



## Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of the Meeting Held on 14 December 2022  
at 10 am at County Hall Norwich

### Present:

Cllr Steve Morpew (Chair)

Cllr Lana Hemsall (Vice Chair)

Cllr Carl Annison

Cllr Lesley Bambridge

Cllr Phillip Duigan

Cllr Barry Duffin

Cllr Mark Kiddle-Morris

Cllr Keith Kiddie

Cllr Brian Long

Cllr Jamie Osborn

Cllr Brian Watkins

### Also, present (who took a part in the meeting):

Simon Pepper

Neil Carter

Phil Courtier

Martin Starkie

John Bell

Cllr Eric Vardy

Nick Johnson

Matt Tracey

Steve Miller

Stephen Faulkner

Kat Hulatt

Peter Randall

Tim Shaw

Senior Project Manager, National Grid

Technical Lead, National Grid

Director of Growth at Broadland and South Norfolk Council

Member of the public

Member of the public

Cabinet Member for Environment & Waste

Head of Planning

Growth & Infrastructure Group Manager

Director of Culture and Heritage

Principal Planner

Head of Legal Services

Democratic Support and Scrutiny Manager

Committee Officer

### 1 Apologies for Absence

- 1.1 Apologies were received from Cllr Ed Maxfield, Cllr Richard Price, Ms Helen Bates (Church Representative), Giles Hankinson (Parent Governor) and Mr Paul Dunning (Church Representative).

### 2 Minutes

- 2.1 The minutes of the previous meetings held on 23 November 2022 were confirmed as an accurate record and signed by the Chair.

### 3. Declarations of Interest

**3.1** There were no declarations of interest.

**4. Public Question Time**

4.1 There were no public questions.

**5. Local Member Issues/Questions**

5.1 There were no local member issues/questions.

**6 Call In**

6.1 The Committee noted that there were no call-in items.

**7 Nutrient Neutrality**

7.1 The annexed report (7) was received.

7.2 The Scrutiny Committee received a report that summarised the immediate implications and the possible actions required going forward about Nutrient Neutrality, in the light of Natural England advice on the status of the Norfolk Broads and the River Wensum.

7.3 During discussion of the report with Cllr Eric Vardy (Cabinet Member for Environment & Waste), Phil Courtier (the Director of Growth at Broadland and South Norfolk Council) and officers of the County Council the following key points were noted:

- The current complex position of Norfolk County Council and the District Councils in relation to the issue of nutrient neutrality was explained to the Committee.
- Since the publication of guidance regarding the implications of an EU decision on a Dutch Nitrogen case was issued to all relevant local planning authorities by Natural England in March 2022, no permissions for development that would give rise to additional nutrient (sewage) loading in the Norfolk Broads and the River Wensum areas of Norfolk had been granted.
- General planning needs, such as ordinary housing, were not precluded from the scope of the guidance.
- Developers were now legally obliged to provide nutrient compliant development schemes.
- In answer to questions, it was pointed out that plans were being made for a Joint Venture with Water Resources East and Anglian Water to deliver a Norfolk Environmental Credits Board, that would complement the Natural England mitigation scheme in delivery of mitigation for developments. This joint venue was expected to go live at the start of April 2023. This was the fastest and most strategic response on the issue anywhere in the country and would address approximately 40 per cent of the development growth needs of the area and be centred on small and medium size development.

- Local Authorities in the county were looking to set up a Joint Venture with Water Resources East and Anglian Water to deliver a Norfolk Environmental Credits Board which would complement the Natural England mitigation scheme in delivery of mitigation for developments.
- The cost of a credit was expected to be set at somewhere between £5,000 and £7,000.
- The aim was to be able to help small and medium size builders who were unable to find their own solutions to reducing nitrogen-based pollution.
- How to achieve nutrient neutral development, and the science behind it was a very complex issue which was having a large impact on sustainable economic development in the county and the potential for new developments to take place.
- The current position was likely to have a significant potential impact on current and future housing delivery.
- The Head of Planning said that Local Authorities should be able to show a 5-year land supply by this time next year, if not earlier.
- The risk implications associated with nutrient neutrality were set out in paragraph 9.1 of the report. This matter featured in the corporate risk register.
- There were some large infrastructure schemes that were being held up by nutrient neutrality issues. The largest of these schemes was the Long Stratton bypass.
- In short, unless a development could be proven to be nitrate neutral planning permission could not be granted.
- The Wensum and the Broads were the two main areas of special environmental interest that were being protected.
- Members spoke about not wanting to place any additional financial burden on developers and about wanting to help Norfolk farmers to tackle issues on nutrient neutrality that directly affected them outside of the planning process.
- The County Council had the staff with the necessary skills to do the assessments that were required.
- The County Council had agreements in place with the District Councils to provide them with non-statutory advice on environmental issues.
- The service provided by the County Council met its statutory requirements and could be expanded when/where needed to meet future demand.
- Given the existing levels of ecological expertise within the Council, the Council could also support planning authorities in the scrutiny and monitoring of offsetting schemes over their lifetime.

