fewer listed buildings'*
  - Bullet 3 repeats that *'heritage effects are likely to be reduced with the western alternative'*. Clearly it would route pylons away from Langleys Registered Park and Gardens and the Conservation Areas, negating the need for lower height pylons altogether.
6. Although the alternative route would be closer to Pleshey Castle Scheduled Monument, there is considerable potential for strategic tree planting in the wider gap between Great Waltham and Pleshey, to mitigate adverse effects – more effectively than the existing tree cover between the Walthams in relation to the Preferred Route.
7. Bullet 2 of para. 9.2.4 notes that the western arm of the alternative would bring the alignment close to a scheduled monument (Chignal Roman villa archaeological site) but there is no assessment of comparable effects with the scheduled monument on the Preferred Route at Ash Tree Corner.
8. Bearing in mind that currently the Preferred Route crosses a gas pipeline west of Broomfield, requiring construction of a Faraday Cage, it is unclear whether the crossing referred to in 9.2.4, bullet 4 would be additional or relocated.
9. In summary, it is clear that the west of Great Waltham alternative has not been studied or consulted upon in sufficient detail, given its potential to mitigate effects on heritage assets and valued landscapes. In this regard, the application does not comply with the mitigation strategy set out in EN-5, section 2.10.

## East of Chelmsford

1. The Parishes Group has consistently argued for a more detailed consideration of a route to the east and south of Chelmsford. It has set out detailed proposals for such a route in its Written Representation (REP1-261).
2. These proposals are necessarily detailed, including a number of potential variations, as the Group was denied the opportunity to discuss and refine these with the Applicant prior to Application.
3. To fully understand the Applicant's position, the Group (and the ExA) therefore need to receive a full and detailed response to REP1-261. So far, this has not been forthcoming, despite the ExA requesting such in Written Question ALT1.6.
4. To date, the only response to REP1-261 has been the Applicant's Comments on Written Representations (REP2-029). These Comments are at best partial in this regard and in places are confused. Nor do they include a proper response to the Alison Farmer Landscape Report contained in REP1-261. To avoid repetition, the Group refers the ExA to its REP3-104 which outlines the deficiencies in the Applicant's Comments.
5. The Parishes Group accepts that a route to the east of Chelmsford (Corridor L) would experience some technical constraints. These were outlined in 2022 in the Corridor Preliminary Routeing and Substation Siting (CPRSS) report Annexe D (REP1-068). Its conclusions do not rule out use of Corridor L, though noting that *'from a technical perspective, routeing west via Section K would be less complex'* (p.D21). The CPRSS found that all the routes it included were feasible.
6. Since then, opportunities to use this route were enhanced when, at statutory consultation, it emerged that undergrounding of 132kv lines to make way for Norwich to Tilbury was quite acceptable to the Applicant. The Group notes that the Applicant proposes the undergrounding of a 132kv line elsewhere, namely in the area around Bramford substation. In this instance, the presence of the existing overhead line (OHL) informed both the assessment of susceptibility and the evaluation of effects. The Applicant concludes that replacing the 132kv line with a 440kv line would *"reduce the scale of change experienced"* and therefore the level of effect (APP 228, para 13.3.236). In fact, this is required as part of the Mitigation Strategy (EN-5, para 2.10.5) and indeed should have been considered *'at an early stage'* (para. 2.10.1).
7. The dismissal of the eastern and southern routes around Chelmsford on the basis that they would give rise to their own landscape and heritage effects does not provide a satisfactory justification for discounting these alternatives. This is particularly the case given that these routes offer further opportunities for rationalisation and do not contain an equivalent highly constrained or sensitive area such as the Walthams.

