

ENERGY PROJECTS REPORT – 23 AUGUST 2024

Summer consultations and concerns: Sea Link, Nautilus and Sizewell C Sternfield Water extraction.

A question posed by many is the timing of consultations and thus far National Grid Electricity Transmission (NGET) has managed to time their main Sea Link Statutory Consultation just before Christmas and the additional Consultation during the peak summer holiday period.

During the August summer Town Council recess, the Energy Projects Working Group convened to discuss the Additional Sea Link Statutory Consultation. This related, as far as Saxmundham is concerned, to the introduction of Sunday working and the selected access road option via Benhall with an extremely high bridge over the River Fromus between Bigsby's Corner and Hurts Hall. Meanwhile OFGEM consulted on the Nautilus connection being moved from the Isle of Grain to Friston with the introduction of a third proposed converter located in Saxmundham. Furthermore Sizewell C advised of their intention to withdraw water from Sternfield Reservoir with the associated numerous daily tanker movements and traffic light controls up to at least the end of 2024. Thankfully, after many complaints this proposal was withdrawn.

Sizewell C:

Whilst the water extraction may be a small victory for local communities, there is no doubt the locale will suffer from increased traffic as Sizewell C progresses. Admittedly, discussions regarding funding for the project continue, as do the questions regarding transport. Until the Freight Management Facility at Orwell Logistics Park, plus the northern and southern Park and Ride sites are operational, it is difficult to gauge the route of site traffic. However, traffic is a concern for Leiston and Saxmundham residents, who I am reliably informed, are on Sizewell C vehicle watch. Also of great concern to Saxmundham will be the night freight trains.

Removing up to 1000 HGV's per week during peak construction will undoubtedly be good for the environment. However, four up and four down trains per night between 11.00pm and 6.00am will cause issues to some residents despite the continuous welded track, slow speed and non-stopping trains. In May I asked for a meeting between Sizewell C's rail team and town and parish councils specifically affected by the rail freight movements. During the August Southern Transport Forum Meeting, I was advised that a meeting will be arranged shortly between Sizewell C and Saxmundham Town and Benhall Parish Councils. This will provide an opportunity to discuss further mitigations for our residents. However, one issue may not be mitigated.

The question of Houses of Multiple Occupancy (HMOs) was initially raised by a member of the public during the Extraordinary Council meeting in August to agree the Sea Link and Nautilus consultation responses. Already parking in some areas of the town is becoming untenable with six cars per house. This will be aggravated by Sizewell C's proposal not to provide caravan pitches at the Ancillary Construction Area (ACA) located at the top of King George's Avenue, Leiston. Obviously, this is an issue for East Suffolk Council to monitor but the Town Council will undoubtedly receive complaints.

Finally on Sizewell C, the Friday Street roundabout is scheduled for construction during Q2 2025- Q2 2026. Whilst most welcomed for road safety, it will have implications in respect of cumulative impacts if Sea Link proceeds.

Dates and deadlines:

Sea Link Planning Inspectorate submission – due first quarter of 2025

Lion Link, Statutory Consultation – no actual date set but would assume Spring/Summer 2025 with Development Consent Order submission by the end of 2025

Obviously all local authorities, town, parish councils and residents are becoming Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects (NSIPs) weary! Thus I would propose a public meeting towards the end of the year, to reach those that still do not know about the proposed converter stations and to explain how the Town's responses. In many respects we are doing the work that National Grid should do.

Reports:

Another study was published in July 2024. The interim report from the Aldersgate Group and The Countryside Charity (CPRE), *Insights for the decarbonised electricity system: journeys through planning*, reviews, NSIPs through journeys: 'The renewable energy and grid developer's user', 'The environment's user' and 'The local community user'. The authors identified deficiencies in the NPS EN-1 process. Whilst problems are not wholesale, 'NPS EN-1 mandates that all nationally significant infrastructure projects should mitigate the adverse impacts on local communities and sets out a framework for doing this'. But NSIPs have issues, as co-design or co-development is not standard or required practice. Nor is the NSIP process equipped to account for cumulative impacts of multiple projects in one area. The authors find, as the Town well knows, that trust between developers and residents is difficult to build and developer's approach to community engagement, especially due to poorly scheduled 'drop in' meetings and poorly communicated information worsens trust.

This all leads to the view that infrastructure is being imposed on the local community. Location is determined by geographic conditions and availability of existing grid connections. All this leads to 'engagement fatigue'. Moreover, one negative experience with a developer blights all other responses to other proposed projects.

One feels that the authors may have visited Friston and Saxmundham when writing this response! Sadly, the report offers no solutions at this stage other than reviewing strategic planning and how it can help address existing challenges including changes to the NSIP process to review the needs of energy, environment and local community from the onset. The second point is the introduction of early engagement with all stakeholders.

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Chair of the Energy Projects Working Group