

Saxmundham Town Council

Committee Meeting	Town Council
Meeting Date	13 November 2023
Item Number	8c
Report Title	Energy Projects Report
Report Author	Sharon Smith, Town Clerk

NGV Lionlink

The Town Clerk attended a webinar for Town and Parish Councils on 11th October 2023. They extolled the virtues of The Great Grid Upgrade which is the largest overhaul of the electricity grid in generations by bringing in more renewable energy and transporting it to the areas where electricity is needed most, namely South East England including London.

Suffolk County Council News Release

Developers risk "treating Suffolk communities with contempt" as latest round of large-scale energy projects in Suffolk emerge.

Energy developers who are bringing forward large-scale energy projects without speaking to councils or communities, were criticised heavily today by Councillor Richard Rout, Deputy Leader of Suffolk County Council and Cabinet member for Finance and the Environment, following the latest publication of National Grid's Transmission Entry Capacity (TEC) Register.

The TEC Register is a list of projects, which often end up as large nationally significant infrastructure projects (called NSIPs), that have secured the right to connect to National Grid's network if they are consented, under the Planning Act 2008 by government, not local councils. These connection offers, which form a legally binding contract with National Grid, are routinely published and made, prior to the development and consenting of electricity generation or storage projects.

The current list of connection offers published by National Grid shows that new projects have been offered connections at National Grid's sites in Suffolk, at Bramford near Ipswich, and at Yaxley, near Eye, in north Suffolk. These new projects are large scale solar panel and battery storage proposals in the same style as the recent SUNNICA scheme in West Suffolk, which is a proposal to create a 2500-acre Solar Farm on the Suffolk Cambridgeshire border.

Councillor Richard Rout, Deputy Leader of Suffolk County Council, and Cabinet Member for finance and the Environment said, "It is both shocking and disappointing to me that councils and communities in Suffolk are finding out about these very large proposals for the first time in this way."

"Suffolk County Council has not been approached by any of the businesses that have had a connection offer from National Grid, and neither have the communities, who will be expected to host these huge schemes. When you consider that a connection offer from National Grid forms a legally binding contract with developers, it is simply inexplicable to me that such a contract could exist without anyone locally being made aware, by the developer, of their proposals. In my view, this treats the opinions of local people, and their council representatives, with contempt and is a terrible way to begin projects of this nature.

"Any of these projects, if they do come forward and are submitted to the planning inspectorate for planning permission, have serious implications for local people, our county's infrastructure, our agricultural capacity and heritage, not to mention our precious natural environment and wildlife habitats."

Suffolk County Council, which is recognised by the Government as a centre of excellence when it comes to managing the impacts of big energy schemes, has previously outlined its concerns over the way large energy developers treat

communities. In July this year, Cllr Rout wrote to the Secretary of State for Levelling up, Housing and Communities, Rt Hon Michael Gove MP, to outline the significant shortfalls of the West Suffolk SUNNICA application, described as "the worst example of what can go wrong" when developers mistreat local communities.

Cllr. Rout continued, "Suffolk County Council readily understands and accepts the extent and magnitude of the infrastructure required to deliver national energy independence. However, food security is equally important, and we have grave concerns about taking vast swathes of high-quality agricultural land out of food production for solar farms.

"It is absolutely critical that projects, like those emerging for the first time today, are handled in the right way and treat local people with the respect they deserve. Any attempt to sneak projects through the back door or avoid early meaningful engagement with communities is simply not good enough, and I will continue to call it out when I see it happening."

These projects can now be brought forward by the respective developers for consideration under the NSIP programme and, if they meet the criteria, will be considered by the planning inspectorate for approval in due course. Due to the size of these proposals being like the SUNNICA proposal, if they do come forward, their planning applications will be ultimately decided by central government, not local councils.

EDF Sizewell C

The temporary access for the Benhall Fen Meadow Mitigation is complete. Dependant on weather conditions, Sizewell C Co are expected to start removing spoil from 16th October until 1st December 2023. Traffic control will be required at the A1094 access when being used by HGVs. This is expected to generate a maximum of 82 vehicle movements (41in, 41 out) each day which will be routed via the A12 and B1122 to the main site access off Lovers Lane. The average speed cameras on the A12 will be decommissioned once the spoil movements are complete, or if weather conditions cause a halt to operations.

The Anglian Energy Planning Alliance understand that Sizewell C Co are looking to commence the main site preparatory works early in 2024. SCC and ESC may start notifying stakeholders regarding several requirements and other planning activities that need to be undertaken to achieve this.

Sizewell C Co have started the detail design of most of the highway schemes. As part of this they are required to undertake road safety audits therefore small teams of engineers may be observed conducting these over the next few months. It is probable that other activities such as coring and trial pits will be necessary to inform the design of the highway projects. These would typically be carried out using temporary traffic management noting that work on the A12 is not permitted during peak morning and afternoon periods. The current programme AEPA has is that construction of the works adjacent to the main site will start during Q2/3 next year with the major schemes such as the Sizewell Link Road and Three Villages Bypass starting at the end of 2024.

The Sizewell C Transport Review Group is now functioning in an embryonic form. Sizewell C Co have appointed a Transport Co-Ordinator who will be a key link between communities (ie transport and community working groups) and the Transport Review Group. Sizewell C Co are looking to start some of the transport working and community groups in the near future.

The Town Clerk is trying to confirm a rumour she heard that the office accommodation, for up to 700 workers, for Sizewell C will be located in Saxmundham.