

Planning Inspectorate
By Email

14 December 2020

Dear Rynd Smith,

I write following the verbal submissions made on my behalf by Phil North during the Issue Specific Hearings on Wednesday 2nd and Thursday 3rd December 2020.

During the discussion on 'developments in energy policy', Phil North referenced the adjournment debate which took place in Parliament on the 5th November 2020, where the Minister of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, Kwasi Kwarteng said that "the argument for some form of offshore network review had been won." The Minister was, of course, referring to a system of integrated and coordinated connections as set out in the National Grid Offshore Network Review that he initiated. As I have already pointed out in previous submissions, the review states that "the majority of the technology required for integrated design is available now" and that "some changes to achieve an integrated network can take place within the current regime."

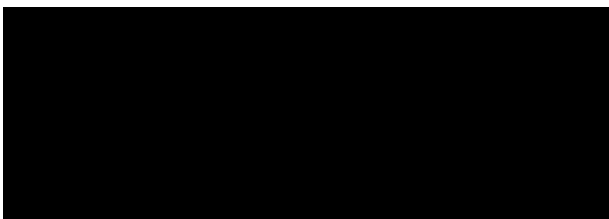
Indeed, as Phil North also referenced, SPR think the technology is already available too, hence their commitment to undersea cabling as part of the Scotland to England 'super-highway', bringing energy onshore in an integrated way. If they are committing to that elsewhere then I would suggest they could provide undersea cabling to onshore the energy connection for EA1 & EA2 at a more appropriate site, closer to a centre of population. In the past I've referenced the brownfield site at Bradwell.

As the adjournment debate was referenced in the issue specific hearings, you requested that I send the Hansard link and copy of the debate as evidence for you and your team to consider. I have also attached the Guardian article that refers to the Scotland to England 'superhighway'.

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2020-11-05/debates/DC9C239E-08D4-4EB5-933B-A41A95D5B35F/OffshoreWindTransmissionConnections>

<https://www.theguardian.com/business/2020/nov/16/firms-agree-scotland-to-england-renewable-energy-superhighway>

Yours Sincerely,



Dr Thérèse Coffey MP

Adjournment Debate – 5th November 2020

Duncan Baker

(North Norfolk) (Con)

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This is my first Adjournment debate in this place, and I am proud to have been granted a debate on one of the most important areas that the Government are tackling. At its heart, we are dealing with climate change, and our efforts to provide clean, green power will set us apart as we tackle the single most important issue that all Governments around the world face.

Perhaps it is rather fitting that I am standing here at all on Guy Fawkes night, because had Guy Fawkes got his way back in 1605 and blown up the Houses of Parliament, I would not be able to be here to talk about a different kind of blow—the blowing of the wind that is to transform our energy sector and make us the leading nation in the whole world in the race to decarbonise and reach net zero. Back in December 2019, I stood on a commitment to care about and tackle climate change. Eleven months in, how are we are getting on? We are doing that, aren't we, but why? Wind energy has the potential to be our greatest story and to give us energy security—just imagine that—as well as protecting our natural environment; all those things together.

Off the coast of Norfolk and Suffolk, we already have 52% of all the wind farms in the country, and we will contribute well over 60% of all the country's energy once the current applications are built. This programme, along with all the other initiatives we are contributing to, is making us the fastest country in the G7 to decarbonise since 1990. As well as that, we have been the first nation to legally commit to being bound to achieving net zero by 2050, an achievement that we on the Conservative Benches are all rightly proud of. But recently, we heard the Prime Minister announce that we will go even further, even faster. Not content with that, the Prime Minister four weeks ago announced that by 2030 every single household in the country will be powered by wind-produced energy. As he said:

“As Saudi Arabia is to oil, the UK is to wind”.

And I have no doubt that the Prime Minister is sitting watching, having a cup of tea.

It is an intrepid quintet of Norfolk and Suffolk MPs who are already ahead of the curve. We saw that vision and we have a method to deliver it. It is at this point that I want to thank my colleagues, some of whom are here this evening, because without them we would not be as far down the line as we are now. My hon. Friends the Members for Broadland (Jerome Mayhew), for South Suffolk (James Cartlidge) and for Mid Norfolk (George Freeman), and my right hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk Coastal (Dr Coffey) have been working on how to achieve that vision for months and, certainly before newbies like myself, even longer. For there is a problem that brings us to this debate. How do

we connect that much power and put it into the transmission grid? We need a better system, a better method, and a fit-for-purpose and future-proof way.

