

Norwich to Tilbury EN020027-003829: Socio-economics, Recreation and Tourism

The Parish Councils of Ardleigh and Little Bromley (ALBA) are concerned that the Project, including the siting and associated works for the East Anglia Connection Node (EACN), would affect not only land and roads, but also the way residents and visitors use the countryside for recreation, events, walking, cycling, horse riding and local leisure. This paper distinguishes between effects which the Environmental Statement itself identifies as significant residual EIA effects and other effects which are assessed as non-significant, but which remain locally important in functional and community terms.

Permanent loss of recreational asset near Ardleigh

The clearest adverse effect is the fishing lake north-west of Ardleigh. National Grid identifies that this asset would require permanent closure and assesses this as a permanent, long-term, moderate adverse and significant residual operational effect. That is a direct admission of significant harm in the Ardleigh area. The assessment should identify precisely which land take, work or operational requirement is responsible for the closure, whether the lake is publicly accessible or membership-based, and, so far as evidence is available, the number and type of users affected. Separate discussions on compensation are referred to, but compensation discussions do not reduce the environmental effect and should not be treated as secured mitigation unless an enforceable replacement facility, equivalent provision or other binding mitigation is identified in the DCO. The Parish Councils therefore challenge any approach which records the recreational loss while leaving the remedy uncertain.

Public Rights of Way in Little Bromley would be permanently altered

The paper identifies effects on several Little Bromley footpaths. The Parish Councils will need to check every PRoW number, closure duration and length of permanent alteration against the latest PRoW schedule and plans, but the present assessment identifies effects on Little Bromley 15, 14, 13 and 7. These include temporary closures, managed access or diversions during highway verge, compound, cable or road-widening works, and short permanent alterations including shortening or diversion of sections of the network. Although these effects are generally presented as negligible or not significant in EIA terms, that classification does not answer the local functional concern. In a small rural parish, even short permanent changes may matter because they affect connectivity between routes, perceived safety, accessibility for less mobile users, amenity, and the practical usability of the wider walking network.

Ardleigh bridleway and equestrian use would be affected

Ardleigh 2 bridleway is identified as being temporarily closed, with managed access during haul road construction works. It would also be temporarily closed and diverted for underground 11 kV cable installation. The assessment should specify whether managed access will in fact remain available throughout the relevant works, the standards by which that access will be kept safe for walkers and horse riders, and what alternative arrangements will apply if managed access cannot be maintained. God's House Farm, CO7 7QQ, has been identified as an equestrian stable in Section C but rates its sensitivity as low. That may understate the importance of equestrian activity in this rural area, where users are particularly sensitive to construction traffic, road widening, HGVs, noise, diversions and loss of quiet lanes.

Local events depend on quiet rural roads

The paper identifies the Little Bromley 10 km Run, the Corbeau Seats Rally and Tour de Tendring. The Little Bromley 10 km Run is an annual local event using roads surrounding Little Bromley and had around 170 confirmed entries in 2025. The Corbeau Seats Rally uses local roads around Ardleigh, Great Bromley, Frating, Great Bentley, St Osyth, Clacton-on-Sea and Tendring. Tour de Tendring is a cycling event using local roads in Tendring. These examples are important because they demonstrate that the rural road network is itself a recreational and community asset. Construction traffic, road widening, abnormal load movements and access restrictions could undermine that function unless event-specific arrangements are defined and secured.

Mitigation for local events is weak

National Grid proposes mitigation measure S05 in relation to events such as the Little Bromley 10 km Run, Corbeau Seats Rally, Tour de Tendring and Ford Ride London-Essex 100. The present formulation is too weak if it merely states that the undertaker will seek to work with event organisers. The Parish Councils request defined commitments, including consultation with event organisers and affected parish councils by a specified period before each relevant event; a published event-management plan; avoidance of identified event dates where reasonably practicable; safe temporary traffic and access arrangements; clear notice periods; a named community liaison contact; and a dispute-escalation mechanism if agreement cannot be reached.

Business, supply-chain and reputational effects may be understated

Colchester City Council raised concerns that the assessment does not capture supply-chain impacts or reputational impacts on businesses. National Grid's response is that these matters are outside the agreed scope of the assessment. On the present material, the Parish Councils do not put this point as a proven significant EIA effect. Rather, it is a remaining assessment gap. The assessment should identify any particular rural businesses, recreation providers, equestrian facilities, events, visitor activities or access-dependent enterprises that may be affected, and should explain whether impacts on reputation, rural setting, access and visitor confidence have been considered. Without that work, a narrow access-based assessment may miss real local economic harm.

Overall concern for the Planning Inspectorate

The assessment accepts one clear significant residual effect: the permanent closure of the fishing lake north-west of Ardleigh. Other effects, including permanent shortening or diversion of Little Bromley footpaths, temporary interference with Ardleigh 2 bridleway, effects on equestrian use, and disruption risks to local events, are generally treated as low, negligible or not significant in EIA terms. The Parish Councils' concern is that those classifications should not obscure their local importance. The Examining Authority should require stronger location-specific commitments for PRoW protection, event management, equestrian safety, construction traffic control, access to rural businesses, and mitigation or compensation for lost recreational facilities. It should also ensure that voluntary community benefits are not treated as a substitute for mitigation, compensation or secured replacement provision for identified harm.

Conclusion: This assessment confirms that Ardleigh and Little Bromley would experience direct socio-economic, recreation and tourism effects from the Project. The most important admitted effect is the permanent closure of a fishing lake north-west of Ardleigh, which is assessed as a significant residual operational effect. Other effects, including permanent changes to Little Bromley footpaths, temporary effects on Ardleigh 2 bridleway, and potential disruption to locally important rural events and equestrian activity, may be assessed as non-significant in EIA terms but remain important to everyday rural life, connectivity, amenity and community wellbeing. Stronger, enforceable and locally specific mitigation is required before consent is granted, and voluntary community benefits should not be relied upon as a substitute for secured mitigation or compensation for identified harm.