

## Introduction

Good evening. I am Councillor Richard Rout, Deputy Leader of Suffolk County Council and cabinet member for finance and environment.

Thank you for this opportunity to talk about this project, which has been so long in getting to this stage.

First, to add some context, I have the political responsibility for overseeing SCC's response to Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects. It is a responsibility I've held since 2018.

Over this period, I and the teams I work with, have engaged with and responded to:

- Sizewell C, one of only two planned new nuclear plants in the UK;
- The EA1 North and EA2 windfarms;
- Major interconnectors connecting the UK national grid to the continent at Suffolk;
- Sunnica Energy Farm, which (if consented) would become the UK's largest solar farm;
- And the Norwich to Tilbury pylons (previously known as East Anglia Green) which forms another part of the large number of transmission projects to reinforce the grid, coming forward in East Anglia, as our region becomes one of the greatest exporters of clean energy in the country.

The County Council has also successfully promoted its own DCO project under the NSIP planning regime, to authorise the Lake Lothing Third Crossing at Lowestoft, which is now under construction as the Gull Wing Bridge. The County Council therefore has a good understanding of the responsibilities and pressures on a scheme promoter, as well as its experiences as a host authority, and regulating authority.

This is the experience that we at Suffolk County Council have, in dealing with Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects.

## Suffolk's Context

The Council recognises that Suffolk's geography means that the county will play a very significant role in delivery of the country's Net Zero target. Particularly, Suffolk will likely be an important location for delivery energy security, supporting food security and adapting to climate change. Suffolk already hosts a huge proportion of the UK's new low-carbon generation projects.

SCC has adopted a policy of being supportive in principle to renewable and low-carbon energy generation and transmission schemes, whilst ensuring that the impacts of these schemes are minimised and that opportunities for the affected areas are maximised.

Suffolk County Council's Energy and Climate Adaptive Infrastructure Policy, approved by the County Council's cabinet in May 2023, outlines that the Council will try to secure proposals that avoid, mitigate and, if necessary, compensate for significant changes in locations affected for Suffolk's people and the environment.

We, of course, are behind the national ambition to achieve Net-Zero for the UK. SCC has declared a climate emergency in March 2019, and we are fully aware and supportive of the need for new, large-scale, low-carbon electricity generation and transmission.

Whilst the national benefits of this transition are welcome; the co-location of these major projects will result in the significant impacts of these schemes being acutely concentrated on our local communities and environment. As a rural county with a vibrant economy, strong communities and a rich natural and cultural heritage, the speed and scale of this transformation of our energy infrastructure means that Suffolk County Council's position must be to demand the highest standards of all major projects, including this one, in terms of design, mitigation, and reducing the impact on our communities as best as possible, and where required, providing appropriate compensation for residual impacts.

## **Suffolk County Council's Aims**

The Council's Local Impact Report will go into the comprehensive details of the Council's issues with the proposed development; however, I will speak to the wider issues as we perceive them.

Suffolk County Council accept this project is essential to reinforce the electricity transmission network in East Anglia. Furthermore, the Council recognises that the applicant has made significant changes during the development of these proposals, to reduce the harm to Suffolk's communities, landscapes, and environment.

The proposed undergrounding is very welcome, it means that the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty gets the recognition and protection it deserves and requires. The proposed undergrounding also means that the undesignated landscape of the Stour Valley, which is of the highest quality and sensitivity, also gains this protection.

Suffolk County Council is satisfied that the case for undergrounding in the Stour Valley is entirely justified and robust, in terms of both the sensitivity of the landscape and the requirements of emerging draft policies in the National Policy Statements. Also, it is important to acknowledge that it has come about in no small part due to the relentless and effective campaigning of both the communities and the local authorities, over many years.

There are, however, substantial issues that remain to be resolved.

These include the long-term impacts of the project around Bramford substation, both by itself and in combination with other projects, the detrimental impacts on the setting of listed buildings along the route, such as Hintlesham Hall.

Furthermore, National Grid have acknowledged that there will be long term residual impact from this scheme. The council considers, therefore, that a comprehensive scheme of mitigation, to compensate for these residual impacts, is both reasonable and essential.

The construction phase of the project will have significant impacts, for both residents and the visitor economy. The Council considers that these impacts on businesses, especially tourism businesses, and the amenity and highways impacts, must be robustly addressed and mitigated by National Grid.

The proposals as they stand at present lack sufficient detail in places including aspects such as the Construction Traffic Management Plan, and SCC insists that it should be consulted before the practical details of construction traffic routeing and management are agreed.

The successful delivery of these proposals will depend to large degree on National Grid keeping to promised mitigation as set out in the application and SCC will continue to work with all interested parties to ensure that this is so.

This is especially true of the proposed undergrounding of cables in the Dedham Vale Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and in the Stour Valley. It also applies to the micro-siting of lattice towers in the vicinity of the listed buildings at Hintlesham Hall and in the Brett Valley at Benton End.

## **Conclusion**

In summary, SCC accepts the need for project in principle and acknowledges the engagement with National Grid and the improvements that have flowed from the constructive dialogue. However, the Council is not yet able to offer its support because of the outstanding unresolved matters. SCC looks forward to participating in the Examination process with a view to securing a satisfactory resolution of its concerns.

Thank you for your time.