

County Council report – April 2025

Council continues to oppose pylons in final round of consultations

Suffolk County Council maintains that more can, and should, be done to improve National Grid's plans for their Norwich to Tilbury pylon project.

A final round of consultation for the project in Suffolk has now been completed (3 March 2025), ahead of an expected Development Consent Order application later this year.

The county council has welcomed a series of changes to the latest set of plans, evidence that National Grid has listened to some of the council's concerns and those of local communities.

However fundamental differences remain, with the council clear that offshore and undergrounding solutions should be priorities for the scheme.

One blow came at the beginning of this latest consultation, with National Grid writing to local leaders in Norfolk and Suffolk saying that there would be no undergrounding in the Waveney Valley.

Councillor Richard Rout, Suffolk County Council's Cabinet Member for Devolution, Local Government Reform and Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects, said:

"We are bitterly disappointed that pylons are still the go-to solution for this project, and particularly those destined to cut across the Waveney Valley's valued landscape, rather than going underground, or ideally offshore. We still firmly contend that less damaging alternatives to the project have not been properly considered.

"Despite making clear our overall opposition to the scheme, we have influenced some alterations proposed by National Grid, such as the undergrounding of smaller pylons, owned by UK Power Networks in some places, such as the Burgate area, which will reduce the visual and landscape impact and protect the operations of local airfields.

"At the next stage of the process, when the Planning Inspectorate is presented with the plans, we will continue to pursue our preferences for no pylons at all, to make the scheme better and safer for our communities.

"But should pylons ultimately be given the go-ahead across Suffolk, Norfolk and Essex, despite our opposition, we will continue to work with National Grid to make sure communities are fairly treated and compensated – something which has not yet been evident."

One of the considerable changes that the county council believes is possible in the current set of plans, is the option to remove some existing powerlines between Bramford and Lawford.

The county council believes that National Grid, UK Power Networks and the regulator, Ofgem, should work together to investigate removing this line, which goes through two National Landscapes and passes close by the iconic Willy Lott's cottage at Flatford.

Suffolk County Council's response to the latest, and previous, consultations can be found at [suffolk.gov.uk](https://www.suffolk.gov.uk)

According to [National Grid's website](#), they intend to submit a Development Consent Order application to the Planning Inspectorate for the Norwich to Tilbury project some time in 2025.

Council fears pace of decision for large solar farm in north Suffolk

Suffolk County Council is calling on communities impacted by the proposed EcoPower solar farm, to act with urgency, and join the council in opposing the scheme.

- Unprecedented pace of planning application
- Inappropriate proposal which could take out quality farmland
- Serious concerns for welfare of local communities

The 250-megawatt solar farm and battery energy storage system will be spread out over 1,500 acres at multiple sites around Yaxley, Brome, Gislingham, Mellis, Eye and Occold.

EcoPower is proposing the bare minimum of engagement and is likely to submit its application to the Planning Inspectorate in around 12 months from now.

This means, unusually, that residents will have just two opportunities in the coming months to have their say. The first of these two is a non-statutory consultation, launched on 10 March. A statutory consultation will follow.

The council fears that communities won't have enough time to familiarise themselves with the planning process, understand the potential impacts of the project, do their research, and make their points – unfortunately, it is not enough to simply state opposition to the project in a consultation response.

The county council is formally opposed solar farm proposals that remove the top grades of agricultural land.

Independently conducted assessments will be required to provide reassurance that Suffolk's best farmland will not be used and put food security at risk.

The council also prefers rooftop-before-rural solar development and expects that solar developers should rule out any links to forced labour in their supply chains.

There are also serious concerns for the welfare of those in the communities affected by the proposed scheme. Such projects can change ways of life forever for those living near the proposed sites.

Councillors have seen first-hand, the stress and worry brought by the sudden announcement of a huge infrastructure projects. This is something that should not be underestimated and should be recognised by a project promoter.

Suffolk County Council has created several online resources to support communities who are facing planning proposals for these nationally significant infrastructure projects. These are available at www.suffolk.gov.uk

The EcoPower Suffolk consultation is available at www.ecopowersuffolk.com

200 new specialist SEND places for Suffolk

The creation of 200 new specialist places across the county for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) is set to be considered by Suffolk County Council's cabinet.

An extra 100 places could open this year, and another 100 new places by September 2026, with plans being drawn up. These places will be spread across Suffolk and tailored to meet need and demand.

The plan to be presented to cabinet next Tuesday April 1 outlines how £18.6million could best be spent to support the growing population of SEND children and young people who need specialist education. Over the last five years, Suffolk pupils accessing special schools and units attached to mainstream schools has increased by over 40%.

The proposal includes £3million to be spent on small groups and units in mainstream schools from September 2025 and £12million to be spent on developing satellite units linked to existing special schools across Suffolk from September 2026. The remaining £3.6million is earmarked for further SEND provision.

In the past five years, 1,025 new specialist SEND places across Suffolk have been agreed.

On top of these new 200 places, plans will continue to be drawn up. Using the recently published Joint SEND Needs Assessment report, work is underway to create a Joint SEND Sufficiency Plan, written in conjunction with health, social care, inclusion and transport. This will establish how future Department for Education SEND capital money should be spent.