

Writtle Parish Council response to the National Grid Consultation August 2023.

About you

Organisation/group (if applicable):

Writtle Parish Council

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admin@writtle-pc.gov.uk

Q1. How would you describe your interest in Norwich to Tilbury?

(Selected Local Representative and Statutory Organisation)

Writtle Parish Council

Sections A - H

(The Parish Council response to Sections A-E and G-H is as follows -)

Writtle Parish Council have a specific interest in Section F - Chelmsford. However our general comments, which fundamentally oppose the proposals for the overhead line alignment and pylon locations equally apply to all sections of the route.

Section F: Chelmsford

Please refer to pages 42-43 of the Project Background Document for more information on our current proposals in this section.

Q10. Do you have any comments on the proposed locations for the following within this section?

Proposed overhead line alignment

Proposed pylon locations

(If you would like to comment on specific pylon locations, please refer to the numbering in the plans, which can be found here experience.arcgis.com/experience/ba2cbd9ac64c4723847fae8637d50df3)

Writtle Parish is directly impacted by pylons from around TB155 to TB178, and we have the following comments to make.

Proposed overhead line alignment

The proposed route breaches the following Holford Rules:

- *Rule 3 – “No sharp changes in direction”.*

To the South West of Writtle there is a sharp change in direction (nearly 90 degrees) leaving Writtle surrounded very closely on two sides with 50 meter pylons. Check Height?

North of Writtle the pylons come in from the North East so this beautiful ancient village is thus surrounded on 3 sides by 50 meter pylons.

- *Rule 4 and 5 – “Choose tree and hill backgrounds in preference to sky backgrounds”, and “Prefer moderately open valleys with woods where the apparent height of towers will be reduced, and views of the line will be broken by trees”.*

The area to the North ,West and South of Writtle, and Chelmsford, is completely open and on a plateau, i.e. the western landscape is higher than the village of Writtle and the City of Chelmsford.

The route of the pylons is about 20 meters higher than Writtle and Chelmsford – so the effect is that the pylons will look to be 70 meters high.

Additionally, when travelling East from Ongar on the A414, the view looking toward Writtle and Chelmsford will be obscured by pylons. The highest building in Chelmsford is Melbourne Flats and this is clearly visible from all around the West of Chelmsford. The pylons are taller than Melbourne Flats, and the Flats are located lower down in the valley of the three rivers that congregate at Chelmsford. Writtle is situated in the valleys of the Rivers Wid and Can.

Using the main intention of Rule 4 the West of Writtle is absolutely the wrong area to place 50 meter pylons.

· *Rule 6 – “In country which is flat and sparsely planted...avoid a concentration or ‘wirescape’”.*

In addition to the comments stated in Rules 4 and 5 there are rural and green space corridors around Writtle specifically designated to restrict urban sprawl around the village and Parish due to its special significance to the area. This will be raised later, but Writtle is an ancient village, and when Chelmsford didn't exist Writtle appeared in the Domesday Book.

In the Writtle Neighbourhood Development Plan (page 42) the following points are made:

- o The main built-up area of the Parish falls within the Writtle Farmland Plateau Landscape Character Area. This describes Writtle as being separated from Chelmsford by the floodplains of the Rivers Can and Wid, and that away from the main roads, there is a sense of tranquillity.*
- o The Church Spire within Writtle is noted as a visible landmark across the farmland plateau.*
- o Concerns are expressed in relation to disturbing the sense of tranquillity through increased traffic, the potential increased pressure on minor roads and lanes, and the visual intrusion of any new development.*

And additionally, “Anciently, this area was part of Writtle Forest, a medieval hunting forest. Substantial pockets of woodland survive, as does the historic settlement pattern of dispersed villages focussed on greens and commons,”

· *Rule 7 – “.....and when pleasant residential and recreational land intervenes..... go carefully into the comparative costs of the undergrounding”.*

Writtle has many reasons for special consideration:

- 1. A Roman settlement, currently being excavated.*
- 2. Writtle is the location where the first commercial radio broadcast was made – which ultimately became the BBC.*
- 3. Hylands House which is the crown jewel of the Chelmsford area and part of the Writtle Parish – the pylons will destroy the westerly sight line from Hylands Park.*
- 4. The Writtle Neighbourhood Development Plan identifies landscape views both into and out of Writtle which are highly valued by the community through in depth public consultation. The Pylon proposal has given no consideration to this at all and it is doubted whether the Neighbourhood Plan has even been consulted.*

Q11. Do you have any further comments on our proposals within this section?

