

Norwich to Tilbury Pylons – Response to Statutory Consultation

Good evening, everyone. I'm Steve Gilbert, chair of Great Waltham Parish Council. Thank you all for coming out to this important meeting.

[Housekeeping – fire exits]

This meeting has been arranged by the parish council principally to provide information for and facilitate discussion in relation to statutory consultation issued by National Grid in relation to its proposals to upgrade the transmission network between Norwich and Tilbury. In addition, it will help the council to finalise its own response to the consultation.

We did ask guest speakers to attend, but some were unable to make it this evening. However, after I've provided a brief overview of the scheme and the proposals as they affect the parish, I will first ask Mike Steel, our city and county councillor, to offer more insight including the Essex County Council and Chelmsford City Council responses, together with details of the some of the other reports and information which have been produced and are relevant to the proposals. You may be aware that on 14th May Mike proposed a motion objecting to the current proposals at a full county council meeting and it was passed unopposed and will now inform the county council's position and consultation response.

Then Steph Dodwell will present some slides on behalf of the Essex, Suffolk & Norfolk Pylons campaign group who afterwards can also provide further information on their campaign at the tables.

After Mike and Steph have spoken I will go through where you can get more information on the proposals and the mechanisms for responding to the consultation. And I will also provide you with an update on the parish council's own proposed response.

Then we will open the floor to those with any questions for Mike, Steph or myself or who wish to share their thoughts and concerns with the meeting.

To begin then:

In National Grid's own words the Norwich to Tilbury project:

“[...] will enable National Grid to connect the sources of power generated from offshore wind to homes and businesses across Britain, helping to reduce our reliance on fossil fuels and bring the cost of energy bills down” and

“The project will help the UK achieve its aim of generating 50GW of energy from offshore wind by 2030 and reach net zero by 2050”.

The statutory consultation and associated information for the project was released on 10/04/2024. It followed two non-statutory consultations to which many of you may have responded. The parish council's responses are on the parish website, and you may recall we strongly opposed the proposals in those two previous consultations.

As part of the statutory consultation those residents affected (living within 1km of the proposed overhead transmission line) have been provided with NG information packs. No doubt many of you will have received one.

From the latest information provided you will have seen that the route of the proposed line has altered little from the two non-statutory consultations and is planned to cut across the southern end of the parish along the route shown on the maps we have displayed here tonight.

The overall route from Norwich to Tilbury is 183 km (113 miles in old money) of which 158 km will be an overhead line serviced by 520 steel lattice pylons. Typically the height of each pylon will be 50 metres (or 164 ft.) tall. Some could be even taller.

While there are only a small number of pylons actually on land within the parish, they, and those beyond, will affect not only residences in the immediate vicinity, but will also be visible to many more, including those who travel to, from or through the parish. There is no doubt that apart from anything else – and there are many other consequences – the use of pylons will have a colossal visual impact on both our immediate community, and the Essex and East Anglian countryside in general.

The proposed route between Great and Little Waltham is contained in the narrowest part of the 'swathe' identified in National Grid's earlier non-statutory consultations. Now referred to as the 'Waltham Gap' it offers the fewest opportunities for lateral movement of the route within the swathe.

I will hand over to Mike now to go through his involvements as a city and county councillor, including insight on National Grid's apparent reluctance to take full account of a number of independent reports which challenge their proposals. Over to you, Mike.

[MS presentation]

Thank you Mike. If you can save any questions for Mike, I'll now ask Steph to make her presentation on behalf of the Essex, Suffolk and Norfolk Pylons campaign group.

[SD presentation]

Thank you, Steph. I'll now briefly go through the process for getting more information and how to respond to the consultation.

If nothing else, National Grid has supplied a lot of information about their proposals, both online and elsewhere. This includes public information events, webinars, proposal inspection points (typically at local libraries), an interactive map of the proposed route, an online document library, an online list of frequently asked questions (with NG's responses) and details of how people can respond. Online all of this information is available at a very long web address – I have found the best way to find the webpage this is to google 'National Grid Norwich to Tilbury Consultation' and the first option is the one with this information.

If you are interested in the details of how National Grid responded to issues and concerns raised locally during the 2023 non-statutory consultation, they are available, buried in the Feedback Report (at pages 257-277 and 666-713).

