

Essex Wildlife Trust's response to Countryfile appearance on 19 February 2023

Many thanks for your email about the proposed East Anglia GREEN electricity transmission scheme.

We're very aware that there is significant public opposition to this proposal, which will result in the construction of a new high-voltage pylon network running from Norwich to Tilbury. Much of this opposition is understandably centred around the visual and landscape impacts of the scheme, including the impacts on agricultural land. We recognise that these are serious and legitimate concerns which are shared by very many people.

Essex Wildlife Trust's charitable objective is the protection of wildlife. This means that we're unable to comment on issues such as the impacts of development on the visual appearance of the landscape, or the use of agricultural land. Those issues are dealt with by other organisations, such as Natural England and the CPRE.

The segment on Countryfile which featured our representative was a very short, highly-edited series of statements taken from a much longer and more detailed conversation. We'd like to clarify our position to ensure that those statements are not interpreted out of context.

We are facing twin climate and ecological emergencies that will have huge social, environmental, and economic costs unless we take urgent action now to prevent the worst impacts. Making the transition from fossil fuels to zero and low carbon energy sources is vital but must not come at the expense of the natural environment that underpins our societies and economies. New energy infrastructure to support the transition to a net zero society must be planned, designed, and built with protecting and restoring biodiversity and natural ecosystems as an essential requirement.

We support calls for a strategic approach to electricity transmission grid planning for the East of England. However, we urge a cautious, evidence-led, and holistic approach to planning of offshore and onshore grid infrastructure to ensure the marine environment receives the same consideration and protection as the terrestrial environment in the planning of new energy infrastructure. Offshore cabling and other infrastructure that would be needed to deliver an 'offshore ring-main' solution would itself have potential for significant ecological impacts on important marine protected habitats. The importance of protecting the marine environment must not be ignored in the rush to place new energy infrastructure 'out of sight and out of mind'.

The East Anglia Green scheme has the potential to result in significant impacts on biodiversity and habitat connectivity across the Essex landscape. Impacts on valuable wildlife habitats must be avoided wherever possible. Where this isn't possible impacts need to be fully mitigated or compensatory habitat must be provided. Direct impacts to ancient woodland habitats in particular must be avoided.

The scheme should also avoid any loss of connectivity caused by removal of hedgerows. Mitigation and enhancements should include measures to improve connectivity between areas of habitat (such as woodland and hedgerows) important for protected species such as hazel dormice and bats.

Where the scheme passes through river corridors, National Grid must avoid causing damage to river banks and disturbance to river beds, which could destroy important plants and cause harm to wildlife such as water voles. The release of fine sediments and other pollutants into rivers must also be avoided.

National Grid should also address any indirect impacts of the scheme, in particular impacts on birds (collision mortality, disruption of flight paths) and construction impacts such as dust, noise and

lighting. Where power lines are planned to pass in close proximity to waterbodies and other bird flight paths, mitigation must be considered at an early stage, including for example, attaching bird diverters to power lines to reduce collisions. Tower designs should also minimise perching opportunities to reduce the risk of electrocution to birds. The potential for power lines to affect any populations of breeding waders must also be considered and mitigated through route choice and avoidance of disturbance.

We will engage with National Grid to ensure any adverse impacts on biodiversity and ecology are minimised and any opportunities for the scheme to support nature's recovery are maximised. We will be responding to formal consultations on the proposals with a focus on the potential impacts on wildlife and ecology and calling on National Grid to ensure that best practice is followed in the consideration of ecological impacts in the planning and design of the scheme, including its routing.