

Ardleigh Parish Council Comments on North Falls and Five Estuaries' Joint Substations Design Guide September 2025

In the first instance, our Parish Council and our community do not agree with the proposal to site three substations on Best Most Versatile land, in, and at the borders of, the parish of Ardleigh. We feel it is premature for the two developers to bring this forward, as the DCO for National Grid application has only just gone to the Inspector.

Strong representations, as to why alternatives should be considered, have been presented in previous feedback both from the Parish Council and individuals.

The Joint Substation Design Guide (JDG) indicates that both North Falls and Five Estuaries are progressing to Air Insulated Switchgear (AIS) at the site. This includes several buildings, electrical equipment, access routes, and other hard surfaces, enclosed by secure, fenced boundary with lighting and CCTV.

JDG 1.1 Page 13 – Good Design Best Practice

The four key principles set out with National Infrastructure Commissions Design Principles for National Infrastructure remain valid themes for the preparation of the JDG and subsequent detailed design. Our comments and questions are set out below.

Climate: Mitigate greenhouse gas emissions and adapt to climate change.

Has a comparison been carried out between off-shore transmission of greenhouse gas and this proposal?

People: Reflect what society wants and share benefits widely.

The communities of Ardleigh and Little Bromley will be severely affected by the cumulative developments of 3 substations plus TARCON power link. This proposal does not reflect what the local society wants.

Places: Provide a sense of identity and improve our environment.

This proposal, alongside National Grid and Tarchon will not be improving the environment. Rather it will be destroying large areas of landscape in the area.

Value: Achieve multiple benefits and solve problems well.

The only benefit that the communities of Ardleigh and Little Bromley can see will be that which goes to the shareholders of the companies who own the developers. The community feels that the better option is to offshore the transmission or find an alternative brownfield site that will not destroy undeveloped countryside. To achieve value it would be better to go off-shore, find another more suitable site or, if not, combine the two substations to take up less land and have less impact.

Fire Risk There is a Water Deluge Tank proposed in case of fire but have the developers consulted/considered the availability of the fire service to tackle substation fires? Manningtree Fire Service, the nearest one, is an on-call service. Substations are likely to be serious events requiring specialist equipment and knowledge to deal with them.

Wildlife and biodiversity. Are the developers working with Essex Wildlife Trust and ECC Local Nature Recovery Team to establish what is best and will have the greatest result for increasing the biodiversity of the area to encourage as much wildlife as is possible.

Attenuation Ponds – how will these be maintained? We are in a low rainfall area. Will they not just dry up and become just a dry scrape?

Will the site ensure quiet, dark nights.

It would be good to see images of the proposals with the full extent of both substations. It is very hard to visualise the entire site development. Perhaps a visual ‘tour’ would be more helpful. To include all the perimeter fencing through to all of the buildings and metal constructions.

Colour Assessments have used examples from, what looks like, building in Colchester and not Ardleigh, Little Bromley and surrounding hamlets. This is inappropriate and lacking in respect for the local area.

Accents The community do not want it to look pretty they want it to go to a better site or to disappear from view.

Is Biodiversity Net Gain delivered entirely on site?

Answering the feedback questions:

2.11 - 2.18

Low roof/Shallow pitch

Green roof with water harvesting

2.15 – 2.18

Low profile as invisible as possible

2.8

Increase the edge planting SW/NE/SE – to use as much screening as possible

3.9 – 3.17

Do not use Colchester buildings as architectural examples. Use local architecture – Ardleigh, Little Bromley and surrounding hamlets.

3.18 – 3.24

Use the best colours to make the construction ‘disappear’.

2.19 – 2.20

The security fencing looks ugly and not in keeping with the surroundings. Least harmful to the surrounding environment the better. Needs a better pictorial description to be able to make considered comment.

2.21

Perimeter boundary 1.2m high. Timber post and rail preferred.

4.5 – 4.16

Important to maximise native planting. Is BNG being delivered totally on site?

The area is used for walking, dog walking, horse riding, cycling, and driving from village to hamlet to village. More access to open countryside and ways of observing the local flora and fauna. Provide suitable habitat for dormouse, turtle doves, and bats as well as all of the usual creature that live in the area.

We also support the comments submitted by our District Councillor reproduced below.

- I believe it would be best for the community for the buildings to resemble agricultural buildings which are found within the immediate vicinity. I understand from the explaining booklet that PV panels would not be possible. Are you able to offer further explanation for why this is the case? Are PV panels definitely not an option?
- Local agricultural buildings within the vicinity are steel frame, therefore suggest steel frame with metal cladding is best option.
- A shortened width giving widened edge planting to the south east would be my preferred option. This could give greater screening from Ardleigh Road.
- It is vital that colours used blend into the environment as far as is possible, using neighbouring agricultural barn colours as a best guide. NO vivid/bright/conceptual colourways.
- Visual integration would offer the least impact on residents.
- Landscaping proposals will inevitably increase rabbit populations which will impact on local businesses. The site is within a working agricultural setting and as such, rabbit fencing must be included to help protect remaining farmland. Five Estuaries and North Falls must also have full ongoing responsibility for all fence and landscaping maintenance.
- Any fencing must allow Five Estuaries and North Falls access within their own boundary to follow landscape maintenance. There must not be reliance on land owners or the local authority to maintain project related planting or fencing.
- A mix of native species should be used for planting with consideration for where more mature planting should be used in the first planting stages. Avoid species which suffer badly in drought. Locally, well maintained mixed species or blackthorn hedging provides thick, effective screening which offers good value. This would be an easily maintained, quick and simple option to consider which fits with the local area, especially along Ardleigh Road. If using broad bands of loosely planted trees and bushes, if poorly maintained this could look very messy in years to come. No planting should block any access for ditch clearance/maintenance which is vital in this area to avoid flooding situations which are common along both Grange Road and Ardleigh Road in winter months.
- The local area is used by walkers, dog walkers, bicycle and horse riders and runners. Able bodied and wheelchair users, adults and children. Our village is also our amenity area and accessibility is vital. Safe, joined up areas and routes which are accessible to all should be provided.
- There is still no clarity for how National Grid's plans will interact with Five Estuaries and North Falls own plans along Ardleigh Road. National Grid intend to widen the road which is a 60mph speed limit. Cumulatively, the projects will add further risk to all road users. Where Five Estuaries and North Falls landscaping interacts with all roads and agricultural field entrances, visibility splays to ensure safe access/exit for agricultural vehicles must be worked into the landscaping designs, together with appropriate road signage, to avoid collisions and to keep road users safe.

Ardleigh Parish Council
29 September 2025