

AENC-NG-CNS-REP-0384

Norwich to Tilbury

Volume 8: Examination Documents

**Document: 8.33 Comments on the RIES and Responses to
any Associated Questions**

Final Issue A

July 2026

Planning Inspectorate Reference: EN020027

nationalgrid

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1. Applicant's Response to the Report on the Information for European Sites

1.1 Introduction

1.1.1 This document has been prepared to respond to the Examining Authority's (ExA) questions in the **Report on the Information for European Sites (RIES) [PD-030]**.

1.1.2 The **Report on the Information for European Sites (RIES) [PD-030]** has been reviewed and the Applicant agrees with the content of **Table A1: Applicant's conclusion on likely significant effects and adverse effects on integrity and the position of Natural England**, however the Applicant would like to add that the conclusions outlined for the Assemblages of international importance under the Stour and Orwell Estuaries Ramsar Site are also applicable to an Assemblage qualifying feature of the Stour and Orwell Estuaries SPA (which is not presented in the table). In addition, no mention of the Thames Estuary and Marshes SPA and Ramsar is made in the table. No Likely Significant Effects (LSE) and no Adverse Effects on Integrity (AEOI) were concluded for all qualifying features of these European Sites which has been agreed with Natural England.

1.2 Applicants Response to the Questions in the Report on the Information for European Sites

Table 1.1 Applicant's responses to the Questions in the Report on the Information for European Sites

Matter	NG Response
RIES Q1 – to the applicant – please confirm how potential impacts on European sites have been taken into consideration as a result of the additional sites identified in the Report on Interrelationship with Other Infrastructure Projects [REP4-296] .	Within paragraph 2.2.2 of the ExA's Report on the Implications for European Sites (RIES) [PD-030], the ExA references five Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects (NSIPs) identified within 8.4.3 Interrelationship with Other Infrastructure Projects Report [Revision C], that are not within 5.3 Habitats Regulations Assessment Report [APP-082]: • Sheringham and Dudgeon Extension Projects • Longfield Solar Farm • Tilbury 2 • Rivenhall Integrated Waste Management Facility and Energy Centre • Tarchon Interconnector. The Applicant can confirm that of the five projects listed above, four (Sheringham and Dudgeon Extension Projects, Longfield Solar Farm, Tilbury 2 and Rivenhall Integrated Waste Management Facility and Energy Centre) were reviewed and considered when preparing 5.3 Habitats Regulations Assessment Report [APP-082], and subsequently not included when compiling the list of in-combination projects in the 5.3 Habitats Regulations Assessment Report [APP-082] as they did not meet the defined criteria for inclusion within the in-combination assessment – refer to Appendix A for further detail. Paragraph's 2.8.15 and 2.8.16 from the 5.3 Habitats Regulations Assessment Report [APP-082] are presented below to detail the approach to how projects were selected for the in-combination assessment. <i>'2.8.15 For this HRA, only projects that were located within the Impact Risk Zone (IRZ) of a European Site and also fell within the Zone of Influence</i>

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	<i>(ZoI) [sic. from the Project Order Limits] were considered in the in-combination assessment at Stage 1 Screening. The nature of the plans or projects was also considered when determining the potential for an in-combination effect which ruled out in-combination effects for most small projects and local plan site allocations.</i> 2.8.16 <i>When considering a potential in-combination effect at screening, due to the discreet impact pathways associated with the Project, the risk of in-combination effects with other plans or projects such as residential projects and employment land allocations was considered negligible. Therefore, the in-combination effects screening focussed on other linear and energy transmission projects.'</i> These four projects were not included in the list of in-combination projects as they did not meet the above criteria. Therefore, an in-combination effect on the integrity of the European Sites was ruled out at screening stage because they didn't meet the criteria for sites to have an in-combination effect with Norwich to Tilbury. Further details of why the four projects were not included are presented in Appendix A of this document. Tarchon Interconnector was not included within 5.3 Habitat Regulations Assessment Report [APP-082]. This is because the list of developments considered within the in-combination assessment was drawn from the long list of cumulative developments which used a cut-off date of 1 April 2025. The s35 Direction was not issued for the Tarchon Interconnector project until 7 April 2025, however, since April 2025, the Applicant has been undertaking monthly reviews of planning registers and has continued to do so during the Examination period, to check whether there are any new relevant developments that need to be considered. The Tarchon Interconnector project was included in 6.17.1 Environmental Statement Chapter 17 – Cumulative Effects – Response Update [REP4-163] at Deadline 4.