Five years ago, nobody really cared. It was not the problem that it is now, but we have come an enormous way since then. We have now to catch up with the technology, catch up with the regulatory framework and catch up with the legislative processes.

James Cartlidge

(South Suffolk) (Con)

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I congratulate my hon. Friend on bringing forward this vital debate and on speaking so eloquently. I am proud to be one of the quintet to which he refers. Does he agree that what we all share is that our constituencies will see very significant infrastructure built in the years ahead to accommodate the new demand for offshore wind? We all support that, but is it not the case that bringing forward a new transmission method, whereby we have more co-ordinated wind farms, would not only reduce infrastructure pressure but sustainably develop the industry in the interests of UK plc?

Duncan Baker

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My hon. Friend makes perhaps one of the most important points I am about to come on to. He is absolutely right that as our growth has become almost exponential, we have had to tackle the problem of infrastructure and find that better way. We will come on to that in a moment, but first of all I just want to highlight some of the problems that that presents for my communities and the communities of my hon. Friends the Members for Broadland and for South Suffolk.

I have said before that it is about the rate of growth. Because of the rate of growth at the moment, communities are blighted by the invasiveness of connecting these mammoth pieces of infrastructure to the transmission grid. I have said many times—for the record, I still believe it—that I am lucky enough to represent the most beautiful constituency in the country, which is my home of North Norfolk. An increasing number of offshore wind projects are being granted in similar locations within my constituency, breaking land and sharing cables routes that go through my countryside. My communities, such as Weybourne and Happisburgh, which I am sure some of my hon. Friends know well and have holidayed there, are seeing year after year of destruction to their communities as cable routes tear through villages, communities and farmland.

Jerome Mayhew

(Broadland) (Con)

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I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this important debate. Does he agree that, although cable corridors call to mind something rather minor, they in fact run a 100-metre corridor through whatever is in front of them, whether it is the environment or local communities?

Duncan Baker

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My hon. Friend is right, and he highlights another important point. It has been a privilege to serve in this place since December 2019. Since then, we have held many meetings with—

Madam Deputy Speaker

(Dame Eleanor Laing)

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Order. The hon. Gentleman has not done anything wrong, but it is five o'clock.
5.00pm

Motion lapsed (Standing Order No. 9(3)).

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(James Morris.)

Duncan Baker

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Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker; it is a privilege that I have not done something wrong in the Chamber.

Since December 2019, I have had many meetings with my hon. Friend the Member for Broadland, and I commend him for the passion with which he has served and tried to help those communities that have seen potential road maps of cable corridors coming through

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their small villages. He has been a champion for trying to stop that in those communities. I used to live in one of those communities—Cawston—and I know how much he has done to help it. One of the problems is that the current regulations prohibit the sharing of infrastructure due to competition rules, so each individual company must construct separate cable corridors.

Joy Morrissey

(Beaconsfield) (Con)

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I am not fortunate enough to have a beautiful coastline along my constituency, although Beaconsfield is beautiful indeed—the most beautiful, I would wager, but we can debate that later. Does my hon. Friend agree that those who are passionate about tackling the climate change emergency and are providing new and alternative forms of energy need infrastructure that can be shared with everyone, including small community energy suppliers, and that we need to look at how we can expand that infrastructure to not only wind farms but other alternative forms of energy?

Duncan Baker

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My hon. Friend is absolutely right. I know that she has an equally beautiful constituency; perhaps we should do an exchange programme one day and view each other's constituency. She makes an important point: wind energy is just one part of the jigsaw of how we decarbonise and create enough green energy. There will be other forms of energy that are part of the mixture that will help us to decarbonise by 2050. We are lucky in Norfolk and Suffolk to have an enormous amount of wind energy off our coast, but there are many areas around the country with leading initiatives that are helping in the fight to tackle climate change.

The point I want to highlight, and the reason why this debate is so important, is what these cable corridors are leading to. They are causing major environmental damage, as wildlife habitats and agricultural land are dug up multiple times. Nutrient-rich land is sometimes irreversibly damaged from the disturbance caused, and many farmers report poor crop growth along cable routes—much worse than before those cables were put into the ground—caused by the disturbance of the digging. Communities also suffer great socioeconomic damage from the disruption and upheaval caused. For businesses that are along cable routes, there is disturbance, including from heavy goods vehicles and traffic for many months—sometimes up to a year—while these trenches are being dug. It causes enormous problems for these small, often rural communities in my part of the world.

