

## **ENERGY PROJECTS REPORT - January 2025**

It's been a quiet news month with the exception of the publication of *Clean Power 2030: A New Era of Clean Electricity* (UK Government, December 2024). Even Councillor Tom Daly in his report to East Suffolk Council regarding Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects generally reiterated news that has been covered in my previous energy project reports. Albeit the issue of Sizewell C contractor intimidation raised by Councillor Daly does require special mention:

### **Sizewell C**

The subject of intimidation was raised within ESC's public newsletter. Tom Daly expanded by reporting during the meeting about the seriousness of incidents that included: taking keys from contractor's vehicles, threatening with a shotgun and bore holes filled with excrement. This is incredibly concerning and we should encourage all residents to raise their concerns with Sizewell C, personally at the Leiston Office, via phone or email or alternatively to ESC via the online complaint form.

### ***Clean Power 2030: A New Era of Clean Electricity* (UK Government, December 2024).**

This latest government energy report seeks to accept the findings of NESO's *Clean Power 2030* report and deliver an Action Plan to achieve goals. A review of the report pertaining implications for Saxmundham is attached. However, the following extract and actions should be considered:

The government will launch an engagement exercise early this year concerning how to encourage nature positive best practice into energy infrastructure planning and development. Whilst this is promising, it will not benefit Saxmundham as the engagement will not commence until the Town is in the process of responding to National Grid, Electricity Transmission, (NGET) Sea Link Development Consent Order (DCO). Unless great pressure is exerted the greening of infrastructure will not apply to our Town. Thus, I would make two recommendations:

1. Write to the Secretary of State, Rt. Hon. Edward Miliband, MP with a copy to Jenny Riddell-Carpenter, MP, agreeing with the proposals for nature positive infrastructure. It would be an ideal opportunity to include a copy of our environmental mitigations for Sea Link.
2. Contact NGET, Sea Link, advising that as a Town, we have pre-empted the *Clean Power 2030 Action Plan* and that by engaging with our environmental proposals they could become a model for all future developments.

***Clean Power 2030 Action Plan: A New Era of Clean Electricity. (UK Government, December 2024),***

‘We have accepted independent advice from the National Energy System Operator (NESO), on the energy infrastructure required to deliver Clean Power 2030’.<sup>1</sup>

This latest government energy report seeks to accept the findings of NESO’s *Clean Power 2030* report and deliver an Action Plan to achieve goals.<sup>2</sup> There are a great number of assertions, ‘we will’s’ and the report is wide ranging. However, this review concentrates on issues that directly will likely affect Saxmundham.

One of targets to achieve the goal of Clean Power 2030 is the need to accelerate schemes through the planning process. This is significant to Saxmundham and the wider area. Amendments will be made to Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects, (NSIPs) scheme. Planning will be streamlined by involving community groups earlier and restricting legal challenges to projects:

*‘We will bring forward a Planning and Infrastructure Bill with measures to streamline the delivery of critical infrastructure in the planning process, and convene community, nature, and industry groups on complex projects to stress-test them prior to application. In line with Lord Banner’s recommendations, we will also progress work exploring changes to the legal challenge process for major infrastructure projects.’<sup>3</sup>*

The report states that not only is the UK Government committed to reach net zero by 2050 and clean power by 2030, it is also committed to restore nature and halt species decline.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore it acknowledges that the UK is ‘one of the most nature depleted countries in the world’.<sup>5</sup> To rectify the two competing needs of nature and energy, the reports states that new energy infrastructure should be constructed in a manner that aims to avoid damage and uses the ‘mitigation hierarchy’: avoid damage, minimise damage, restore and deliver compensation where damage is impossible to avoid.<sup>6</sup> This includes the provision of ‘wildlife corridors’, rebuilding and integrating nature at the same time as building infrastructure.<sup>7</sup> Seemingly, the authors have taken note of Dr Andy Tickle’s, *Greening the Great Grid Upgrade*.<sup>8</sup> Generally Tickle’s argument is that by improving the green credentials of new infrastructure, including spending more, and involving the community at a far earlier stage in projects, that resistance against developments would be substantially reduced. However, the Government has ignored advice on speeding up the planning process: In this Tickle quotes, Professor Richard Cowell who argues that reducing planning consenting time could affect the ‘social acceptability’ of energy projects. Moreover, the UK should aim for the best zero energy

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<sup>1</sup> *Clean Power 2030 Action Plan: A New Era of Clean Electricity*, (UK Government, December 2024), p.10.

<sup>2</sup> See: *Clean Power 2030*, National Energy System Operator.

<sup>3</sup> *Clean Power 2030 Action Plan: A New Era of Clean Electricity*, (UK Government, December 2024), p.12.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*, p.41.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid*, p.41.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*, p.42.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid*, p.42.

<sup>8</sup> *Greening the Great Grid Upgrade, A new vision for landscapes and communities in East Anglia*, Dr. Andy Tickle, Suffolk Preservation Society, Campaign for the Protection of Rural England: (Essex and Norfolk, May 2024).

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid*, p.16.

transition, not the fastest.<sup>9</sup> To achieve their goals, the government seeks to engage with the community:

*'Government will launch an engagement exercise in early 2025 to invite communities, civil society and wider stakeholders to submit their ideas on how government can best encourage nature-positive best practice into energy infrastructure planning and development. Feedback from this exercise will allow government to better understand how we can integrate nature restoration through Clean Power 2030.'*<sup>10</sup>

Prima facie, this is promising. But there is a caveat for Saxmundham in as much as the engagement will not commence until the Town is in the process of responding to the National Grid, Electricity Transmission (NGET), Sea Link Development Consent Order (DCO). Unless great pressure is exerted the greening of infrastructure will not apply to our Town. In this I would make some recommendations:

1. Write to the Secretary of State, Rt. Hon. Edward Miliband, MP with a copy to Jenny Riddell-Carpenter, MP agreeing with the proposals for nature positive infrastructure. It would be an ideal opportunity to include a copy of our environmental mitigations for Sea Link.
2. Contact NGET Sea Link advising that as Town, we have pre-empted the *Clean Power 2030 Action Plan* and that by engaging with our environmental proposals they could become a model for all future developments.

And finally, amongst a raft of changes to streamline the NSIP process, the government is considering restricting claimant's entitlement to just one attempt to seek permission for Judicial Review.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid, p.16.

<sup>10</sup> *Clean Power 2030 Action Plan: A New Era of Clean Electricity*, (UK Government, December 2024), p.42.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, p.57.