

By Email: 11 January 2021

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*a threat hanging over
coastal suffolk*

Dear Teresa Camey and Rebecca Barnett

BEIS and Ofgem joint response to the Open Letter engagement

Further to your letter of 18 December, BEIS and Ofgem joint response to the Open Letter engagement, we would like to thank you for setting out the seven broad themes articulated by stakeholders in their feedback to BEIS and Ofgem.

I am writing on behalf of a coastal Suffolk community group called Suffolk Energy Action Solutions (SEAS). We submitted our written suggestions for your consideration. I expect that of the total 48 responses received by you, many of them came from Norfolk and Suffolk community groups, as we are the most affected region.

We have at all times tried to be constructive and forward-looking. Most of our members are keen to encourage more strategic and coordinated thinking on the part of UK plc. Sadly, wind energy onshore infrastructure has been one of the sectors that has not kept pace with technology advances and it is now time to make a step change. There is no disagreement about the wish to accelerate the move to new integrated solutions and halt the radial point-to-point systems, which are not efficient or responsible in terms of their damage to the environment and disruption to communities and to rural way of life.

We have already shared our views with you and there is no need to repeat.

Having participated in the 17 December BEIS stakeholder webinar and studied the themes detailed in this Letter and having read the National Grid ESO Report published on 16 December, together with attending their Q&A session in the afternoon of 17 December, I believe that our views are yet to be fully acknowledged. A consultation process can as you know, be limiting and superficial or inclusive and in-depth.

We have some reassurance that BEIS and Ofgem are hearing the views of local community groups, because I recognise some of the seven themes, which are presented. Our suggestion is that the Expert Advisory Group (EAG) is an excellent initiative and one that we proposed, using the word “Specialist” rather than “Expert”, as this is such a devalued title nowadays.

We were denied the names of those on the Suffolk Energy Coast Delivery Board and now we are not being given the names of those on your EAG. Key documents produced by National Grid on site selection have been redacted and National Grid has failed to turn up to the PINS Examinations



for EA1N and EA2 and to answer questions about the cumulative adverse impacts caused by 12-15 years of construction in a tiny area of unspoilt coastal Suffolk.

a threat hanging over coastal suffolk

National Grid appears remiss in not sharing its plans for the largest MegaHub in Europe to be sited at the medieval village of Friston. Our conclusion is that Ofgem, BEIS, National Grid all lack transparency and their behaviour only leads us to believe that there is a blurring of roles and historic failures to develop a strategic plan for offshore and onshore infrastructure. Their seeming inability to implement a more intelligent and coordinated infrastructure solution should not mean that coastal Suffolk and other communities in Norfolk are the helpless victims of their collective failures. I am sure that we are not the first to make these criticisms. There is a huge sense of frustration amongst local communities.

There are better solutions for 2027 onwards if implementation starts by 2025 and we are therefore offering our time and input to your EAG as we suggest that members from constructive and collaborative community groups as well as consumer groups should be involved. We have given up years of our lives (and money) to understand better the advances in HVDC technology, Modular Offshore Grids and even though we are not engineering professionals, we do have former engineers, ecologists, farmers, representatives from the tourism sector, the hospitality sector and from Parish councils, amongst our group membership. We are all enthusiastic supporters of green energy, provided it is delivered in the right way.

The decisions around site locations for the largest infrastructure hubs should be assessed taking into account more than the CION criteria. We all know that the current criteria are limiting and outdated given the commitment to protecting the countryside. There is no gain without some pain. At the same time, we all have a duty to future generations to avoid needless destruction. By creating a MegaHub five miles from a thriving tourism destination, with Thorpeness, Minsmere and Aldeburgh impacted and vandalising unspoilt countryside including AONB and SSSI, a group of observers with no agenda would say that this is a tragedy.

Tragedy is an event causing great suffering, destruction and distress. I can assure you that I have witnessed in the last 18 months communities suffering and distressed with a huge cloud hanging over their heads. It has made people ill and some have suffered strokes and panic attacks. Some people chose to live in a rural community far away from the madding crowd and now they are having nightmares about the loss of their paradise. The prospect of looming steel towers, tarmac and concrete and 12-15 years of construction noise, dust, light and air pollution is frightful. The tourism industry in this part of the UK is dependent on nature and tranquillity. Visitors come here to find the antidote to their urban existence. They come here precisely because it is not developed. The only upshot from SPR's proposals to decimate hundreds of acres of countryside is that tourists and visitors will stay away when they can find what they're looking for elsewhere. Surely, no one could be so foolish?

The BEIS Review gives us hope, so long as it is not a sham, not window-dressing. We believe that with advanced HVDC technology and a new integrated approach, there is, to quote BEIS terminology, an Early Opportunity and Pathway alternative to these ill-conceived plans by using a brownfield site elsewhere, instead of Friston.



We would like to be represented at your EAG in order to present a new Cost/Benefit Analysis Method, which factors in the exponential gain or loss from adverse impacts on communities, the environment and the local economy. *a threat hanging over coastal Suffolk*

We would like to challenge the conflation of regions and energy projects in the economic analyses, which are carried out by the current PR groups for EEERG and others. We are delighted that Lowestoft will benefit from new energy investment but that should not be at the expense of the wider coastal region.

If the alternative solutions cost a little more in the set-up, these can be offset by the efficiencies gained in the mid-to long-term and by the sparing of the environment and the safeguarding of the Aldeburgh, Thorpeness, Snape and Southwold tourism sectors, which are the main revenue stream for this part of the coastal Suffolk region.

If ScottishPower and National Grid are not currently incentivised to make these innovative changes, those motivational drivers can be addressed by BEIS in order to gain a unified vision and focus on building back faster, better and greener.

To quote from your document, the Early opportunities work stream will “look at projects that are already in relatively advanced stages of development and consider whether there are flexibilities or minor changes to regulations that could allow them to take a more coordinated approach under the current regime”.

We believe that we have a realistic alternative solution. Specialist engineering companies such as Elia and Tennet did talk to us and give verbal guidance, despite being conflicted by their work with National Grid. It is hard to obtain any specialist engineer advice given that National Grid has tied up every adviser in the UK! We are confident that there are better solutions that should be on the table now.

The speed at which the country has been mobilised to deal with the pandemic shows us that we can all be mobilised to work together for better solutions. This is a potential crisis moment. Bad plans lead to bad decisions lead to bad outcomes.

Good plans lead to good designs lead to good outcomes. We can make this step change together. Please involve us. We are serious, thoughtful and positive forward-looking thinkers. This is a time for transparency, openness and true collaboration, not a time for marketing rhetoric and obfuscation.

Yours sincerely

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