

National Grid Electricity Transmission - Sea Link Interconnector Consultation

Saxmundham Town Council Draft Response

1. What do you think of our proposals? Items 1 to 5 listed below each include a landfall location, underground convertor corridors and convertor station site.

1. Suffolk site 1 emerging	Strongly Support	Support	Neutral	Do not support	Unsure ✓
2. Suffolk site 3 emerging	Strongly Support	Support	Neutral	Do not support	Unsure ✓
3. Suffolk site 1 alternative	Strongly Support	Support	Neutral	Do not support ✓	Unsure
4. Suffolk site 3 alternative (option 1)	Strongly Support	Support	Neutral	Do not support ✓	Unsure
5. Suffolk site 3 alternative (option 2)	Strongly Support	Support	Neutral	Do not support ✓	Unsure

Add your comments here:

The proposed Sea Link landfall locations, cable corridors and convertor station sites are based upon the assumption that the National Grid substation north of Friston will be approved and constructed. The Development Consent Orders granted to Scottish Power Renewables to build the substation for the EA1N and EA2 windfarms are still subject to legal challenge by means of a Judicial Review.

In our opinion, the greenfield site at Friston is entirely unsuitable for a substation on the scale proposed by Scottish Power Renewables and we note that it will require expansion to accommodate the cable bays for further interconnector projects. Given that there is no existing grid connection at Friston, it is wrong for multiple projects to seek connection at this location.

There is still sufficient time for the department of Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy to reevaluate the merits of an alternative offshore strategy that would transmit power direct to brownfield sites much closer to where the power is needed. We support the Rt Hon Therésé Coffey MP's petition to her government to review all onshore energy connections along the Suffolk coast and to commit to carrying out a comparative study, including already suggested brownfield sites like Bradwell in Essex, and properly assessing the environmental impact of these connections before proceeding any further.

Given the government's commitment to achieving net zero by 2050, the future growth of offshore wind, and electricity interconnectors will require innovative and potential offshore solutions to minimise the onshore impact of the associated infrastructure. One possible solution is for interconnectors to be connected via a modular offshore grid using offshore platforms and artificial islands connected to brownfield sites. We support National Grid's aim to work with BEIS and Ofgem to progress the Offshore Transmission Network Review however we note there is no legislation nor government incentive to coordinate and deliver this vital infrastructure.

2. As we develop, refine and narrow down our proposals do you have any views or local knowledge that you would like us to take into account?

Add your comments here:

We understand the national need to expand renewable and sustainable energy sources, and the desire to improve the interconnections between the UK and Europe, however such developments need to be undertaken in a sympathetic and coordinated manner, particularly when the three emerging interconnector projects are all within the overarching responsibility of National Grid.

It is unfortunate that more coordination between Scottish Power Renewables (EA1N and EA2 offshore windfarms, EDF Energy (Sizewell C nuclear power station), SSE Renewables (Greater Gabbard and Galloper offshore windfarms) and National Grid (Sea Link, Euro Link and Nautilus interconnectors) was not significantly undertaken at an earlier date. Two further landfall and convertor stations projects (North Falls and Five Estuaries) have also been proposed for East Anglia. We will be encircled on all fronts. The lack of forward planning for the associated onshore infrastructure will result in unnecessary and repeated levels of disruption for the local population, harm to its tourist industry, and considerable damage to the coast and countryside to the detriment of the general amenity of this area for many years.

It is understood that the scale of construction traffic for the Sea Link project is much less than for Sizewell C, however there are concerns about the cumulative impact of potentially multiple energy infrastructure projects proceeding over the same period of years. There are concerns that increased levels of traffic on the A12 will increase the frequency of 'rat running' incidents along the minor roads.

3. What do you think about co-location of (up to three) convertor stations?

Strongly Support

Support

Neutral

Do not support

Unsure 

Add your comments here:

We feel that any Sea Link convertor station, and links from the shore to the convertor station, and from the convertor station to the substation, should minimise the spread of infrastructure and length of cable routes as far as possible.