Jerome Mayhew

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My hon. Friend has already made mention of the beautiful village of Cawston in my constituency and the neighbouring village of Oulton. Does he agree that when we look at the socioeconomic impact of these cable routes, it is wrong to look at them in isolation? In the case of Cawston, for example, there are no fewer than two routes crossing each other in the same community, yet we have individual planning applications. Does he agree that a more integrated approach dealing with all the infrastructure requirements for offshore wind should be taken?

Duncan Baker

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My hon. Friend is absolutely right. He makes a hugely important point: we have places that are seeing multiple crossings of cable routes. Of course, what we should be doing is looking ahead with some vision about what is coming in.

Peter Aldous

(Waveney) (Con)

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I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this debate. He is making his case extremely passionately. He has clearly done an awful lot of research for this debate, but I do not know whether he has seen this week's Policy Exchange report, "The Future of the North Sea" that highlights the enormous potential of the North sea basin to generate jobs and to achieve our carbon reduction targets. Does he agree that the way to do this is to work collaboratively with industry, which wants to help, and to look at reviewing and changing the regulatory framework, as indeed Policy Exchange has suggested, but in a way that does not disadvantage industry?

Duncan Baker

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My hon. Friend has, as he always does so beautifully and succinctly hit the nail on the head. This is all about our wanting to promote, help, collaborate and work together on such an important issue. Ever since we have been involved in this whole discussion, we have come together with the industry, and worked with people from across the world, mainly in Europe, who have brought such brilliant ideas to the table. Only through collaboration and working with them do I even stand here today to try to present some of the issues and why it is so important to work together. I thank him enormously for that contribution.

James Cartlidge

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As a supplementary to that intervention, will my hon. Friend give way?

Duncan Baker

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Absolutely.

James Cartlidge

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My hon. Friend is being very generous in taking interventions. I hope that he continues in that spirit—I am sure he will. My hon. Friend the Member for Waveney (Peter Aldous) is absolutely right to highlight the Policy Exchange report. I believe that it calls for a more holistic approach to planning the future of the North sea. Is that not in keeping with what we are asking for, which is a more co-ordinated approach? After all, not only is it in the interests of our communities to reduce infrastructure and build more of it out at sea, but it supports the industry, enabling it to grow more sustainably because it does not have to be bogged down with constant planning changes and all that comes with that.

Duncan Baker

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Again, my hon. Friend, in his enthusiasm and excitement, is leaping ahead to the point in my speech that I am going to get to in just a moment, but he makes the point so passionately and enthusiastically. That is why I said at the beginning that he was part of the quintet. I feel almost guilty that my great friend the hon. Member for Waveney is not included in this quintet. I want to invite everybody to be part of this, because they have all been such champions to get to this important debate this evening. That point is absolutely right, and we will come to that point about co-ordination and integration point in one second.

As more and more developments are granted and our communities recover from one cable corridor and get back on their feet, another one comes along in close proximity. As my hon. Friend the Member for Broadland mentioned, even in such close proximity, they cross over the top of each other. I say to all hon. and right hon. Members in this place today that we cannot go on like this. There is a better way and it is only right that we urge the Government to address this problem. For months

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now, we have met with all manner of stakeholders, from the operators to the regulators, to those around the world who have helped us in our quest, and I do think that there is light at the end of the tunnel.

I am hugely grateful, as we all are here, to the Minister for giving up his time and for so willingly allowing us to lobby him. I have even disturbed him when he was eating his dinner in the Dining Room to talk about this. He has always been so engaging and has allowed me to shamelessly talk about this. I know that the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy is charging ahead with the offshore transmission network review, which we also welcome. What started off as a very fixed vision of an offshore ring main has in just a few months morphed and evolved into something probably best summarised by the National Grid ESO report published last month. The report's findings outline many of our concerns, but, as in all governance, we should not just come up with a problem—we should offer a solution. There is something there: an integrated offshore network using high-voltage, direct current, or HVDC, technology that could save consumers approximately £6 billion by 2050. More than that, by using an integrated approach with the infrastructure out at sea, we reduce the environmental and social impacts of the point-to-point connections, such as cables and onshore landings, by about 50%.

James Cartlidge

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My hon. Friend is being incredibly generous in giving way. Is not another big advantage that once we start building that offshore transmission network, it massively increases the capacity for exporting energy once a surplus is generated? We will come ever closer to linking through those big DC connectors into Europe through France.

Duncan Baker

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Again, my hon. Friend hits such an important point. We touched on this at the very beginning when we talked about the ability to create energy security for ourselves. Where else do we produce a solution in which we could actually end up exporting energy? We will be a sovereign nation—we are a sovereign nation again—and the ability to have that security but export excess energy to other countries in Europe is almost a no-brainer. I know that he has very close links to the Chancellor, and I am sure that he, too, is watching this speech and that his eyes will light up at the potential export opportunity and income to the Treasury.

