

By email:

Dear Richard, Phil and Graham

Thank you for meeting us yesterday at Constantine House. We were glad to have the opportunity to hear your views regarding the energy projects and the NSIP system that we are working our way through on a series of energy infrastructure projects.

We wish to find constructive ways forward, not always easy given the enormity of what is at stake for local communities around the Aldeburgh, Friston, Saxmundham area: the economic catastrophe facing the tourism and hospitality sector, the profound transformation of a deeply rural area into an industrial centre, the breakdown of a thriving rural, coastal community.

Our concerns as we shared with you are:

1. PEIR Assessments: Traffic peak flows and Sealink assumptions

SCC did not object to the Sealink Statutory Consultations despite the flawed PEIR assessment. The timetables were incorrect for the projects and hence the cumulative impact assessment was inaccurate. Traffic flows at peak times for a tourism resort are critical. There is no proper interrogation from SCC relating to National Grid's silence on this matter. We have to stipulate that peak flow times are monitored on the access roads and lanes during this year. Mean averages are inadequate. For a tourism resort these peaks are very different to out of season traffic flows. We presented these peak flows for the A1094 using approved data collection systems for SPR Examinations.

Part of your remit is Highways and keeping the traffic moving. You must surely be concerned enough to interrogate their assumptions and estimates. We are surprised that you did not challenge these assumptions in your Response.

Do you wish us to meet the Highways team to ask for their support in this endeavour? Do you wish to initiate the peak time traffic flow monitoring on the key access routes? What is your proposed action?

2. PEIR Assessments: Tourism adverse impacts leading to catastrophic economic decline

Whilst you are responsible for economic growth policy, ESDC is responsible for tourism growth policy. You must surely be worried that economic growth will be severely undermined by the congested, choked roads and the new pollutions - noise, air and light.

The Destination Marketing Organisation (DMO) has shown from their quantitative independent research study (2019) that the most important attributes related to choice of destination for a short stay or day visit are: tranquillity and landscape. Over 90% of the 60 million visits per annum to East Suffolk are day

visits. You have data showing the fragility of day visits in the event of road/ access issues.

The A12 is already regarded as a poor highway often gridlocked at peak times. These energy projects are only going to make the roads more congested. These tourists will go to more attractive places where access is easier. The current forecasts for economic loss over 10 years of construction are now estimated at £1billion, no longer the optimistic estimate of £600million. Your Response omits any mention of catastrophic economic decline, killing businesses and destroying livelihoods.

We can convene a meeting with the DMO in April with your team? What is your proposed action regarding your views on economic decline? Your statement in the Sealink response was wholly inaccurate and misleading to the existential threats.

3. SCC views regarding Friston/ Aldeburgh/ Saxmundham as a major Hub

SCC welcomes coordination of these energy projects at Aldeburgh/ Friston/ Saxmundham. That is the implicit text in your Response to date.

It beggars belief that you welcome this coordination at an unusually successful seaside resort.

Whilst we all wish for efficient coordination of energy projects we have stated in our top four spatial strategy principles: “use of brownfield sites for major hubs, closer to London and demand”. Those brownfield sites do not have thriving Nature based tourism economies which are threatened. They have smaller tourism economies but not £1billion losses on the horizon.

The economic RISK to the principle economic sector for the Aldeburgh region is too great for a huge energy infrastructure hub to be located in the Aldeburgh area. Sizewell B and C are contained in a tiny area of Suffolk Coast and Heaths. Over 98% of the Suffolk Coast and Heaths area are dedicated to tourism and Nature. We believe that construction of Sizewell C is already a possible tipping point. This area will crash economically with the additional onslaught of National Grid’s energy infrastructure plans. This is hard to prove because National Grid has never dumped this scale of infrastructure on a successful tourism spot before. There is no precedent.

This forecast for tourism decline is equally, hard to disprove.

The DMO visitor quantitative research is the only primary research that has been conducted. It is independent. You can scrutinise this research and ask National Grid to respond to this concern. They have carried out no such research and therefore they have no robust case to reject what the DMO research states.

You will no doubt wish to probe more deeply before coming to your conclusions regarding economic growth. What action do you propose to take?

4. SCC choosing not to object

The most important negotiation tactic in any controversial high risk infrastructure project is to object and challenge what is clearly erroneous in SeaLink's PEIR. Given the fact that this assessment is not just missing factual evidence and surveys, but that there are significant errors in what is written, unless SCC signals those errors, National Grid can feel confident that they go forward without any serious interrogation to their assumptions.

We disagree with your statement that you cannot object at this stage because there is not enough information. We think it's a nonsense that you don't object. We know they have misrepresented traffic, tourism and economic outcomes not to mention noise pollution, landscape, heritage. Sternfield was almost a footnote in the SeaLink analysis. There is a wealth of history and heritage in Sternfield alone and it was ignored. In the same way, ScottishPower ignored the existence of the Hundred River and its 875 species.

5. Offshore solutions

We have presented to you the SEAS Scenario Seven, a holistic offshore approach. It's conceptual and not intended to be complete but as stimulus for discussion. A campaign group does not have the authority to speak up on this technical subject, but we have had to enlist help from engineers as we know from other North Sea countries that these options are viable and in the mid-term more cost effective. This idea that a delay of two years to get these things right is not feasible is really rather ridiculous (as pointed out in the Winsor Report).

You suggested that what works for Belgium and Holland does not work for Britain. They have small amounts of electricity and we have huge amounts to deliver to the places that need it. All the more reason to use brownfield sites, not fragile coastal resorts and medieval villages. Belgium's Elia told us in 2019 that the technology advances are highly relevant for the UK as much as for Belgium and the same principles apply. You scale up accordingly and have the necessary number of subsea cables going to various brownfield sites.

We are now engaging with other specialists in order that the decision makers in this country will listen if not to us, to people who speak from authority. We urge you to open the door to these possibilities and not close the door over hastily.

As we take stock of the meeting and your responses, we appreciate that you gave us good time to exchange views and you were willing to give guidance on hiring experts wherever possible. However, some people would say that it is deeply worrying for communities in coastal Suffolk to know what we believe to be the case:

SCC does not interrogate the National Grid Sealink Statutory Consultation assumptions and appears to accept what are factual errors. They would probably say this is an alarmingly complacent attitude, a dereliction of duty of care and responsibility, a reactive not a proactive approach. They could easily conclude that there is little concern for what could be the irreversible destruction of businesses and

livelihoods for hundreds of locals and the permanent blight on a uniquely important rare lowland heathland and surrounding countryside. The legacy for coastal Suffolk in National Grid's hands is destructive and no amount of compensation will return this green and pleasant land to what it is today.

Your role in this destructive process cannot be excused due to any breakdown in the local Government structure or systemic issues. You have the opportunity to object, challenge factual errors and make a case for alternative less harmful solutions using brownfield sites closer to London. It is not too late. It can be done.

We look forward to further discussions relating to the above,

Best wishes

Fiona

Fiona Gilmore

SEAS

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