

Rt Hon Graham Stuart MP
Minister of State (Minister for Energy and Climate)
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BY EMAIL

Dear Rt Hon Graham Stuart MP

Onshore and offshore transmission in Suffolk, minimising community and environmental impacts

As you are all too aware, Suffolk, (along with Norfolk and Essex) faces a succession of electricity transmission projects, that have been identified as essential for the UK to meet its net zero target by 2050.

Whilst Suffolk County Council has, in close collaboration with our MPs and other Local Authorities in the three counties, been able to have effective engagement with Ministers, the regulator (Ofgem), energy developers and National Grid, which has yielded significant progress, such as the OTNR and the forthcoming consultation on Community Benefits; the Council has identified key areas that are impeding further progress, which we would like you to consider.

The position of Suffolk County Council remains that:

- Offshore wind projects, should wherever possible, be connected to a multipurpose interconnector (MPI) to minimise the extent of adverse impacts of onshore infrastructure
- Offshore transmission infrastructure should, wherever possible and appropriate, be directed to the principle point of electricity use. In the south-east of England this is currently anticipated to be in the region of the Thames Estuary.
- Onshore transmission should be avoided where possible in favour of an integrated offshore alternative
- In respect of onshore infrastructure that cannot be eliminated, it is essential it should be minimised and consolidated to the maximum possible extent, and where project promoters are developing in the same area, construction programmes should be streamlined and coordinated, to minimise community and environmental impacts.

An offshore alternative to East Anglia GREEN

Therefore, the Council consider that, in respect of the National Grid pylon line known as East Anglia GREEN, although further information regarding alternative offshore links has now been provided, the opportunities and costs of an integrated offshore solution, as an alternative to this project, have not been effectively considered.

The Early Opportunities Workstream and MPIs

The Council considers that the integration of single radial connection windfarms into multipurpose interconnectors is a clear opportunity to reduce harm to communities in Suffolk, and elsewhere, that should not be squandered. We are disappointed that the wind farm promoters do not yet have sufficient confidence to come forward with an integrated solution, through the Early Opportunities mechanism, which appears to be readily available. The Council is not aware of any engineering reasons why these windfarms could not be part of MPIs, and it appears that the principle stumbling blocks are regulatory, financial, and contractual.

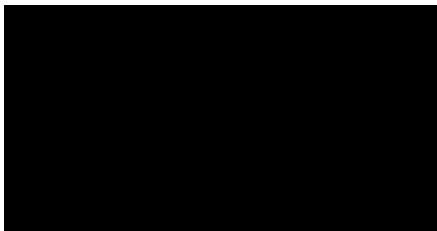
Integration of transmission and distribution infrastructure onshore

Finally, where it is necessary for National Grid (NGET) to build onshore transmission lines because an offshore solution is not available, it is not possible, at present, to create an integrated onshore transmission and distribution solution, that minimises harm to communities and the environment.

This would see the removal of out of date and over capacity 132kV pylons operated in our region by UK Power Networks, and other distribution operators elsewhere in the UK, when new NGET transmission lines are installed. Not only would such an integrated approach benefit communities and the environment, but it would also support business development and decarbonisation, which is currently hampered by the lack of available network capacity. However, based on our discussions with National Grid, who have pursued this with the distribution operator, UK Power Networks in relation to East Anglia GREEN, it is not possible at present, because of the system of parallel regulation of electricity Transmission and Distribution by Ofgem, which limits this kind of whole system approach.

The Council consider that these are three areas in which it would be possible for you to intervene, to secure firstly, greater public confidence in the roll out of energy infrastructure in our region, secondly, to reduce the adverse impact of these developments on our communities, and finally, to deliver tangible local benefits, from the construction of new transmission infrastructure.

Yours sincerely,



Richard Rout

Deputy Leader of Suffolk County Council
and Cabinet Member for Finance and
Environment