

Norwich to Tilbury (EN020027)

Deadline 8 submission: Cumulative Fire, Safety and Emergency-response Risk

**From: Carolyn Mason, Ardleigh Resident.**

**IP reference:** [REDACTED]

**Date:** 3 August 2026 **Deadline:** 4 August 2026

I write to you as a fearful resident of Ardleigh. In these drought conditions we live in dread of a field fire taking off and spreading to our property. Something we are witnessing happening nearby and on our tv screens daily, during this continuing heatwave. I have used Copilot to research the Examining Authorities document library, but the feeling and gist of the following are mostly my own words and sentiments.

I ask the Examining Authority to consider the combined fire, explosion, toxic-emission, wildfire and emergency-response risks created by the concentration of major electricity infrastructure around the proposed East Anglia Connection Node (EACN). The cluster includes the EACN, the onshore infrastructure for Five Estuaries and North Falls, the Tarchon converter station, and existing or proposed battery energy storage systems (BESS). These developments share rural roads, water resources, receptors and dependence on the same emergency services and should not be assessed in isolation.

The Parish Councils of Ardleigh and Little Bromley raised safety and resilience in their response to ExQ2 [REP5-227]. Their concern is not that electricity infrastructure is inherently unsafe, but with the consequences of its scale and clustering around the proposed substations in an open rural location, together with the practical constraints of surrounding roads and emergency access. I am very concerned that this has not been sufficiently considered by the Applicant.

A robust assessment must test events and escalation across the whole cluster. Relevant BESS hazards include thermal runaway, difficult-to-extinguish fires, re-ignition, flammable or toxic gas release, explosion, contaminated firewater and propagation between units. Transformers, substations, converter stations and cabling add electrical and oil-fire hazards.

The key issue is not only the probability of an incident at one installation, but whether an event on one site, or indeed nearby, could restrict access to another site, require simultaneous cordons or evacuation, exhaust available firefighting water or specialist chemicals, or divert specialist crews from other emergencies. The assessment should include cascading or simultaneous incidents; smoke, toxic-plume and thermal effects on homes, farms, workers, roads and habitats; two independent appliance routes; turning and staging space; resilient water supplies; contaminated-firewater containment; loss of power or communications; public warning; and construction overlap or later expansion.

July 2026 drought reporting has recorded very dry and hot conditions, falling river flows and groundwater levels and increased wildfire risk: NOTE recent field and common land fires in Essex and East Anglia that escalated very quickly to unprecedented levels. Prolonged drought and heat increase vegetation flammability and fire spread, reduce available water and place competing demands on emergency resources. The assessment must therefore apply reasonable worst-case climate allowances over the development's operational life, rather than rely on historic averages or treat current conditions as exceptional. We are facing a climate emergency, and every consideration must be given to this threat.

Essex County Fire and Rescue Service (ECFRS) capacity should not be assumed adequate merely because individual developers consult it. ECFRS guidance emphasises early

engagement, chemistry-specific detection and suppression, safe appliance access, substantial on-site water where hydrants are insufficient, environmental controls, emergency information, training and exercises. The National Fire Chiefs Council similarly calls for site-specific risk management and robust emergency plans agreed with the local service.

The Applicant should provide written, project-specific evidence identifying realistic attendance and reinforcement times, available crews and specialist appliances, water-tanker needs, mutual aid, communications, hazardous-material capability, firefighter welfare during a long incident and effects on wider county cover. Any shortfall must be addressed by enforceable, developer-funded measures.

The Applicant's published final Statement of Common Ground overview does not appear to identify a separate agreement with ECFRS? A dedicated Statement of Common Ground, or equivalent signed statement, should be required before the Examination closes.

I respectfully ask the Examining Authority to require, before construction or operation of the relevant works:

1. **An independent cumulative assessment** covering the EACN, Five Estuaries, North Falls, Tarchon and all relevant BESS, including cascading and simultaneous incidents under drought, heatwave and wildfire conditions.
2. **Written ECFRS assurance** that access, staffing, specialist capability, water, incident command, mutual aid, training and wider service cover are adequate, with assumptions and limitations stated.
3. **Approved safety and emergency plans** prepared with ECFRS, the Environment Agency, highway authorities and water undertakers, reviewed before commissioning and after any material technology, layout or capacity change.
4. **Secured physical safeguards** including independent emergency access, appliance turning and staging space, evidence-based separation, vegetation management, resilient on-site firefighting water, controlled drainage and contaminated-firewater containment.
5. **Monitoring, exercises and funding** for detection, emergency information, plume response, public warning, regular multi-agency exercises, independent audit and any additional appliances, equipment, infrastructure, staffing or training made necessary by the cluster.

## Conclusion

The concentration of nationally significant electricity infrastructure around Ardleigh and Little Bromley creates a cumulative risk profile that should not be understated through separate project assessments. In the absence of an integrated assessment, signed ECFRS evidence and secured mitigation, the Examining Authority should not conclude that the cumulative fire and emergency-response effects are acceptable.

**Signed:** Carolyn Mason - concerned resident and near neighbour to the proposed EACN and other infrastructure.

**References:** ExQ2 response [REP5-227]; Planning Inspectorate project and examination documents; ECFRS BESS developer guidance; National Fire Chiefs Council grid-scale energy-storage guidance; Environment Agency drought reporting, July 2026.