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	Limited details of the Tarchon Interconnector project were available at Deadline 4 and there is no HRA Screening available for the project, however, a Scoping Report was published on 8 April 2026. The onshore section of the project will involve a 15 km stretch of underground cable from the coast (immediately south of Harwich) to a converter station inland. The converter station will then connect with approximately 5 km of underground cable to National Grid's proposed new East Anglia Connection Node Substation (EACN). The Tarchon Interconnector is located within the IRZ of the Stour and Orwell Estuaries Special Protection Area (SPA) and Ramsar Site and within the Zol of Norwich to Tilbury. It therefore does meet the criteria set out in paragraphs 2.8.15 and 2.8.16 in 5.3 Habitat Regulations Assessment Report [APP-082] and would have been included in the HRA in-combination project list if details were known before the cut-off date of 1 April 2025. As part of ongoing assessments, an in-combination assessment has been undertaken. This confirms that the inclusion of Tarchon Interconnector within the in-combination assessment of the HRA would not affect the conclusions reached at either Stage 1 or Stage 2 of the in-combination assessment. Rationale for this is provided below. <i>Stage 1</i> In the absence of a HRA Report for the Tarchon Interconnector project it is appropriate to use the extensive information available for comparable projects to inform the in-combination assessment. It is assumed that the pathways to impacts from Tarchon Interconnector that could cause a likely significant in-combination effect with the Norwich to Tilbury Project, would be comparable to the Five Estuaries Offshore Wind Farm and North Falls Offshore Wind Farm outlined in 5.3 Habitat Regulations Assessment Report [APP-082]. This is because the Tarchon Interconnector Scoping boundary overlaps with the Norwich to Tilbury Order Limits at the proposed new EACN Substation, where the Five Estuaries and North Falls projects also connect. These three projects (Five Estuaries, North Falls and Tarchon

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	Interconnector) all comprise onshore underground cabling with similar construction methods. Therefore, the pathways to impacts with the potential to cause a likely significant in-combination effect will be construction works causing habitat loss and disturbance to lapwing (a waterbird assemblage species) using potential functionally linked land (FLL) outside the Stour and Orwell Estuaries SPA and Ramsar Site (the same pathways to impact as the assessed projects). <i>Stage 2</i> The potential pathways to impact associated with the Tarchon Interconnector are comparable to those of Five Estuaries Offshore Wind Farm and North Falls Offshore Wind Farm. This was considered extensively in relation to Five Estuaries and North Falls in 5.3 Habitat Regulations Assessment Report [APP-082], the primary concern considered at Stage 2 related to impacts upon lapwing. Therefore, an assessment has been undertaken to determine if the addition of the Tarchon Interconnector would change the conclusions of the assessment has been carried out. It is stated within 5.3 Habitat Regulations Assessment Report [APP-082], that lapwing use a vast area of inland arable habitat during the non-breeding season which is dependent on arable practices and management (manure spreading and sugar beet production) and therefore the areas used change year to year. Within the east of England there is considerable arable habitat for lapwing to use. This has been demonstrated by mapping potential habitat for lapwing within 5 km of the Stour and Orwell Estuaries SPA and Ramsar Site as shown within Figure 3: Assessment of Field Sizes Suitable for Lapwing and Golden Plover within 5 km of the Stour and Orwell Estuaries SPA and Ramsar Site in Appendix C within 5.3 Habitat Regulations Assessment Report [APP-082]. This shows an extensive area of possible habitat for this species in the wider area. It should be noted however, that surveys have not identified FLL for lapwing (or other qualifying features) where the Tarchon Interconnector project and the Norwich to Tilbury Project coincide. It is also noted that the

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	construction periods of these two projects overlap by a single year, with Norwich to Tilbury due for completion (including demobilisation) by 2031 and the updated earliest start date of Tarchon Interconnector project being 2030. This will reduce the possibility of an in-combination effect, while it is likely habitats at the FLL locations identified in 5.3 Habitat Regulations Assessment Report [APP-082] (located within Order Limits between 3 km and 7 km to the north-east of the proposed new EACN Substation), would be restored and available to birds by the time construction works at Tarchon Interconnector commence. It is therefore concluded that the inclusion of the Tarchon Interconnector to the in-combination assessment would not change the conclusions of the assessment and therefore the Norwich to Tilbury HRA is robust. <u>Delivery of Norwich to Tilbury and Tarchon Interconnector Projects would not lead to an adverse in-combination effect on the integrity of qualifying features of the Stour and Orwell Estuaries SPA and Ramsar Site or any other European Site.</u> <i>Multiple Project In-combination Effect</i> 5.3 Habitat Regulations Assessment Report [APP-082] considers the potential for a multiple project in-combination effect from the Norwich to Tilbury, Five Estuaries Offshore Wind Farm and North Falls Offshore Wind Farm projects. The Five Estuaries Offshore Wind Farm and North Falls Offshore Wind Farm projects are however due to be complete by 2030, which is prior to the commencement of the Tarchon Interconnector project. Therefore, the Tarchon Interconnector project is not considered to add to the previously assessed multiple project in-combination effect, or change the conclusions reached. As such, the Norwich to Tilbury HRA is considered robust. <u>Delivery of Norwich to Tilbury, Tarchon Interconnector Project, North Falls and Five Estuaries would not lead to an adverse in-combination effect on the integrity of qualifying features of the Stour and Orwell Estuaries SPA and Ramsar Site or any other European Site.</u>

