

### Sea Link project raises new concerns for Suffolk

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Concerns have been raised by Suffolk County Council about the latest updates to National Grid's Sea Link project, in particular plans for constructing a permanent bridge across the River Fromus.

The bridge would be used during the construction of the scheme, as part of a private access route to the converter station site at Saxmundham.

These plans have come to light in details published by National Grid (8 July 2024). Included are refinements made to its original project proposal, following a public consultation last year – however it says that although some changes have been made, plans remain largely the same.

Officers from Suffolk County Council will now review these latest revisions in detail and respond accordingly. However, a preliminary assessment has raised significant concerns, particularly in relation to the bridge, which could have a total height of around 20 feet and have a total span, including the embankments, of over 500 feet.

**Councillor Richard Rout, Suffolk County Council's Deputy Cabinet Member for Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects, said:**

“Should the Sea Link project go ahead, the bridge will likely have significant impacts on the landscape, adjacent heritage assets, and the water environment.

“The proposed bridge appears to be absolutely the wrong approach, and a disproportionate solution for creating the site access. From our initial look at the plans, there are likely to be more suitable routes, which would be less harmful.

“But if it really is the best answer, to prove this, National Grid needs to undertake a comprehensive and transparent review of the alternatives and publish their findings.

“The county council calls on National Grid to be open to new ideas, and where possible, to integrate their access proposals with those of other infrastructure projects. That will minimise the impact on the environment and local communities, who deserve the respect of a thoughtful and carefully considered proposal.”

Sea Link is a proposal for a new 2 gigawatt subsea high voltage direct current electricity connection, developed by National Grid Electricity Transmission. It is approximately 140km in length and predominately offshore.

It proposes a converter station near Saxmundham which will be up to 26 metres high, the cable landfall from offshore will be between Aldeburgh and Thorpeness, with around 12km of underground cabling connecting the sites, including a substation at Friston.

Local residents and communities are encouraged to share their views, and have until 11 August 2024 to give feedback on the latest changes, and the proposals in general. National Grid expects to submit its application for development consent in early 2025.

## **Improved Ipswich walking and cycling routes proposed as residents encouraged to have their say**

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Suffolk County Council wants to hear the views of Ipswich residents on the proposals for three new active travel schemes which could improve key routes into the town centre.

The schemes which form part of the funding awarded to the county council by Active Travel England have been developed to make it easier, safer and more enjoyable for residents to walk, wheel and cycle through town.

The public consultation is now open and will close on Friday 13 September 2024. The schemes which we want to hear your views on are as follows:

- **Nacton Road** – Focussed on making improvements to Nacton Road in Ipswich, between Maryon Road and Felixstowe Road. These include widening the pavement along the route, improving many of the crossings over side roads and improving busier junctions.
- **Woodbridge Road** – Set to improve the link between Ipswich and Kesgrave, making it easier for all road users to get from the centre to east Ipswich. The proposals include wider pavements to improve the journey for those walking and cycling, including segregated cycle paths and improved crossings.
- **Ipswich Hospital to Waterfront** – Aiming to make improvements to the route for those walking and cycling between the waterfront and hospital. The proposals focus on the busier and harder to navigate junctions along the route to make these safer for walking and cycling.

To access all the information regarding the consultation, please visit: [Ipswich Walking, Wheeling and Cycling Routes \(arcgis.com\)](https://www.suffolk.gov.uk/arcgis.com).

To access the consultation survey, you can visit: [www.smartsurvey.co.uk/s/ATF2024](https://www.smartsurvey.co.uk/s/ATF2024) or if you would prefer to fill in a hard copy version of a survey, please contact us via email: [customer.services@suffolk.gov.uk](mailto:customer.services@suffolk.gov.uk) or call Suffolk County Council on 0345 603 1842.

## **Council's shock at solar farm go-ahead**

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Suffolk County Council has expressed its extreme disappointment that a huge solar farm has been approved in West Suffolk.

The Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, Ed Miliband MP, today announced that approval had been granted for the Development Consent Order, as proposed by Sunnica.