To summarise the position to date:

8. The point at issue between the Applicant and the Parishes Group seems to be whether the rationalisation of existing 132kv lines opens up more opportunity to use Corridor L. If it does, the Alison Farmer Landscape Report is clear that it is more consistent with the Applicant's duties to mitigate landscape harms.
9. The Applicant now seems to say that a route to the east of Chelmsford is still not feasible even with rationalisation, citing constraints at Sandon (REP2-029). The Group responds that its proposals contain a variation which enables Sandon to be bypassed altogether. The Group's proposals do not require the new 440kv line to follow the course of the existing 132kv line in its entirety.

10. The Parishes Group therefore continues to await a full, detailed response to its proposals, reserving the right to respond when one is forthcoming. In the meantime, it maintains that no evidence has been presented to show that use of Corridor L is unfeasible.

### **Conclusion to the Alternatives Section**

It is common ground that there will be significant residual adverse heritage, landscape and visual effects arising as a result of the proposed alignment to the west of Chelmsford, especially in the Walthams area. Even the Applicant accepts that impacts on the landscape and visual setting is significant and cannot be mitigated. Given this situation, and the requirement to mitigate through appropriate route selection, the Parishes Group believes that the alternatives must be assessed more thoroughly and consistently than they have been to date. In short, there needs to be a complete re-evaluation of route options around Chelmsford.

### **Ingatestone and Buttsbury - the Wid Valley (8.3)**

1. The Parishes Group has serious concerns about the landscape and visual impact of the Application in the Wid Valley.
2. The Wid Valley southwest of Chelmsford, forms part of the Brentwood Hills landscape character area, although it has its own distinct sense of place. The proposed overhead line would extend into a part of the valley noted for its scenic quality and tranquillity. These points are explored in greater detail in the Alison Farmer Landscape Report, para. 2.2, 'Hylands woodland and Wid Valley (p.s 10 – 13). The Report forms part of our written representation (REP1-261).
3. The Parishes Group also fully supports the written representation made by Ingatestone and Fryerning Parish Council (REP1-169). In addition to the points raised above, this draws attention to the case for substituting T-pylons instead of conventional lattice pylons to mitigate landscape and visual impacts and the impact on the important heritage assets of St Mary's, Buttsbury (Grade II\* 14<sup>th</sup> century parish church) and Ingatestone Hall (Grade I 16<sup>th</sup> century manor house).

Illustrations of open valley landscape in the Wid Valley:



Important heritage assets in the Ingatestone/Buttsbury area: St Mary's Church and Ingatestone Hall:



#### **Any Other Landscape and Visual Matters (8.6) – Alison Farmer Landscape Report**

1. The Parishes Group commissioned an independent landscape report from Alison Farmer Associates. It is included in the Group's written representation (REP1-261).
2. The Report examines the landscape harms arising from the NG Preferred Route and compares them with the harms likely to arise from Corridors L and Q, which constitute an alternative OHL route to the east and south of Chelmsford. It concludes that the eastern arm of Corridor L combined with Corridor Q would be significantly better in landscape/visual and heritage setting terms than the NG Preferred Route.
3. During the Hearing, the Inspector raised this important study and asked the Applicant for their response. There was some confusion on the part of the Applicant's representatives, initially suggesting they were unfamiliar with it but later suggesting they had responded to it in AS-089, the Applicant's Comments on Relevant Representations.
4. In the Group's oral contribution, we emphasised that AS-089 contains no such response. In Table 2.45.1 (page 650), the Report is acknowledged, with a suggestion that a response is included 'below'. However, that appears to be an outline of the Applicant's general approach to various other landscape assessments. It is not a response to the Alison Farmer Report.
5. A response is also missing from Applicant's Comments on Written Representations (REP2-029, pages 277-8). There is a brief and rather confused comment on the Group's overall representation. The deficiencies in the Applicant's Comments are outlined in our response REP3-104 and, in any event, there is no response to the Alison Farmer Report.
6. The Parishes Group is therefore grateful to the Inspector for asking the Applicant to study and respond fully to the Alison Farmer Associates Report. We note the Applicant's commitment to do so – we assume this will be at Deadline 4 and we reserve the right to respond further in due course