

COTTON PARISH COUNCIL

FORMAL RESPONSE FROM COTTON PARISH COUNCIL TO THE EAST ANGLIA GREEN CONSULTATION JUNE 2022

INTRODUCTION

Cotton Parish Council strongly objects to the National Grid's plans to run 180km of high voltage overhead power cables and 50m high pylons through large swathes of Norfolk, Suffolk and Essex. This is a hugely damaging proposal which will harm the environment, bio-diversity, historic assets and the amenity and tourism value of our countryside.

Our response to the non-statutory consultation will inevitably focus on the impact on our community of the Grid's chosen methodology, its preferred corridor and graduated swathe. However, our residents share the wider concerns of so many in Suffolk about the negative and damaging impacts of these proposals on the County as a whole.

We therefore support the views expressed by Mid Suffolk District Council about the EAG project, especially the lack of co-ordination with the growing number of large-scale energy projects in the County, and the failure overall to safeguard the interests of the host communities.

Cotton Parish Council's overriding preference is for as much as possible of the cabling required to reinforce the Grid to go offshore where it will do substantially less harm than the current proposals. We note that Suffolk County Council has written to Minister, Greg Hands, in support of this option.

We are dismayed that this consultation is so narrowly focused on overhead cabling (with very limited exceptions for underground cabling). A genuine consultation should allow all feasible options to be properly explained and commented on. And there should be properly costed impact assessments particularly as little value has been ascribed to societal, amenity, environmental and quality of life costs of the proposals. This proposal seems a 'fait accompli'.

We all recognise the need for upgrading/creating new infrastructure to meet future energy needs. However, it's almost ninety years since the first grid of pylons began operating in the UK. The National Grid (NG) is addressing a future 'green energy' challenge with outmoded and highly intrusive technology. The NG and similar companies operating in other jurisdictions use under-sea cabling, including for high voltage cables, but your default position here is to present the cheapest and easiest overhead option. To quote the NG's Chief Executive "Business needs to stand for something more than simply profitability. Now, more than ever, we have a responsibility to demonstrate our contribution to society more broadly." Precisely.

..../

A couple more points before turning to very local concerns. The capital cost of various corridors are quoted but we believe the consultation document is silent on the ongoing maintenance costs of the preferred solution. What assessment has been made of the effects of climate change, more storms and high winds on a further 180km of pylons and overhead cabling for decades to come. We also

query the extent of the carbon footprint in building and installing all the necessary pylons down such a lengthy route and removing thousands of trees, hedges and woodland in its path.

SPECIFIC CONCERNS RELATING TO OUR AREA OF MID-SUFFOLK AND THE PARISH OF COTTON.

Cotton is situated on high plateau clay-lands. The proposed corridor and graduated swathe, NB1, takes in much highly productive arable land and grazing for dairy and beef herds, an important community meadow and water meadows, many footpaths, trees, historic heritage assets, and a vast array of wildlife.

In discussions at your recent Exhibitions, mitigating the harms to landscape and visual impacts in an area such as ours was described as “challenging”. Much of Cotton village sits a little lower than the proposed route. But both for the village and especially the properties and other assets firmly within the swathe, we do not believe that visual impact of the power lines and the huge pylons can be successfully mitigated. We do not see how the relevant Holford Rules can met here.

There are 16 Listed buildings in Cotton, mostly Grade 2, except St Andrews Church is Grade 1 and dates back to the 14th Century. Eight of these buildings fall within the graduated swathe. Two of which are historic buildings too, one Hempnalls Hall belonging to Anne of Cleves, the other Cotton Lodge, the hunting lodge of the Duke of Norfolk. Historic England advice and the Listed Buildings Act seek to protect the settings and experience of historic buildings. There should be no visual dominance of them from other buildings, wind turbines etc, no disruption to the historic views and settings, and development must not threaten their ongoing conservation. The open land surrounding these historic houses means that route NB1 would directly impinge on these historic properties and others that are listed.

The preferred route NB1 runs close to the existing high voltage power lines. We are told close paralleling with those is not feasible and yet a double bank of lines and pylons over this plateau land will cause a double blight, added to the (necessary) miles of lower overhead cable bringing electricity to our homes and businesses. We agree with MSDC that landscapes outside those formally designated as AONBs and SSSIs need to be given much more detailed attention. Landscape heritage is not replaceable or capable of being satisfactorily offset. Obviously if the Grid were eventually to proceed with an overhead option, then we would want very detailed discussions about mitigation and the alternative of underground cabling.

In terms of biodiversity, the Council has been unable yet to do a proper audit of all the wildlife that thrives in this area. However, we do have a wide variety of habitats and include bats, a huge range of bird life including nesting skylarks and grey partridge, great crested newts, roe deer, hares and many other species in and around our Parish.

Our farmers and local landowners all oppose the proposal as it currently stands, and support offshore cabling, because of the extensive damage and disruption that will be caused to the

..../

valuable and productive land, and to crops. Many have spent time and energy in recent years planting hedges and trees and digging out ponds to improve bio-diversity and landscape. The heavy

clay land has a whole network of drainage systems installed, and whether overhead or underground, significant damage and disruption would ensue from new pylons and cabling.

In conclusion, we strongly urge the use of offshore cabling to deliver the future energy from the North Sea to London and other parts of the country. It is by far the best solution for the East Anglian environment. Although more costly initially in terms of capital outlay, over the life of the project and the decades of future energy supply, it would not add hugely to individuals' energy costs while preserving much that is precious and on which it's hard to put a purely monetary value.

14 June 2022

Please see addendum attached.

ADDENDUM to Cotton Parish Council Response

As previously stated, our overriding preference is for a largely offshore solution.

Should the project proceed within the current corridor Cotton would experience a significant detriment due to the combination of the local topography and exceptional historical buildings and amenities at risk, notably:

- Two historical assets directly within the swathe
- The Grade 1 Church of St Andrew's close to the boundary of the swathe
- 'Carters Meadow' which is an area of local amenity used by residents of both Cotton and other local parishes; this lies on the westerly edge of the swathe and largely benefits from an easterly vista, i.e., directly toward the proposed pylons and cables

In that event we would invite and encourage NG to work with us to mitigate this exceptional detriment through the use of underground cables and we believe our local farming community whose land would be accessed would be supportive of assisting NG to achieve this, subject to detailed assurances and adequate compensation.

Finally, in the worrying situation that our special circumstances are not accepted and pylons and cables remain the technology of choice, then naturally we harbour grave concern about the detriment they will cause. To that end, we believe mitigation can only be accomplished through distance and reduced height pylons rather than clever placement i.e., we have no valleys running in the direction of the route nor trees in the right places to mitigate due to the land being used mainly for agriculture. Cotton village and all of the exceptional assets listed lie towards the west or in the westerly half of the swathe. In contrast, there is limited habitation on easterly side of the swathe and therefore our local knowledge tells us the best of a bad situation solution would be to run the pylons as far east as possible within the corridor as that would minimise the impact for the largest number of people.

SW

14.06.22