The project will see 2,792 acres of solar panels and battery storage, installed across parts of West Suffolk and Cambridgeshire.

**Councillor Richard Rout, Suffolk County Council's Deputy Cabinet Member for Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects, said:**

[“The approval of this solar farm is a massive blow to local communities, agriculture, nature and our landscape in the west of Suffolk.](#)

[“I am frankly shocked that the poorest infrastructure application that I have ever dealt with, has now been approved - we highlighted numerous deficiencies in the submission.](#)

## August Samford Division Report

“The voices of thousands of local residents, businesses and organisations have not been listened to. This scheme will permanently and detrimentally impact the landscape of a vast part of West Suffolk and remove thousands of acres of land from food production.

“Despite some improvements to the initial application, we felt that the proposals did not meet the standards we, and local communities, would expect from a project on this scale. Local residents will quite rightly be asking what it takes for a project to be refused, when the worst project we have dealt with gets consented in the face of so much opposition.”

Suffolk County Council supports national aims to adapt to climate change and provide low carbon energy for the country, which often bring benefits to support the local economy. However, it also has an ambition to protect and enhance Suffolk’s communities and environment.

The council had many issues with the application, including:

- The geographic scale of the proposal which will permanently transform the landscape
- The impact on local communities of the 24 month construction period
- Sunnica’s serious shortcomings in terms of both evidence and methodology
- Sunnica’s presentation of proposal which made it, and impacts on local communities, unclear
- Mitigation proposals did not appear to be tailored to the local context

Time will now be spent reviewing the final decision and engaging with the local community.

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### **New All-Age Autism Strategy launched in Suffolk**

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A joint strategy and action plan has been launched today to help support autistic people of any age and their families.

Produced by Suffolk County Council, Suffolk and North-East Essex and Norfolk and Waveney Integrated Care Boards, the vision of the new strategy is that all autistic people in Suffolk, their parents, friends and carers are able to live fulfilling and rewarding lives in a county that accepts and understands them.

The strategy and action plan were both co-produced with autistic people, and their families, and includes their experiences and voices. Autistic people can often experience differences in how they process information, their sensory environment and how they interact with other people. While autistic people share some similar characteristics, they are also all different from each other, it was therefore important from the outset that this strategy looked to capture those differences.

Alongside the strategy an action plan was also published which looks to take the priorities outlined by the strategy, and autistic people in Suffolk, and deliver them. The priorities are:

- Improving acceptance, awareness and understanding of autism within society
- Building the right support in the community and supporting people in inpatient care
- Tackling health and care inequalities for autistic people with a focus on needs lead by diagnostic pathways
- Improving autistic children and young people’s access to education, and supporting positive transitions into adulthood
- Supporting more autistic people into employment Improving support within the criminal and youth justice systems.

**Speaking about the new strategy Cllr Beccy Hopfensperger, Cabinet Member for Adult Care said:**

"I am pleased that Suffolk will have a strategy that is not only covering the whole lives of autistic people but has also been co-produced with the experiences of autistic people at its heart. I look forward to seeing the progress made with the action plan, and creating a county within which autistic people can truly feel safe and accepted."

**Cllr Andrew Reid, Cabinet Member for Education and SEND said:**

"Many people who have autism face barriers in their lives, including within education.

"I am proud that this autism strategy, and action plan, encompasses the whole life journey of a person, which includes our work to improve the outcomes of children and young people with SEND."

**Lisa Nobes, Chief Nurse, NHS Suffolk and Northeast Essex Integrated Care Board, said:**

"The new strategy and action plan are very much welcomed and represent a significant step forward in delivering on our commitment to helping ensure those living with autism can live happy and fulfilled lives, and that their families and carers receive all the support they need.

"We will continue to work closely with our partners and the county's autistic community to drive this plan forward and make sure that it delivers a real and positive difference to people's lives."

The strategy and action plan are available on the county council's website with hardcopies being sent to libraries across Suffolk.

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**Council remains opposed to Norwich to Tilbury pylons in formal consultation response**

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Suffolk County Council has formally objected to National Grid's current proposals for pylons between Norwich and Tilbury, as it submits its response to the project's statutory consultation.

