

Empowering Nature – Protecting Saxmundham

Introduction

Saxmundham Town Council opposes National Grid Electricity Transmission's proposals for Sea Link, particularly the siting of a converter station near our town. We believe the project poses serious long-term threats to our landscape, biodiversity, and historic rural character.

However, we recognise that responsible leadership requires us to prepare for all outcomes. Should a Development Consent Order be granted, Saxmundham and its neighbouring communities face an unprecedented level of disruption, including landscape change, biodiversity loss, adverse traffic and socio-economic impacts, and wider environmental degradation.

The Empowering Nature initiative represents a proactive, community-authored response to the long-term environmental threats posed by energy infrastructure. It is an exciting example of the type of community benefit that we ask the Planning Inspectorate and National Grid to give serious consideration to.

Empowering Nature demonstrates how local people can help shape the future of their town in the face of imposed change, and many of its proposals have been widely endorsed by the local community. It sets out a conceptual vision which would, of course, be subject to detailed design and appropriate assessment to ensure deliverability and to avoid any adverse impacts on local landowners, neighbouring parishes, or designated ecological sites, including the North Warren SSSI and the wider Alde–Ore Estuary landscape.

Our Town, Our Choice

No mitigation can fully offset the ecological damage to this precious and ancient landscape. Productive, arable land will be lost, soil composition altered, and irreplaceable habitats destroyed. Yet, we believe if we can set aside our differences and come together, these projects could also become a catalyst for positive change - both for our people and for the many species that rely on this beautiful natural environment.

Our Vision

- A green corridor from Saxmundham to the coast, where wildlife can thrive along the route of the proposed bridge and cable trench, and where people can walk and cycle.
- A Fromus boardwalk where residents can engage with the river and surrounding nature.
- A community fund for new wildlife havens in our gardens: nature-friendly improvements for all, including water butts, bat boxes and ponds.
- Healthy, affordable food grown in a community orchard and allotment.
- Water harvesting to support biodiversity and to protect us from flooding.
- Restoration of the Great Wood for community use and biodiversity.
- Converter stations that also support locally commissioned art projects, wildlife habitats and solar panels.
- Training and support for local people to manage these initiatives.

A green corridor from Saxmundham to the coast

Farmland, compulsorily purchased for cable trenches, will not be able to go back into food production. We envision it taking on a new purpose as a nature corridor, featuring hedgerows and wildflower margins, and offering an accessible route to the sea for cyclists, walkers, and wheelers.

The required bridge over the River Fromus should be future proofed as a rewilded, living structure and include an otter ledge to ensure safe passage for wildlife. The project will support local wellbeing, boost our tourism economy and enable other species to move in and out of the Suffolk Coast and Heaths National Landscape. We would also like to offer free bike hire from Saxmundham Station to promote sustainable and active travel.

A Fromus boardwalk and nature trail

After construction concludes, we propose a River Fromus boardwalk and a nature trail linking Fromus Green to the town centre. These features will allow the community to reconnect with nature and encourage sustainable tourism and footfall in the High Street via a circular route. Visitors will be encouraged to spend more time in our town—shopping locally and using it as a base for exploring the surrounding countryside on foot or by bike. The boardwalk, which will include a pontoon for safe river access, will put the river back at the heart of our community and enable the people who live here and who visit us to appreciate the rich diversity of the species it supports.

Community funds for all to support nature

We propose a Fromus Communities Scheme funded through a toll on energy transmission passing through the converter stations and revenue from solar panels on their roofs. This fund would offer all households in the five affected communities a choice of nature-supporting products with free installation (to support the wildlife species affected by the National Grid proposals).

Residents would select from a list of items which would include:

Hedgehog highways	Bat boxes
Native hedgerow saplings	Swift boxes
Ponds	Draught excluders
Bughouses	Water butts
Hedgehog hibernation and feeding stations	

The fund should also support solar and battery storage for community buildings.

Growing our own food

We propose creating an inclusive market gardening zone surrounding the converter station site. This can include allotments, and a community orchard run on permaculture principles to support and feed local people as well as visiting swifts, pollinating insects, hedgehogs and other wildlife. Our new green space will support health and wellbeing and reduce food miles and packaging waste. It can be irrigated by water harvested from hard surfaces and will benefit from native hedgerows, scrub and carefully managed wildflower meadows.

Managing our water to protect us and to improve our environment

Our water is a precious resource. The new bridge and converter stations will create hard surfaces which cannot absorb water. This could provide an opportunity for water harvesting solutions such as attenuation ponds, swales or bio-retention basins, which could be fully landscaped. This could help prevent runoff - reducing flood risk and mitigating the risk of pollution to the River Fromus.

Restoration of the Great Wood

The Great Wood lay to the south of Leiston Road and historically was a place of leisure for the people of Saxmundham. Some years ago, most of the trees were cut down to increase farmland, and it now lies within the boundaries of the Sea Link proposal. Post-construction, we propose that native trees are planted to restore the wood for community use and biodiversity.

Jobs and training for local people

The converter stations will not result in long-term job creation therefore we propose the Fromus Communities Scheme is expanded to enable businesses and community groups to manage the proposals outlined earlier and to support new initiatives such as:

- Training and employing local people to run the Fromus Communities Scheme.
- Employing local people to develop a website and an app to support the scheme as well as other projects such as citizen science, energy and water management.
- Green space management of wildflower meadows and hedgerows.

Creating community benefits from the converter stations

- Art Spaces: large-scale nature-themed murals commissioned by the community to reflect the local environment and to highlight flagship species.
- Living Walls: two sides of each building should feature vertical planting to create habitat for pollinators, swifts and bats.
- Solar Energy: rooftops could host solar panels to contribute to clean energy generation and feed the Fromus Communities Scheme.

A call for collaborative, nature-positive infrastructure

Planning expert Dr Andy Tickle supports many of the principles at the heart of these proposals, His report 'Greening the Great Grid Upgrade', published by CPRE, the countryside charity, calls for a more strategic and environmentally responsible approach to infrastructure delivery. He urges a new planning culture that aligns grid expansion with long-term social, ecological and landscape priorities.

It echoes our call for local voices to help shape how infrastructure is embedded into landscapes, ensuring places like Saxmundham and its neighbouring villages are not simply altered, but actively improved – with nature, community wellbeing, and heritage at the centre of design and delivery.

We call on National Grid companies to work with us; to go beyond the statutory minimums and show real leadership by delivering infrastructure that can enhance, rather than erode the landscapes and communities it affects.