

Dear Sir/Madam

INTERESTED PARTY REFERENCE NUMBER: [REDACTED] (VILLAGES AGAINST PYLONS)

Many thanks for allowing our group the opportunity to speak at the recent Issue Specific Hearing 4 at Chelmsford Racecourse.

By now you will have received the response to ISH4 Action Point 5 concerning connectivity between the Colne Valley and the Dedham Vale, provided by Mr Ryan Mills of Planscape on our behalf. We would like to note for the record that this response, like the previous Landscape Assessment, was drafted by Mr Mills acting in a professional capacity; although it was commissioned and paid for by Villages Against Pylons, it reflects his independent professional opinion. Should you have any further questions, we would be willing to forward them to Mr Mills for his consideration.

We would also like to take this opportunity to raise three further matters.

1) The need per NPS-EN5 to 'avoid altogether' the Dedham Vale

At ISH4, National Grid argued that if Government had intended NPS-EN5 to impose requirements upon them, it would have said so explicitly within NPS-EN5 itself.

We agree – and it is our position that it does.

The Holford Rules, which are incorporated into NPS-EN5, state that the major areas of highest amenity value must be "avoided altogether", "even if total mileage is somewhat increased in consequence" (paragraph 2.9.17, first bullet point).

With respect to National Landscapes, the policy is clear that "even residual impacts may well make an overhead line proposal unacceptable in planning terms" (paragraph 2.9.12).

We note that National Grid have made no reference to this requirement to 'avoid altogether', and have made no attempt at the Hearings to defend their position or to discount the alternative routes set out in their own Strategic Options Backcheck and Review – routes which were said to work electrically, and to be more expensive than the current proposals only because they were brought forward by National Grid at a later date. National Grid appear to be hopeful that this requirement will be overlooked.

We trust that the Inspectorate will not overlook it. If this requirement were properly respected, the discussion below concerning undergrounding along the southern boundary of the Vale and through the Colne Valley would be moot.

For the avoidance of doubt, we are not arguing that National Grid's specific alternative route should itself be adopted. We have not considered it in detail, and the public have not been consulted on it. However, the existence of at least one route that is compliant with policy is sufficient to render the current proposals – which are not – incapable of approval.

2) Mis-statements by National Grid and their representatives regarding the requirements of NPS-EN5

In previous submissions we have highlighted National Grid's repeated misrepresentation of the requirements of NPS-EN5, in particular their claim that policy requires the use of pylons as soon as a route passes outside a protected landscape such as the Dedham Vale. This is not what NPS-EN5 says, and we consider it to have been a deliberate attempt to mislead the public and reduce opposition to their proposals.

NPS-EN5 is explicit that the starting presumption in favour of overhead lines is reversed where a route "will cross" a National Landscape. Paragraph 2.9.20 states that in such cases "undergrounding is the starting presumption", subject only to technical infeasibility or where undergrounding itself would cause greater harm. Notably, the words "within" and "cost" do not appear in this context in paragraph 2.9.20. It does not say, for example, that the whole of the section proposed for undergrounding must lie within the protected landscape, nor does it require a cost-benefit analysis to be carried out. It merely requires that the route will cross the National Landscape.

As noted above, paragraph 2.9.12 states that even residual impact to a National Landscape is likely to be unacceptable in planning terms. This clearly recognises that the infrastructure need not sit inside the landscape boundary to cause unacceptable harm; and second, that this statement is significant when read together with the requirement in EN1 that proposals must be acceptable in planning terms in order to be capable of approval.

We would add that the requirement to "seek to further" the purpose of a protected landscape, as set out in Section 245 of the Levelling-up and Regeneration Act 2023 (which came into force on 26 December 2023), goes further still. This is an active duty, not a passive one. It is impossible to further a conservation purpose where harm is caused in one part of a protected landscape, even if improvements are made elsewhere within it. There is no scope in the Act for "net harm" calculations or "balancing" of this kind.

Paragraph 2.9.23 confirms that there will be "other cases" where undergrounding may be appropriate, even where "no part of the route lies within such a designated landscape" (the phrase "no part" further confirms that a route need not lie wholly within a protected landscape for the presumption to underground the whole route to apply). It is only in this latter case – where no part of the route crosses a protected landscape at all – that NPS-EN5 treats cost as a relevant factor in the planning balance. The phrase "no part" reinforces this reading.

