

Colchester City Council's (CCC) Closing Statement

Application for a DCO - Norwich to Tilbury

1. This closing statement aims to set out what Colchester City Council considers to be the fundamental issues with the application for a Development Consent Order by NGET. It aims to be a succinct summary and not repeat the detail previous submissions including the LIR, WR and responses to the ExA's questions.
2. Colchester City Council has engaged positively, constructively and continuously with National Grid throughout the development and examination of the Norwich to Tilbury proposal. The Council recognises the significant national importance of reinforcing the transmission network and acknowledges the role that additional electricity infrastructure will play in supporting the UK's energy security and decarbonisation objectives. The Council also recognises that substantial effort has been invested by both parties in seeking to narrow areas of disagreement, and the Statement of Common Ground demonstrates that agreement has been reached on a considerable number of technical and procedural matters.
3. However, despite this extensive engagement, a number of fundamental matters remain unresolved. These are not minor drafting points or matters of detail, but issues that go to the heart of whether the proposal represents the most appropriate solution and whether the resulting impacts on Colchester's communities, landscapes, heritage assets and environment have been adequately avoided, minimised, mitigated or compensated.
4. The Council's primary concern remains the degree of permanent harm arising from the proposed overhead line infrastructure and associated works across the Colchester area. Throughout the project development process the Council has consistently maintained that alternative approaches, including solutions involving greater use of offshore infrastructure, HVDC technology and further undergrounding, should have been explored more fully where they may have reduced environmental impacts whilst still delivering the required network capacity. Whilst the Applicant has explained its reasoning and remains committed to the proposed solution, the Council remains unconvinced that all credible alternatives have been exhausted or that the resulting balance between engineering, cost and environmental impact has been appropriately struck.

5. In landscape terms, the Council remains particularly concerned about the significant residual effects that would arise across some of the district's most sensitive and valued landscapes. This includes impacts associated with the Colne Valley landscape, the setting of the Dedham Vale National Landscape, public rights of way, open access land and the wider rural character of the area. The Council's position is not simply that impacts will occur; rather it is that the Environmental Statement itself demonstrates that significant residual landscape and visual effects will remain following mitigation, yet insufficient compensation has been proposed to address those long-term adverse consequences. The Council remains of the view that the mitigation hierarchy has not been fully applied and that greater consideration should have been given to additional undergrounding, route refinement and compensatory measures capable of delivering meaningful environmental enhancement for affected communities.
6. The Council also continues to have concerns in relation to biodiversity, arboriculture and green infrastructure matters. Whilst progress has been made through ongoing discussions, significant points remain unresolved regarding the loss of trees, long-term replacement and monitoring arrangements, the adequacy of habitat restoration assumptions, the delivery and location of Biodiversity Net Gain, the lack of ambition to provide 20% BNG uplift and the degree to which Local Nature Recovery Strategy priorities will ultimately influence mitigation and compensation proposals. The Council remains concerned that the long-term environmental outcomes currently proposed may not adequately reflect the scale of the losses and disruption associated with the project.
7. Whilst the Council welcomes the Applicant's commitment to community benefits outside the DCO process, it remains concerned that communities experiencing long-term and irreversible impacts will receive limited tangible benefit through the planning process itself. The Council continues to encourage National Grid to maximise opportunities for local skills, employment, environmental enhancement and wider community investment in recognition of the substantial burden that host communities will bear.
8. Colchester City Council does not object to the principle of investment in the national electricity transmission network or to the achievement of the Government's wider energy objectives. However, the Council remains concerned that the current proposal would give rise to significant and lasting adverse effects within the district that have not been adequately avoided, mitigated or compensated. The Council respectfully invites the Examining Authority and, ultimately, the Secretary of State, to give substantial weight to the matters identified as "Not Agreed" within the Statement of Common Ground, together with the detailed evidence contained within the Council's Local Impact Report, Written Representations and subsequent examination submissions. If the project is considered capable of being consented, the Council strongly urges the Secretary of State to secure the highest possible level of environmental mitigation,

compensation, community benefit and ongoing oversight in order to protect the interests of Colchester's residents, landscapes, heritage assets and natural environment.