We are concerned that many of the identified sites will lead to industrialisation of the open countryside around Saxmundham, Friston, Knodishall, Leiston and Theberton. Some of the proposed convertor station sites have a moderate level of existing natural screening but most are on relatively flat countryside/rural agricultural land with little hope of developing screening in a reasonable timeframe given the 22 to 30 m height of the convertor station buildings. The Suffolk site 3 emerging preference, to the east of Saxmundham, is at the top of a relatively high hill overlooking the town, and contrary to the claims made in the consultation documents, this site is not naturally screened by surrounding woodland.

There are concerns about exposure to operational noise from the convertor transformers, the transformer cooling fans and the valve cooling fan banks, all of which will be external to the convertor station buildings for safety reasons and to allow sufficient airflow, and these will operate continuously day and night. There is no evidence from the consultation documents that acoustic modelling has been conducted for potentially three convertor stations on one site, close to residential housing if Suffolk site 3 emerging preference is chosen. A baseline noise environmental study should be undertaken during this preliminary stage to inform further assessment at the planning stage and indicative noise limits should be proposed using night-time noise limits which are more stringent than daytime limits.

It is not clear from the consultation documents whether any savings on total land take will be made by co-locating the convertor stations. If less land take overall is possible, then we agree that the chosen convertor station site should have sufficient capacity to accommodate three convertor stations to minimise the disruption to multiple communities.

However, we note that there are no guarantees that all the projects proposed for this area will be progressed in a way that will minimise the damage during construction and will be sympathetic to the impact on the landscape and amenity once operational.

4. What do you think about the projects (up to three) sharing underground cable corridors?

Strongly Support

Support

Neutral

Do not support

Unsure

Add your comments here:

The Suffolk site 3 emerging preference requires an unnecessary long HVDC cable corridor which passes Friston and will therefore need to double-back on itself to connect to the substation. It is presumed that the AC and DC cables will be unable to share a combined trench therefore a double width cable corridor, of up to 40 m wide for the HVAC cable and up to 100 m wide for the HVDC cable, will be required.

It would seem sensible to support sequential cable corridor excavation and construction for all three projects, however it is noted that, after landfall between Aldeburgh and Thorpeness, a shared cable corridor would need to be 1,200 m wide and cross the nature reserves at North Warren and North Haven. These areas support many rare species of bird and other wildlife. A cable route here could potentially cause disturbance and damage to habitats during construction. We ask that the disruption to these sensitive landscapes is mitigated by Horizontal Direct Drilling but we note there is no assurance that HDD will be technically possible in this location.

5. What do you think about the potential to share a landfall location between (up to three) projects?

Strongly Support

Support

Neutral

Do not support

Unsure

Add your comments here:

Landfall at sites 1 and 2, between Aldeburgh and Thorpeness, are preferable as they can accommodate up to three projects, including Sea Link, however the fragile coast in this area is under considerable stress from erosion and any development so close to the seaside resorts of Aldeburgh and Thorpeness would be inappropriate.

6. As we develop, refine and narrow down our proposals do you have any views or local knowledge that you would like us to take into account about the potential coordination of (up to three) projects?

Our major concern is whether all the proposed Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects will collectively minimise their onshore impacts on the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, the Heritage Coast and the national and international designated sites along the coast and the rural land to the west of the AONB, around the towns of Saxmundham, Leiston and Aldeburgh, and the various outlying villages that surround them.

The discussion of Suffolk site 3 emerging preference, and the possibility of a temporary connection from the B1121 across the River Fromus to the site, revives the missed opportunity of a proper relief road, originally proposed for the construction of Sizewell B and raised again during the Sizewell C consultation. This relief road would have connected the A12 to the B1122 slightly north of the B1121 junction to Saxmundham and had it been properly assessed by considering all the energy projects collectively it would have significantly improved access to the proposed Suffolk site 3 emerging preference rather than National Grid being significantly constrained by the inadequacies of the B1121 and the B1119. These rural roads were never intended for mass industrialisation and the short-sightedness of the piecemeal approach to developing the Suffolk 'Energy Coast' is apparent.

The developers of these projects justify much of the environmental and economic damage by exhorting the local benefits to the community. However, the onshore infrastructure of the interconnector projects creates no long-term employment opportunities and no local investment. What is needed is meaningful long-term legacy for the local economy and the communities of East Suffolk which will offset the environment and economic damage caused by the delivery of onshore electricity transmission infrastructure.