The integrated technology is reasonably available, but a key way to unleash the new system is through the use of HVDC circuit breakers. As we heard very recently, some of the technology is already available. Some is being developed. We are very much at the cusp of this.

Jerome Mayhew

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In your discussions—

Madam Deputy Speaker

(Dame Eleanor Laing)

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His.

Jerome Mayhew

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I am so sorry, Madam Deputy Speaker. In my hon. Friend's discussions with members of the offshore industry, has he formed a view that they are keen to adopt the new system? If so, have they indicated that the sooner they get clarity and the sooner the rules change to facilitate the new system, the better it will be for industry, the environment and our constituents?

Duncan Baker

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My hon. Friend again makes an important point. Even in my short time in this place, it has been amazing to see how many people seem to want and agree on this, and to be pushing in the same direction. He is absolutely right—yes, there are people out there, and industry bodies, who do this day in, day out, who want us to push in this direction. Suddenly, for the first time, everyone is pushing at an open door and it is now incumbent on us to help try to deliver this, and that is part of the reason why we are here this evening.

I was trying to set out the point that if we ensure that the legislative and regulatory frameworks are right, using this new technology we will have a chance to link wind farms together and send current down new cabling straight into the locations that need it. No longer would it have to go through my communities and those of many other hon. Members. It would go directly to the locations that need it. What would that do? It would minimise the need for onshore infrastructure and trenching and disruption in our communities.

James Cartlidge

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Is it not the case that this isprecedented? There was a plan to build new power lines over the border from Scotland into England, but because of the damage that that would have done to the countryside, they built an under-sea link, known as the western link, down into north Wales and the rest of the grid. Does that not show that we can already deliver large amounts of power underneath the sea so that it is closer to the population centres where the demand exists?

Duncan Baker

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My hon. Friend has again picked up on the fact that some of this technology is already out there. It may be in its infancy, but it is on the way. It is being developed and, in some parts of the country, it is even starting to be there already. We just need to unleash it for the rest of the country to take advantage of it.

We often lose sight of why we are even talking about this issue. The current piecemeal approach was appropriate in perhaps the early stages, but as we quadruple our wind generation and commit our energies to decarbonising, we have to look again, and in my case and those of my hon. Friend

the Member for South Suffolk and other Members here, pay particular attention to our coastal communities, where such technology has been such an enormous problem.

Peter Aldous

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I appreciate the point that my hon. Friend is trying to make, but for coastal communities such as mine, these developments have been an absolute godsend in bringing jobs to the area.

Duncan Baker

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My hon. Friend is absolutely right. There is enormous generation of jobs on the back of this green energy revolution. He is absolutely right to point that out and I do not dispute it in the slightest. The point I was making was that in coastal communities, where we are trenching into the side of cliffs—in areas of outstanding natural beauty—I want to make sure that we can properly improve things for the future.

This is now an issue of speed. We have all read the report that I referred to earlier, and I think we now have to get on with things as quickly as we possibly can. I know that the Minister is hugely supportive of the case, so I wonder whether there will be time in the Queen's Speech next year for Bills to be laid out so that we can really get to grips with ensuring that the legislation can change for the better to benefit all our constituencies.

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There are significant challenges ahead. Nobody should stand here and think that this is going to be a walk in the park, but we are offering a solution—a way forward. I want this day to be as important as it was 415 years ago, when Guy Fawkes, luckily, did not get his way. He did not get quite the explosion that he wanted, but perhaps five intrepid MPs from the east will help to blow us back on course with an energy solution that we need for a truly green future.

5.17pm

The Minister for Business, Energy and Clean Growth

(Kwasi Kwarteng)

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I am delighted to respond to my hon. Friend the Member for North Norfolk (Duncan Baker), whose forays into parliamentary history, going back 415 years, I particularly appreciated. I was very pleased to be reminded of the fact that it is 5 November, but I will make no further reference to it my speech. I will briefly, but as succinctly and comprehensively as I can, address the points that he very ably made.

I also thank my hon. Friend for his efforts, along with the quintet—I can count only four—of MPs who have so ably, over many months, lobbied me, persuaded me and cajoled me to look at this issue in a much more detailed way than we had done in the past. I commend them also for a classic example of MPs coming together, forcing an agenda and getting some quite substantial results over a relatively short time.

