

30th May 2024 – Public Meeting – notes from County Cllr Mike Steel

National Grid Norwich to Tilbury – Statutory Consultation:

I have been active on this ever since the first non-mandatory consultation came out in 2022. At the start, awareness seemed quite limited, and it is disappointing that the first consultation only attracted 4,000 comments for the whole of Essex, Suffolk and Norfolk – which is about 0.1% of the population.

There was a similar response on the second consultation.

And the petition run by the protest group is running around 36,000 signatures – that is 1% of the population. The nature of this proposal is that it has a big effect on a small number of people, or people are cynical about the result, or they just can't be bothered.

My involvement:

- I got both City Council and County Council to respond with objections to the first 2 consultations.
- Formed a NW/SW Parish Group, covering all the Parish Councils in my division, so that we could formulate common objections, but with specific local ones – GW, LW, Broomfield, Chignal, Writtle, Highwood, Roxwell, Good Easter. We were subsequently joined by Ingatestone and Margaretting
- Rosie and our MP have both met and addressed the group.
- I have walked Kemi along some of the route, especially where the pylons come close to housing
- The MPs along the route have formed a group to lobby Cabinet and the Secretary of State, to oppose pylons
- For the third consultation, which is the important mandatory one, I proposed a Motion at the 14th May County Council meeting, to oppose the current NGET proposal.. The motion was passed. (all groups except Labour supported it, but Labour abstained on the vote). County Council will now produce their comments based on this motion. Chelmsford City Council will be reviewing their response at the Policy Board 11th June. I will be attending as a committee member. I have spoken to both Spatial Planning and Heritage Officer to understand the City Council response. Members of the public can attend and give their views.
- ECC also produced an independent report which challenged the required date of 2030 and stated that 2034 was the real date. It is important to understand that the 2030 date dictates the solution!
- I have attended many meetings with NGET, ESO, and read all the papers – I actually have a technical background being a Chartered electrical Engineer.

I think it is necessary to understand the role of the different players, if we are to oppose this. You can't win if you don't understand your oppositions strategy and approach.

From the outset and for the 2022 consultation, NG determined that an 400Kv OHL was the answer and it hasn't changed since then.

The reason the answer hasn't changed, is because the exam question, written by Ofgem, is written in a way that dictates the same answer – do it by 2030 or be penalised, the cheapest way, and assume that the power from the wind farms is already delivered to Norwich.

And in terms of the impact on people, the Accelerated Strategic Transmission Investment (ASTI) framework says – it's okay as long the expected consumer benefits of applying the accelerated delivery framework to the project exceeds the expected consumer detriment.

Well, the problem is that the benefit is delivering the power to London, but the detriment is delivered to the people of Essex. Essex does not see any benefits, we just see pylons and sub stations. Essex, and the other 2 counties, become a conduit to London!

ESO Electricity System Operator, were asked to cost out other options - The ESO is the electricity system operator for Great Britain. Their conclusion was that the OHL is the cheapest and quickest solution.

But it must be noted that the 9 options, were all for a Norwich to Tilbury transmission – i.e., the starting point is that the power is already on shore at Norwich – physically. There was not an option to start at the wind farms.

The study concluded that OHL was the cheapest, quickest and could be done by 2030.

An offshore route – which first has to go from Norwich to the coast, is £4Bn more expensive.

They also looked at an HVDC underground – Capital wise it costs £5Bn versus OHL £2.4M, but the overall life cost is just £1Bn more.

A word on undergrounding – Just burying the AC cables needs a trench 120m wide. The cost is 10 times the cost of OHL – about £10M per km versus £1M per km OHL.

The impact on the ground is significant.

The alternative is HVDC – which requires a trench around 30m wide – so would probably fit through the Waltham gap. It is not a mature technology, hence it can't be done by 2030. It also has other problems like needing repeater stations every so often – so someone gets some large sub stations near them!

In conclusion:

- The 2030 target date is driving the current proposed solution
- With this restriction, and the starting point in Norwich, the OHL solution is the cheapest, quickest

I have been pushing to challenge the high level premise - My ECC motion therefore calls upon:

- NGET to reconsider their proposal of an exclusive Overhead Line (OHL) solution for Essex as presented in the statutory consultation, on the basis of the devastating effect of 50m of steel lattice pylons on residents, businesses, communities and the local environment, and that they further consider the alternative options from the ESO study and the case for delay from the Hiorns report. .
- ESO and Govt widen the ESO Options report and not restrict the starting point for all options as Norwich, which has the pre-emptive effect of making the OHL solution the most economical, and restricts consideration of a strategic off-shore grid.
- ESO and Govt ensure that the OCSS is brought into consideration along with the extended timetable of the Hiorns report, which would then enable less impacting solutions on the residents, businesses, communities and local environment of Essex.

What you and Parish Councils need to do is to raise valid local objections.

It would seem that the Waltham gap is one of the most difficult areas to squeeze OHLs through.

The more new reasons are added to oppose that area, the more likely it is to get to a point where it becomes undeliverable.

You could push for the alternative route West of Great Waltham. It would impact a different set of people, but from face value, it probably goes further away from individual dwellings. But my preference is that the consultation adds new issues to the Waltham Gap – how NG resolve that is up to them.

ClIr Mike Steel