Until two days ago the consultation was scheduled to close at 11.59pm on 18/06/2024. However, it seems the calling of the General Election has caused National Grid to rearrange both the dates of some of their engagement events and the final deadline date. We understand the deadline is extended to 26/07/2024, and the webinar for our area has been rescheduled for 16/07/2024¹.

In terms of engagement now, while a local review day (at the Racecourse) has now happened, you will still be able to sign up for the rearranged webinar where information on the Braintree

¹ Use this quote from NG if needs be: "we'll be extending our consultation [...] We're doing this to give the public, their representatives, landowners and stakeholders the time and opportunity to have their say and provide feedback on our proposals after the forthcoming General Election. Consultation remains open throughout this pre-election period, and you can still take part and provide your feedback".

and Chelmsford sections of the proposed route will be provided, or in the meantime you can visit the inspection point at Chelmsford Library. And of course all the information for the proposals remains online.

Despite the revised deadline date you can still respond to the consultation. There are four ways:

- By completing an online feedback questionnaire
- By emailing your comments to: contact@n-t.nationalgrid.com
- By posting your written responses (no stamp required) to: FREEPOST N TO T; or
- By completing a paper feedback questionnaire and return it using the freepost address.

The crucial point is: if you have issues, concerns or comments on the proposals, that you make a response by the deadline date.

In the scheme of things, the response rate for the two previous non-statutory consultations was poor – to make your own and our collective voice as loud as possible, everyone needs to respond. And it's also important to make your response as powerful as possible – just saying 'I don't like pylons' is one thing, but going on to explain the reasons makes a response even more compelling.

As mentioned, the parish council has drafted its response, which will be finalised and submitted with any additional learnings from this meeting. I'm hoping to get this agreed and posted on the parish website in the next few days so that you can see what we have said. We have maintained our strong opposition to the proposals. I will quickly go through at a high-level the main points we have made in the current draft. We will be saying:

- We are disappointed NG has made minimal changes to its proposals in the non-statutory consultations.
- Our opposition to the proposals remains for a variety of reasons, many are ones stated previously and which have still not been properly addressed.
- We believe NG has failed to properly consider both the short- and long-term harms created by its proposals.
- In particular, the visual and noise blight created by pylons, loss of amenity value, loss of productive agricultural land, impact on property prices, and the financial and inconvenience impacts of disruption during construction have all been inadequately factored into the proposals.
- There has been over-reliance by NG on National Policy Statement EN-5 in relation to the Government's position 'that overhead lines should be the strong starting presumption for electricity networks developments in general'.
- We oppose the construction of pylons for transmission lines anywhere in the parish, or indeed elsewhere else under these proposals.
- We stand with all residents and other county, city and parish councils who oppose the use of pylons anywhere in Essex, Suffolk and Norfolk under this scheme.
- The Council's preference remains an offshore route, but failing that any overland route should be effected using an HVDC underground solution.

- We believe the issues raised by the Waltham Gap provide the perfect example of why an HVDC solution would garner, if not support, then grudging acceptance locally. The Council believes its parishioners would tolerate one or two years of disruption if it avoids 50 years or more of blight by pylons.
- NG has failed to thoroughly examine alternative solutions and essentially seems to have reverse-engineered a scheme based on a premeditated decision to use pylons come what may.
- NG has failed to consider the full overall costs in the proposals; for instance, to reflect issues such as full and fair compensation to home and business owners. These additional costs make a HVDC solution a viable alternative.
- Any overland route will require a compensation scheme of some description and that this should be based on full and fair recompense to all home and business owners, rather than a less-targeted 'community benefits' solution.
- NG seems to have chosen to make the case for a scheme where the wishes of local people and consumers and the permanent harms to the countryside have been ignored to enable it to satisfy its own financial objectives, such as maintaining its profit margins.

Thank you for listening so patiently to what we have had to say. This is now your chance to ask questions, and to air and share your views. Who would like to start?

[Public participation section]

Thank you all for coming tonight, I hope you now have more insight into the project and the consultation. Just a final message – please do take the time to make your voice heard by responding to the consultation so that we can help to force a change to the proposals.