Our firm belief is that the best long term solution for this infrastructure project is an undersea route for its entire length area.

Otherwise the entire route to the West of Chelmsford justifies being buried, so there should be no pylons from at least TB131 to TB192.

“The Writtle Neighbourhood Plan 2020 – 2036, dated December 2021 should be considered.

Essex County Council carried out the Chelmsford Protected Lane study in September 2009, the study was on behalf of Chelmsford Borough Council.

Nathans Lane was identified as being one of only two lanes in the area that met the criteria for Protected Lane status. It is designated as such in the Plan.

The Writtle Design Guide notes other important Green Lanes, including Coldhall Lane connecting to Margaretting Road to the South of Southwood’s Farm.

The alignment proposed would adversely affect these lanes particularly as it crosses over Nathans Lane.

The proposed route is therefore unacceptable”.

A further alternative would be to re-consider the Eastern route around Chelmsford. Where there are existing pylons that follow a valley and are disguised by the hill at Danbury.

Lastly, We still do not believe the results of the costings for a sea route. This consultation is very narrowly focused, even the name of the project has now been narrowly focused – how can there truly be a consultation if the route is already defined?

This consultation should have been given the widest remit for transmitting power from the most northerly offshore wind farm to onshoring at the most sensible location for the onward supply of power to the areas that need it. We would repeat that we believe that the offshore method would provide the greatest long term benefits across the majority of relevant headings , if such a remit had been given. The current proposal provides no benefit, in fact in overall terms they would appear to be net disbenefits, to any of the affected areas along the whole route from Norwich to Tilbury.

A recent article on the BBC; <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-66397256>

This shows how cynical this new infrastructure project has been approached..

“The cost of compensation would be lower than building cables underground”

This is a terrible statement to read, and the level of disregard of local communities and historic locations is incredible.

Pylon design

We will be carrying out further assessments on pylon design. Our assessments will include visual impacts and mitigation, environmental and ecological considerations, construction and lifetime maintenance effects.

Different designs in use in the UK include:

standard lattice

lower height lattice

T-pylons.

For the purposes of this initial assessment, the preferred draft alignment reflects the use of standard lattice pylons. The use of other pylon designs is still under consideration.

We will present the findings from our assessments at our statutory consultation.

Q16. Is there anything you would like us to consider as we carry out our assessments?

The parish council is fundamentally opposed to the overhead pylons and would like other options such as under the sea to be explored. Our firm belief is that the best long term solution for this infrastructure project is an undersea route for its entire length area.

Our consultation

Please let us know your views on the quality of our printed and online consultation materials, our public consultation events and online webinars, how we have notified people about our proposals and anything else related to this consultation.

Q17. Please let us know how you heard about this consultation.

Please state

Q18. Please rate the information we have published in terms of how clearly it was presented and how easy it was to understand

Very poor

Reasons for answer

It has been extremely difficult to track down the link for the consultation. The public consultation event for Chelmsford was organised at very short notice and was not central to Chelmsford and has very poor if any public transport availability. There was no signage on the main road to the event or within the race course.

(Questions 19-21 relate to specific consultation events)

Q22. Do you have further comments about our materials, consultation process or any suggestions for how we can improve our consultation?

Allow a more central location for the public consultation event and give residents more notice. They were extremely poorly promoted at the start of the process. The consultation should have had the opportunity to discuss alternative proposals rather than pylons and is therefore not a true consultation.

Equality and Diversity

(Questions 23-26 relate to Equality and Diversity characteristics of the individual completing the questionnaire and are therefore not relevant for the Parish Council.)

Further Comments

Q27. Please provide any further comments you may have

The equality and diversity questions are not relevant to a response from a public body.

Writtle Parish Council is a statutory organization representing approximately 5,500 residents spread across 2,300 households in a village protected by a green belt around the village, located to the west of Chelmsford, Essex. Writtle Parish Council is a statutory consultee for planning applications and benefits from a current adopted Neighbourhood Development Plan forming part of the Local Plan for the Chelmsford City district and takes a keen interest in all planning matters.

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The parish council strongly object to the proposals.