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RIES Q2 the applicant is requested to provide information regarding the condition of Norfolk Valley Fens SAC, Stour and Orwell Estuaries SPA and Stour and Orwell Estuaries Ramsar site, including if the site is in unfavourable condition (to include unfavourable recovering). Outline how any necessary mitigation measures would contribute to improving the condition of these sites.	6.17.1 Environmental Statement Chapter 17 – Cumulative Effects – Response Update [Revision B] has been submitted at Deadline 7 and there are no additional NSIPs to consider in the HRA Report. The legal test under Regulation 63 of the Habitats and Species Regulations 2017, is whether the competent authority can ascertain that the proposal will not adversely affect the integrity of a European Site in view of its conservation objectives. The HRA process is concerned with: • Screening for Likely Significant Effects (LSE) • Appropriate Assessment where required • Determining whether adverse effects on site integrity can be ruled out after mitigation. Therefore, a HRA is required to assess effects on site integrity and identifying measures to avoid or minimise adverse effects, rather than requiring a project to improve site condition. Further details on site conditions and mitigation are given below. Natural England does not publish condition assessments for European Sites directly. Instead, condition assessments are undertaken for the Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) that underpin these designated sites. <i>Norfolk Valley Fens Special Conservation Area (SAC)</i> Norfolk Valley Fens SAC comprises several separate SSSIs. Of these, Flordon Common SSSI is the only site downstream of the Project and therefore the only component potentially affected by it. The other component SSSIs are remote from the Project and have no hydrological or other connection and no pathways to effect. Flordon Common SSSI is divided into two management units: • Unit 1 comprises lowland fen, marsh and swamp habitats and is assessed as being in unfavourable recovering (no change) condition • Unit 2 comprises lowland broadleaved, mixed and yew woodland and is assessed as being in favourable condition.

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	The site condition assessment notes that habitat management is being implemented and remains necessary to maintain and enhance the condition of these habitats. The Norfolk Valley Fens SAC Site Improvement Plan identifies the principal threats and pressures affecting the SAC and sets out the actions required to address them. The only action specifically relating to Flordon Common concerns a lack of information on the distribution of the narrow-mouthed whorl snail <i>Vertigo angustior</i>. Project mitigation measures have been designed to protect water quality within the watercourse that crosses the Order Limits before flowing adjacent to Flordon Common SSSI. Maintaining water quality would avoid adverse effects on the wetland habitats and species supported by the SSSI, including the narrow-mouthed whorl snail. These measures would protect the site from deterioration and ensure no adverse effect on the proposed improvement measures outlined within the Site Improvement Plan. The Projects mitigation measures would ensure that the hydrological condition of the SAC is protected and prevent any deterioration in water quality or quantity, but these measures are not expected to improve the SAC's condition beyond the current baseline. The mitigation measures would ensure that the Project would have no adverse effect on the integrity of the SAC, the qualifying habitats and species or its conservation objectives. The Project would have no effect on the habitat management activities that are required to maintain and improve the condition of the habitats within Flordon Common SSSI. <i>Stour and Orwell Estuaries SPA and Ramsar Site</i> The Stour and Orwell Estuaries SPA and Ramsar site are underpinned by Stour Estuary SSSI and Orwell Estuary SSSI. <i>Stour Estuary SSSI</i> The Stour Estuary SSSI is divided into ten management units. The unit closest to the Project is Unit 1, which comprises littoral sediment and is in