It is self-evident that the proposed infrastructure along the southern boundary of the Dedham Vale, and the Sealing End Compound and pylons near to Little Horkesley (TB35/36 to approximately TB40), form part of the same route that crosses the Vale. Where that route or section ends will depend on the relationship of the landscape further along its course to the protected area, but it manifestly cannot end at a point where the infrastructure still causes harm to the protected landscape. Given that the location of TB35/36 is dictated strictly by the cable route through the Vale, and that National Grid themselves accept it will cause harm to the Vale, it cannot be argued that it forms part of a different route or section. It is equally self-evident that harm can be caused to a National Landscape by infrastructure outside its boundaries but within its setting, and that the setting of a protected landscape is integral to its value. On both a plain-English and a technical reading, the provisions of NPS-EN5 recognise this and require its protection. Paragraph 2.9.22 reinforces this by requiring that schemes must seek to further the statutory purposes of the designated landscape, which can go beyond mere mitigation.

Yet National Grid have repeatedly sought to characterise the position otherwise – first to the public during their early non-statutory consultations, then to parish, local and county councils, and now to the Inspectorate itself at ISH4.

You will recall that at ISH4, counsel for National Grid inaccurately quoted one paragraph of NPS-EN5 s2.9, and omitted the most operative sentence of a second, in support of the claim that pylons must be used outside the Dedham Vale. This was a striking position for two reasons: (i) it contradicted National Grid's own case that undergrounding is required between Great and Little Horkesley specifically to reduce impact on the Vale; and (ii) it is, as set out above, plainly inconsistent with

the text of NPS-EN5.

When we read the relevant text of NPS-EN5 aloud to highlight the discrepancy, National Grid did not accept the correction but instead suggested we were referencing the wrong version of the document. We consider this a second, and more serious, attempt to mislead the Inspectorate, given that (a) National Grid have themselves argued that great weight should be given to the current draft NPS; and (b) the relevant requirements of the previous version are, in any event, the same in all material respects.

We trust that the Inspectorate will not be misled.

We submit that, regardless of the outcome of the assessment in respect of the Colne Valley, National Grid are required by NPS-EN5 to extend undergrounding between TB35/36 and at least TB40, in order to remove the impact on the Vale caused by proposed infrastructure on the plateau at Little Horkesley. Proposed Infrastructure at this location will lie outside the boundaries of both the Vale and the Colne Valley, but would inarguably fall within the setting of the Vale, would be widely visible across the Vale (per National Grid's own visual impact assessment), and would also be visible from within the Colne Valley. The extent of this visibility is such that the harm goes very significantly beyond the merely "residual". For the avoidance of doubt, our position on the Colne Valley is that it too is deserving of protection, both in its own right and / or as a consequence of its contribution to the Dedham Vale and its setting. It will therefore be necessary for National Grid to extend the underground section throughout the Colne Valley well beyond TB40.

3) Opportunities for mitigation

During ISH4, National Grid set out their "Opportunities for Mitigation" in a document titled "Document 8.4.12.2 Response to ISH2 Action Point 27 - Masterplans" which set out proposals for the Colne Valley in Appendix E.

In respect of the Colne Valley, they proposed three elements: (i) planting a hedgerow along the road that crosses the valley to the north-east of Fordham, presumably to screen pylons TB36-TB50 from view within the Colne Valley; (ii) small plantations of woodland near TB50, close to the valley floor; and (iii) the introduction of "connective corridors", without specifying what these would be.

These proposals illustrate only National Grid's profound lack of understanding of the Valley and the existing conservation work in the area.

First, screening the Valley from view would not reduce harm to, nor mitigate the impact of, pylons within it. Rather, it would curtail views across what is an open landscape and prevent people from experiencing its natural beauty – a harm, not a benefit. It may also endanger road users: the road in question is a narrow single-track road with few passing places, several sharp bends and deep ditches, and a hedgerow as proposed would render oncoming traffic invisible to drivers. At the same time, the hedgerows would do nothing to mitigate views of the Valley from the Essex Way or from Hill House Woods.

Second, the Valley is already highly connected in ecological terms. Introducing new "corridors" risks disrupting the existing ones and damaging long-established habitat connectivity. The Woodland Trust's Fordham Hall Estate – at over 500 acres, the largest woodland creation site in eastern England – already encompasses a carefully planned mix of grassland, broadleaved woodland and wetland habitats; 120 hectares (300 acres) of new native woodland and 60 hectares (150 acres) of grassland have already been planted, with 19km (12 miles) of unsurfaced paths providing public access. The site is deliberately managed to support diverse wildlife, including otters and water voles, and contains two groups of ancient cricket bat willows thought to be around 200 years old (see:

<https://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/visiting-woods/woods/fordham-hall-estate/>). To propose unspecified "connective corridors" in an area already subject to such meticulous habitat planning demonstrates a disregard for the work already undertaken by conservation bodies and risks disrupting the existing connectivity that has been so carefully established. Third, the proposed woodland site near TB50 sits at a natural flood point on the River Colne. Planting there is likely either to fail, or to have unforeseen and potentially serious consequences for the river and its course over a long stretch. National Grid appears to be entirely unaware that a major natural flood management project has recently been completed in this very location. The Fiddlers Hill wetland scheme, a three-year collaboration between the Essex & Suffolk Rivers Trust, the Woodland Trust, the Environment Agency, Essex Wildlife Trust and Essex County Council, was completed in November 2025 (see: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/czj0dwjrdj4o> and <https://www.essexsuffolkriverstrust.org/fiddlers-hill>). Large, shallow ponds known as "scrapes" have been dug across five hectares of floodplain grazing meadow on the River Colne, specifically designed to increase the meadow's capacity to hold water during heavy rainfall and reduce flood risk locally, including to the road on nearby Fiddlers Hill. The project involved excavating ponds, expanding fen areas, creating shallow channels, and lowering riverbanks to encourage seasonal flooding. It is the first project completed under the East Anglia Natural Flood Management Local Levy funding and is intended to demonstrate how nature-based solutions can protect communities from flooding while enhancing the environment. To propose woodland planting on a site that has just been transformed into a carefully engineered wetland habitat, designed specifically to hold water during flood events, reveals either a startling ignorance of the existing landscape or a wilful disregard for the considerable public investment made in this conservation project.

Finally, the sites described above have been developed thoughtfully, with the support and involvement of the local community, and are a greatly valued asset. Fordham Hall Estate is open to the public with a free car park, and the Essex Way long-distance footpath runs through the estate, providing a popular route for walkers (see:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Essex_Way). Fordham parish itself has an extensive network of public rights of way, with some 44 public footpaths recorded (see: <https://osm.mathmos.net/prow/progress/essex/colchester/fordham/>), demonstrating the area's high value for public amenity and recreational walking. The site has also revealed archaeological interest, with fieldwalking evaluations identifying potential prehistoric occupation areas and Roman brick and tile. A popular 3.9-mile circular walk through the estate is well-documented (see:

<https://www.greatbritishlife.co.uk/magazines/essex/22565560.tried-pretty-countryside-walk-fordham-near-colchester/>). National Grid could scarcely have chosen a less suitable location for these proposals, nor a less well considered manner of proposing them - as an afterthought and with no community involvement.

These proposals should be seen for what they are: an improvised response to a question for which National Grid had no prepared answer, put forward in order to be seen to be doing something. They are not the "something" that is required – they are unhelpful at best and actively harmful at worst, have not been consulted on, and carry no support from the local community, or from Parish, City Councils, or the multiple conservation bodies who have invested years of work in this landscape.

They must also be explicitly rejected.



Norwich to Tilbury Development Consent Order

Issue Specific Hearing 4 (ISH4) Action Point 5

Dear Sir/Madam,

Please see below the response of Villages Against Pylons to Issue Specific Hearing 4 (ISH4) Action Point 5, which requests "*Villages Against Pylons to submit its consultant's comments regarding the visual and functional linkages between the Colne Valley and the Dedham Vale National Landscape.*"

This includes the Examining Authority's request for further clarification regarding:

- the relationship between the Colne Valley and the Dedham Vale National Landscape, including how the Colne Valley contributes to the setting of the National Landscape; and
- the landscape qualities of the Colne Valley and the extent to which these relate to the characteristics associated with National Landscape designation.

In addition, this submission provides comments on the Applicant's Draft Colne Valley Constraints and Opportunities Plans prepared in response to Issue Specific Hearing 2 (ISH2) Action Point 27.

We respectfully request that this submission is accepted into the Examination Library and taken into account by the Examining Authority in its ongoing consideration of the application.

Yours faithfully,


Director and Landscape Architect
Planscape Consultants Limited

Planscape



Question 1: Can you please set out the relationship between the Colne Valley and the Dedham Vale. How does the Colne Valley contribute to the setting of the Dedham Vale?

The Colne Valley contributes to the setting of the Dedham Vale National Landscape through the way in which the wider river valley landscape is experienced. Although the designated boundary marks the extent of the National Landscape, the change in landscape character on the ground is less definitive. Instead, the river valley continues beyond the designation with a consistent pattern of wooded valley sides, pastoral valley floor, mature hedgerows, historic settlements, ancient woodland and a strong relationship between the river corridor and the surrounding landform. This continuity enables the Colne Valley to function as part of the wider landscape setting of the Dedham Vale.

There is also a strong visual relationship between the two landscapes. The elevated plateau and valley sides surrounding the Colne Valley provide extensive views across the wider river valley landscape, allowing appreciation of the continuity of landform, wooded valley sides and historic settlement pattern beyond the National Landscape boundary. Consequently, changes to the character of the adjoining landscape have the potential to influence the appreciation and experience of the Dedham Vale.