Various reports support the council's position of objecting to the scheme and the council has reiterated the scope for the project to be delayed. This, in turn, opens up the opportunity for a full assessment of other viable alternatives, such as an offshore solution or the undergrounding of cables.

The scale of the proposed project will affect 10 different electoral divisions in Suffolk, and have a considerable impact on their communities.

These impacts go beyond the aesthetics of the project, including harm to National Landscapes, the consequences of HGV construction traffic on rural roads, serious implications on nine airfields, and the cumulative effects of other energy projects, in particular solar farms.

Notwithstanding the council's overall objection to the scheme, it has also put forward comprehensive and detailed proposals to reduce the damage done to Suffolk's communities and environment, should it be consented by the Secretary of State following an examination in public next year.

**Councillor Richard Rout, Suffolk County Council's Deputy Cabinet Member for Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects, said:**

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“The submission of our formal response to this statutory consultation is the culmination of many months work listening to, and standing up for, Suffolk’s communities. Pylon-free solutions remain possible, and National Grid and Ofgem need to take these seriously and fully assess the options.

“I am grateful to members of the public, councillors at all levels, and our staff who have worked tirelessly across our communities highlighting the deficiencies of this scheme.

“From impacts on private airfields and public rights of way, through damage to our unique landscapes and ecology, and the impact on the setting of listed buildings and our farming community – all of these issues and more have been brought to us and improved the quality of our submission.”

Recent reports help to support the council’s position:

The ESO East Anglia Network Study by The National Grid Electricity System Operator, explored better ways to connect offshore wind in Norfolk, Suffolk, and Essex. The council previously stated that it was critical for National Grid to take these findings into consideration as they continue planning their Great Grid Upgrade, including the Norwich to Tilbury project.

The “Valued Landscape Assessment” of the Waveney Valley, commissioned by Norfolk and Suffolk County Councils, acts as a timely reminder to National Grid, of the need to respond effectively and robustly to the sensitivities of Suffolk’s landscapes and communities.

The Hiorns Smart Energy Networks report, commissioned by Essex County Council in close collaboration with Norfolk and Suffolk County Councils, suggested that it is possible for the Norwich to Tilbury project to be paused in order to consider alternatives.

### **CLlr Rout continues:**

“The Hiorns report which we commissioned with Norfolk County Council, summarises that ‘there is the opportunity to pause development of the Norwich to Tilbury project’.

“This is something which must be recognised, so that the best possible solution can be fully explored to help provide energy security to the country, whilst being fair to, and supportive of, the many communities that will be affected.

“The proposals for this project do not go far enough. I will not stand for our communities being swept aside and ignored in the pursuit of unnecessarily, fast-tracked energy projects.”

The statutory consultation for the Norwich to Tilbury project closes today (26 July 2024), with an application submission expected to the Planning Inspectorate in 2025.

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### **Council bringing more community EV charging points to Suffolk**

Over 60 new community venues across Suffolk will have new electric vehicle (EV) chargepoints, as Suffolk County Council’s ‘Plug In Suffolk’ project continues to grow.

Fast charging facilities will be installed at 63 new sites, including community centres, village halls, scout huts and other community hubs, plus 25 existing chargepoints from an early iteration of Plug In Suffolk, will be adopted under a new contract.

## August Samford Division Report

The county council has successfully bid for £7.3 million from the Government's Local Electric Vehicle Infrastructure (LEVI) fund, which supports local authorities to plan and deliver charging infrastructure for residents without off-street parking.

£1.4 million of the LEVI funding will go towards the community charging infrastructure, with a further £5.9 million allocated for on-street charging, which will be developed later this year.

Connected Kerb is an award-winning electric vehicle charging company, which has been awarded the contract to install the new community chargepoints and adopt the existing ones.

All costs associated with the chargepoints will be covered by Connected Kerb, including the cost of the electricity used to power them and any maintenance and repair required over the lifetime of the contract. Host venues will receive a net profit share of every kilowatt sold, from activation until their contract term ends.