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	unfavourable declining condition. The condition assessment attributes this to habitat loss caused by coastal squeeze resulting from sea defences. Unit 2, also comprises littoral sediment, is in favourable condition. Unlike Unit 1, it is not affected by coastal squeeze and continues to support viable high-tide bird roosts. The Norwich to Tilbury Project would not affect the coastal processes responsible for the condition of either unit. <i>Orwell Estuary SSSI</i> The Orwell Estuary SSSI comprises 23 management units. The units closest to the Project are Units 1, 2 and 18. • Unit 1 consists of littoral sediment in unfavourable declining condition, primarily due to coastal squeeze, which is affecting overwintering bird populations • Unit 2 is also littoral sediment in unfavourable declining condition due to coastal squeeze. Some wintering bird populations are considered favourable, while others are assessed as unfavourable recovering or declining, reflecting wider national trends. • Unit 18 comprises the navigational channel, which is regularly dredged to maintain shipping access. It is also assessed as unfavourable declining. As with Unit 2, some wintering bird populations are in favourable condition, while others reflect broader national declines. The Norwich to Tilbury Project would not influence the coastal processes responsible for these conditions, nor would it affect the national trends driving changes in wintering bird populations. The Site Improvement Plan for the Stour and Orwell Estuaries SPA identifies the key pressures and threats affecting the site. The Norwich to Tilbury Project would neither increase nor reduce these pressures and would therefore have no direct or indirect influence on the condition of the designated habitats.

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	To protect the Stour and Orwell Estuaries SPA and Ramsar site, the Project incorporates standard and embedded mitigation measures to maintain water quality. In addition, measures secured through 7.2 Outline Code of Construction Practice [Revision G] will protect air quality within areas of functionally linked land close to construction activities. These measures will prevent deterioration of habitat quality within functionally linked land and avoid adverse effects on qualifying bird species. These measures will not improve the condition of the habitats within the underlying SSSIs beyond their current status, but they do ensure that water quality is protected so that the Project would have no adverse effects on qualifying habitats and species. The HRA has shown that there is sufficient alternative habitat available for qualifying bird species that disturbance to birds using functionally linked land would have no significant effect on the qualifying bird species or the bird assemblage feature.

Appendix A.

Details why NSIPs were not included in the HRA

Appendix A

Details why NSIPs were not included in the HRA

The following paragraphs outline why four Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects (NSIPs) identified in RIES Q1 were not included in **5.3 Habitats Regulations Assessment Report [APP-082]** in-combination assessment.

Sheringham and Dudgeon Extension Projects

- Does not meet criteria set out in paragraph **2.8.15** of **5.3 Habitats Regulations Assessment Report [APP-082]**.
- Criteria 2.8.15 - Sheringham and Dudgeon Extension Projects and the Norwich to Tilbury Project are not located within the same IRZ (as defined within the **5.3 Habitats Regulations Assessment Report [APP-082]**) of a European Site.

Longfield Solar Farm

- Does not meet criteria set out in paragraph **2.8.15** of **5.3 Habitats Regulations Assessment Report [APP-082]**.
- Criteria 2.8.15 - Longfield Solar Farm and the Norwich to Tilbury Project are not located within the same IRZ of a European Site.

Tilbury 2

- Does not meet criteria set out in paragraph **2.8.16** of **5.3 Habitats Regulations Assessment Report [APP-082]**.
- Criteria 2.8.16 – Tilbury 2 is primarily redevelopment works within the existing port site and upgrades to existing infrastructure. It is not a linear or energy project such as the Norwich to Tilbury Project.
- As both Tilbury 2 and the Norwich to Tilbury Project fall within the same IRZ of the Thames Estuary and Marshes SPA and Ramsar Site, further justification as to why it was not included, and why there is no in-combination effect is provided here.
- The focus of the Tilbury 2 HRA was on impact pathways with estuarine birds using FLL along the River Thames upstream of the Thames Estuary and Marshes SPA and Ramsar Site, particularly habitat loss and disturbance. The Norwich to Tilbury Project is, however, located 1.7 km inland from the Thames Estuary and Marshes SPA and Ramsar Site and will not affect estuarine qualifying species through habitat loss or disturbance. Both the Tilbury 2 and Norwich to Tilbury HRA have concluded no LSE (alone and in-combination) on features of qualifying interest of the Thames Estuary and Marshes SPA and Ramsar Site. Therefore no in-combination assessment was required.

Rivenhall Integrated Waste Management Facility and Energy Centre

- Does not meet criteria set out in paragraph **2.8.15** and **2.8.16** of **5.3 Habitats Regulations Assessment Report [APP-082]**.
- Criteria 2.8.15 - Rivenhall Integrated Waste Management Facility and Energy Centre and the Norwich to Tilbury Project are not located within the same IRZ of a European Site.
- Criteria 2.8.16 - Rivenhall Integrated Waste Management Facility and Energy Centre is a small-scale project (installation of internal equipment within existing structure) which is not considered to share the same impact pathways as the large-scale, linear Norwich to Tilbury Project.

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