The significance of this relationship is reflected in the special qualities identified for the Dedham Vale National Landscape. The Natural Beauty and Special Qualities study¹ (2016) identifies the area's scenic quality, lowland river valley character, relative tranquillity and long-distance views from higher ground as defining special qualities. It also identifies electricity pylons as detractors from tranquillity and recognises that development on upper valley slopes, or which interrupts valued views, has the potential to erode these qualities.

As discussed within our previously submitted 'Landscape and Visual Technical Note', the Applicant's own assessment acknowledges adverse effects on views from the Dedham Vale National Landscape. Whilst we disagree with the Applicant's assessment of the significance of effect, it nevertheless confirms that the proposed development would adversely affect the setting of the National Landscape and would not contribute to the statutory purpose of conserving and enhancing its natural beauty.

Taken together, the shared landscape character and visual relationship between the Colne Valley and the Dedham Vale demonstrate that the Colne Valley forms an important component of the wider landscape setting of the National Landscape. Whilst outside the designated boundary, it contributes positively to the appreciation of the Dedham Vale's special qualities. This is consistent with the National Planning Policy Framework, which recognises that development within their setting should be sensitively located and designed to avoid adverse impacts on the designated areas.

¹ Available at: <https://dedhamvale-nl.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Natural-Beauty-and-Special-Qualities-and-Perceived-and-Anticipated-Risks-Final-Report-July-2016-1.pdf>

Question 2: How do the features of the Colne Valley measure up against the requirements for a National Landscape?

A definitive opinion on whether the Colne Valley would itself merit National Landscape designation would require a considerably more detailed assessment against the statutory purpose of designation, Natural England's designation criteria and an evaluation of the area's natural beauty. Such an assessment falls beyond the scope of the technical review undertaken on behalf of Villages Against Pylons.

Nevertheless, the available evidence demonstrates that the Colne Valley exhibits a wide range of valued landscape qualities. These include a distinctive river valley landform, strong scenic quality arising from the combination of wooded valley sides and open pastoral valley floor, a well-preserved historic settlement pattern, extensive public access and recreational use, relative tranquillity, important habitats including ancient woodland, and strong perceptual qualities associated with its rural character.

These characteristics are consistent with many of the factors identified within the Landscape Institute's Technical Guidance Note 02/21 Assessing Landscape Value Outside National Designations, including natural heritage, perceptual qualities and recreational. Collectively, they support the conclusion that the Colne Valley constitutes a valued landscape.

As such, irrespective of whether the landscape has been formally designated, it is considered to satisfy the requirements of a valued landscape referred to in paragraph 187(a) of the National Planning Policy Framework.



Comments on the Applicant's Draft Colne Valley Constraints and Opportunities Plans

The Applicant's Draft Colne Valley Constraints and Opportunities Plans have been reviewed as part of this submission. Whilst the principle of landscape enhancement is supported, it is considered that the proposed opportunities for the Colne Valley would make only a limited contribution towards addressing the significant landscape and visual effects identified within the Applicant's own Environmental Statement.

The principal adverse effects of the proposed overhead alignment arise from the introduction of pylons into a highly sensitive river valley landscape, resulting in skyline intrusion, changes to landscape character, and widespread visual effects experienced across the valley by residents, users of the PRoW network and road users. These effects occur at the scale of the landscape itself. By comparison, the Opportunities Plans rely predominantly upon hedgerow planting, hedgerow enhancements and habitat connectivity measures. Whilst such measures may deliver ecological benefits, they would not materially compensate for the fundamental changes to landscape character or reduce the extensive visual impact of the proposed pylon corridor.

In addition, some of the proposed opportunities appear to prioritise screening of the development rather than conservation of the existing landscape character. For example, the Draft Opportunities Plan for the northern part of the Colne Valley identifies opportunities to close views of the Project from receptors on the elevated plateau around Fordham through additional hedgerow planting.

Whilst reducing localised views of the proposed infrastructure may have visual benefits, this approach does not reflect the characteristics of the landscape. One of the principal qualities of the elevated land around Fordham is the opportunity to experience expansive panoramic views across the Colne Valley towards its wooded valley sides and rolling landform. These open views are a fundamental component of the area's scenic quality, perceptual experience and appreciation of the wider valley landscape. They contribute directly to the landscape's value and to the way in which the Colne Valley is experienced.

Accordingly, whilst the draft Opportunities Plans demonstrate that some local environmental enhancement may be possible, they are not regarded as providing meaningful compensation for the significant landscape and visual effects identified by the Applicant's own assessment. Nor do they alter the conclusion that the proposed overhead alignment would result in substantial and long-term changes to the character and visual experience of the Colne Valley.