9. The Council would also like to take the opportunity to highlight some key areas of concern:

9.1. The position of the East Anglian Connection Node (EACN) substation at Ardleigh was predetermined and the fact the North Falls and Five Estuaries Windfarms which require the EACN were submitted long before this DCO was submitted is clear evidence of that. It is this location that then dictates the route of the alignment, and the corresponding order limits. It is the location of the EACN that produces a route that in turn causes significant harm to the Dedham Vale National Landscape (NL). This does not comply with NPS EN5 which requires harm to NLs to be avoided in the first instance.

9.2. The ES has noted the significant harm in visual and landscape terms. The applicant does not shy away from the fact the scheme will cause significant residual harm. As set out in the LIR, the Council consider the harm to be even more significant than the applicant, however. Whilst the applicants argue that a scheme of this length and scale necessitated proportionality, CCC would have like to have seen a much more extensive approach to the viewpoints selected, noting that the ZTV shows potential visibility from far greater distances than the majority of the viewpoints (VPs) illustrate. This is particularly pertinent in the Dedham Vale NL and in the Colne Valley villages near to Aldham, Fordham and Fordstreet. CCC would like to acknowledge the assessment the ExA has clearly already made in the Colne Valley which highlights its importance as set out by CCC and the community groups in their submissions and their independently commissioned landscape appraisals.

9.3. The embedded mitigation is not sufficient due to the scale of the works proposed – it is simply not possible to mitigate the impact of a line of numerous 50m+ latticework towers. In terms of compensation, NGET is clear that they do not consider any necessary and will request the SoS does not agree with the limited offsetting they are still considering, be that via a legal agreement or article in the DCO.

9.4. The scheme will permanently and irreparably harm the outlook of many of the residents close to the OHL section, reducing the enjoyment of their dwellings and their local areas and therefore demonstrably impacting their wellbeing and quality of life. The rural landscape is the reason many live in this area. This is particularly pertinent in terms of the villages that are close to the OHL, for example Langham, Boxted, Great Horkesley, West Bergholt, Eight Ash Green, Aldham, Fordham, Fordstreet, Great and Little Tey and Marks Tey,

plus the isolated dwellings between those. There is no way to reasonably mitigate this.

- 9.5. The scheme will have a harmful impact on tourism, rural business and farming in the CCC area. The rural isolation is a key reason to visit the area, to walk the footpaths include the Essex Way and to enjoy the visual and cultural wonder that is the Dedham Vale NL. The proposal will materially damage this tourist and business offer. Much of the CCC area is rural hinterland and it is this section of the area that is most impacted by the scheme. The construction phase will seriously limit access to farms, business and the areas tourist offer, including the Public Right of Way network.
- 9.6. Despite the technical difficulties put forward by the applicant, CCC still struggle to rationalise the argument for the siting of pylons over the undergrounded section between the EACN and Boxted. The applicant states that it is not technically feasible to underground into the EACN (through the Dedham Vale NL) and then back out again (towards the Boxted CSE Compound), but this approach doubles the level of harm in this area. This is because the land will be destroyed in the undergrounding construction phase and then will still suffer the addition of pylons over the top of it.
- 9.7. The working hours suggested in the draft DCO are wholly unacceptable and do not give the residents of the area reasonable respite from the noise and disturbance of not only the extensive construction phase, but many HGV movements associated with it. Sundays and Bank Holidays in particular must be left free of all construction activities.
10. Notwithstanding the areas of disagreement set out above, the Council remains committed to constructive engagement with National Grid and all relevant stakeholders and would continue to work positively with the Applicant should consent ultimately be granted, with the objective of achieving the best possible outcomes for the communities and environments affected by this nationally significant infrastructure project.
11. The Council would like to take this opportunity to thank the ExA including the support staff at the Planning Inspectorate for the manner in which the examination has been conducted, noting the scale of the application is one of the largest, if not the largest on land applications ever tabled. The Council would also like to thank the various Interested Parties, including but not limited to the community groups who have tirelessly attended hearings, contributed to the examination and commissioned independent reports that were hugely useful to understanding the impact the scheme will have on communities and the special landscape in which they live.

ENDS