#### 7.4 The Committee **RESOLVED**

**To note the implications of Nutrient Neutrality for the County Council and look to return to this issue when they meet with representatives of Anglian Water and the Environment Agency to discuss sewage and stormwater overflow issues in the Spring.**

## **8 East Anglia Green – Proposed New Over-head Power Line between Norwich and Tilbury**

8.1 The annexed report (8) was received.

8.2 The Scrutiny Committee received a report that provided a brief overview and update of the project (i.e. the proposal for a new 400 kv over-head power line between Norwich and Tilbury (Essex)). The report sets out the County Council's position to date following a non-statutory consultation undertaken by National Grid between April – June this year (2022). The Committee also received a slide presentation from National Grid. The presentation given to the Committee has subsequently been circulated to Members.

8.3 During discussion of the report with officers from National Grid (who attended the meeting virtually via Microsoft Teams) and the officers from the County Council that were present for this item, the Committee considered the following:

- National Grid's representatives said that the existing network of power lines has insufficient capacity to handle the amount of additional electricity which would be generated by a series of offshore wind energy projects making landfall and grid connection in Norfolk.
- In reply to questions, the representatives of National Grid said offshore solutions were more expensive and that undergrounding of cables onshore was more expensive still. The project was about offering value for money for customers.
- National Grid's obligations were to provide the most economic and efficient solution to customers. Laying cables underground, and along the coast on the seabed, would involve more disruption and take the cost of the project to the range of 2-4 billion pounds, compared to 973 million for the pylon project.
- County Council officers pointed out that they continued to be fully engaged with National Grid on the technical and planning matters relating to the project.
- Picking up on comments which had been made to him by a member of the public who was present in the meeting, the Chair said that there was some concern about a lack of alternatives presented in the non-statutory consultation in Spring 2022 including the option of a strategic offshore grid.
- The representatives of National Grid said that they had met with stakeholders to understand their feedback and would continue to do so.
- Members said that the project was resorting to using outdated 1950's technology and that more overhead pylons would be a blot on the countryside.
- It was pointed out that there was an existing line of pylons running nearby the town of Diss which, if the project were to proceed, would surround the town with pylons.
- It was also pointed out that National Grid had already agreed to run part of the cabling underground through Dedham Vale Area of Outstanding Natural

Beauty (AONB) on the Essex/ Suffolk boarder and National Grid should therefore look to do the same in environmentally sensitive areas of Norfolk.

- Members said that the people in Norfolk who were affected most by the pylons would not receive any of the benefits.
- The representatives of National Grid said that it might be possible to use more of the electricity generated by the project to meet Norfolk's electricity needs. This matter was, however, outside the scope of the project..
- In their concluding remarks, the representatives of the National Grid said that they understood objectors concerns to overhead pylons and would try to reduce the impact of the pylons as much as possible. National Grid would respond to all feedback that had so far been received in a feedback report which would be published at the time of the next consultation. After receiving responses to the non-statutory consultation (2022), National Grid would consider making changes before launching a further round of formal consultation in Spring 2023. National Grid would be submitting its Development Consent Order (DCO) application to the planning Inspectorate in late 2024.
- The Chair then referred the Committee to the response to the non-statutory consultation addressed to the National Grid which was set out at pages 28-40 of the agenda.

#### 8.4 **RESOLVED**

**That the Committee**

- 1. Note the current status of the East Anglia Green project and the future opportunities for stakeholder engagement on this project through the NSIP consultation process, as set out in the report.**
- 2. Endorse Norfolk County Council's response to National Grid's non-statutory consultation (2022) on the above High Voltage Cable Route proposal, including the letter from the Leader of Norfolk County Council to National Grid set out on pages 28-29 of the agenda.**

#### 9 **Scrutiny Committee Forward Work Programme**

9.1 The annexed report (9) was received.

#### 9.2 **RESOLVED**

**That the Committee:**

**Note the current forward work programme as set out in the appendix to the report**

The meeting concluded at 1.15 pm

**Chair**