



**Department for
Business, Energy
& Industrial Strategy**

Councillor Richard Rout
Deputy Leader of Suffolk County Council
Suffolk County Council
8 Russell Road
Endeavour House (B1 F5 81)
IPSWICH
IP1 2BX

The Rt Hon Greg Hands MP
Minister of State for Energy, Clean Growth
and Climate Change

**Department for Business, Energy &
Industrial Strategy**
1 Victoria Street
London
SW1H 0ET

T +44 (0) 20 7215 5000
E enquiries@beis.gov.uk
W www.gov.uk

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Your ref:

20 June 2022

Dear Cllr Rout,

Thank you for your letter dated 23 May, regarding East Anglia GREEN.

At present, it is government policy that overhead lines are the starting presumption for most electricity network developments. However, the government is aware that overhead lines can cause detrimental landscape and visual impacts in particularly sensitive areas.

As you note within your letter, the draft energy National Policy Statements (NPS) state that this presumption would be reversed in Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and National Parks. It also states that in circumstances where there could be widespread landscape and visual impacts in other areas, undergrounding can be considered where the benefits outweigh other considerations. These considerations would include the cost implications for electricity bill payers.

We are currently considering the implications of the British Energy Security Strategy to the NPS review, and we will publish revised energy NPS in due course.

Communities that host network infrastructure are playing a vital role in ensuring a cheaper, cleaner and self-sufficient energy supply in Britain. It is therefore only right that they can participate in and benefit from development in their area. National Grid Electricity Transmission's (NGET) current community benefit scheme is voluntary, and NGET has full autonomy over how it delivers its scheme. Ahead of the consultation process, we are engaging with NGET to review how their existing scheme is currently delivered and how this can evolve, building on existing insights and lessons learned. We will also engage with community representatives in advance of consulting on community benefits, and my officials will be in touch shortly to discuss this further.

More broadly, the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities is working across government to develop proposals within the Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project (NSIP) process to support communities with early, meaningful engagement and better outcomes to support Levelling Up. Further details of these, and associated consultation, are due to be published shortly.

The East Anglia Green Energy Enablement project would be considered a Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project ("NSIP") as defined in the Planning Act 2008. For the project to proceed, therefore, an application for the necessary development consent would have to be made to the Secretary of State in due course. When the application is made by

the Developer, the Planning Inspectorate will check whether the Developer has complied with its duties under sections 42, 47 and 48 of the Planning Act 2008, before deciding about whether to accept it for examination. If the application is accepted, it will be published on the relevant project page of the Planning Inspectorate's National Infrastructure portal: infrastructure.planninginspectorate.gov.uk/projects/eastern/sunnica-energy-farm.

There will be an opportunity for anyone who wishes to make representations about the application to do so. The Planning Inspectorate would carry out the examination of the application on behalf of the Secretary of State. The application for the project will also need to include a supporting environmental statement (considering its impact alone and in-combination with other plans and projects) There will be an opportunity for anyone who wishes to make representations about the application to do so. If the application is accepted for examination, and when the Planning Inspectorate's examination of the application is complete, it will then submit a report on the proposed development with findings and recommendations to the Secretary of State who will decide whether to grant development consent for the project.

The Planning Inspectorate has published general advice on the pre-application consultation process, including advice on what to do if there are concerns with the consultations conducted by the Developer. Until the application is made, local people (and any other interested parties) should continue to engage with the Developer and the other relevant parties, as the project is developed.

Finally, given the quasi-judicial role of the Secretary of State in determining any such applications, I hope you will appreciate that the Department cannot comment on specific concerns raised in correspondence regarding a proposed infrastructure project, for example, in relation to the potential environmental impact or the need for the development, as this could be seen as prejudicing the outcome of any proposal subsequently submitted for decision through the planning process. However, in taking the decision on any development consent application, the Secretary of State will follow the relevant requirements in the Planning Act 2008 and have regard to a wide range of matters which are both important and relevant to his decision.

Yours ever,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'GH', followed by a long horizontal flourish.

THE RT HON GREG HANDS MP

Minister of State for Energy, Clean Growth and Climate Change