When I took over this brief, and I had the privilege of accepting the Prime Minister's offer to be the Energy Minister in this country, I was struck by the fact that thinking about this subject had not really evolved since 2015. That year was significant, because it was when Ofgem, to all intents and purposes, ruled out an offshore transmission system network of the kind that my hon. Friend has promoted. However, in the short time since—in the last year and a bit—we as a Government and a lot of industry players have really shifted on this issue, and the contribution of hon. Members in this regard has been remarkable.

My hon. Friend the Member for North Norfolk also did a good job in suggesting that net zero was at the centre of our strategy to fight climate change. We are, as he said, rightly proud of our commitment to that. In many ways, the problem that he refers to is a function of our success. It was not long ago that we thought 10 GW of offshore wind capacity by 2030 would be a significant achievement, and that it was a reasonable target. Today we want to have 40 GW by 2030. That is a quadrupling of the ambition, and because we have upscaled our ambition so considerably, his argument about the disruptive effects that point-to-point landing of electricity would have on his and other communities has been recognised. I would suggest that the argument for some form of offshore network system has been won.

What is critically under discussion at the moment is the timing. In a way, that is the devil that lurks in the detail, and it is precisely the reason that, in July this year, thanks to the lobbying of my hon. Friend and others, I launched the offshore transmission network review, to bring together key stakeholders involved in the timing, the siting and the design of an offshore wind transmission system. The 40 GW ambition equates to installing one turbine each weekday throughout the whole of the 2020s. That gives an impression of how comprehensive and ambitious this deployment will be.

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We cannot afford to slow that rate, so, given the nature of the ambition, it is absolutely right that we should look at developing an offshore transmission network system.

My hon. Friend did a good job in referring to the National Grid ESO analysis, which was published only in the past few weeks. It showed that the economic benefits of a fully integrated approach could save as much as £6 billion by 2050, and that is not even considering all the local environmental benefits that such an offshore network system would provide. The crucial thing to remember is that most of this technology is already here with us right now. Shifting away from individual connections towards a larger, more integrated solution would be environmentally sensible as well as presenting an enormous economic opportunity not only for the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Waveney (Peter Aldous) but for the whole country. As my hon. Friend the Member for South Suffolk (James Cartlidge) said, this is about UK plc at the end of the day.

Jerome Mayhew

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My right hon. Friend referred to the review undertaken by National Grid ESO. When considering the cost-benefit analysis of the integrated design compared with the counterfactual—the current system—the report concluded that adopting the new integrated system immediately or as soon as possible would be the way to get the majority of the £6.4 billion of savings, both in capital expenditure and operating expenditure from then right up to 2050 and beyond. That is an 18% saving for consumers. Does he agree that it would be irrational if the Government did not do all in their power to put this new system in place and get the benefits as soon as possible?

Kwasi Kwarteng

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I fully appreciate my hon. Friend's point. We want to expedite this process, but we are talking about very expensive infrastructure and about redesigning or tweaking the regulatory framework in order to accommodate that investment. These things take time, but it is absolutely right for him and other MPs to hold the Government's feet to the fire. That is entirely legitimate, and he has done a great job on that.

James Cartlidge

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It is brilliant how the Minister is engaging with us on this subject. On timing, we feel that there is an issue about legislation, and if we are to

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reform the regulatory framework as quickly as we are pushing ahead with output targets, we may need legislation in the forthcoming Queen's Speech. We are ready to help in any way we can to ensure that we get something ready quickly.

Kwasi Kwarteng

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Perhaps regrettably, the subjects of the Queen's Speech are beyond my pay grade, as people say, and I cannot possibly divulge what will be in the speech in that context, because frankly I do not know. However, my hon. Friend makes a serious point, and any subsequent legislation from BEIS, or that I try to introduce to the House, must consider the question of the regulatory regime and the environment through which we can develop the offshore network system. We are looking at that issue and taking it seriously.

Peter Aldous

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Does the Minister agree, given the highly innovative solution that he is working up, that industry has been working ingeniously in the North sea for more than 50 years, and it has come up with the most remarkable technological solutions? Industry must be involved, along with us, with business, with the Government, and with regulators.

Kwasi Kwarteng

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My hon. Friend will know that I have visited his constituency and seen the wind farm installations off the coast of Suffolk. Industry and the operators of offshore wind farms, National Grid, and others, will be involved, and I am sure they will be consulted. They have come up with their own review, and people are very much engaged in that wider debate.

I am pleased that our review has been welcomed across the sector and across the House, and I am pleased to respond at any time—perhaps not at dinner time, but at any other time—to my hon. Friends’ insistence and brilliant advocacy on this issue. This is a remarkable instance of a group of MPs representing a locality pushing an important issue, not only for their constituencies but for the country as a whole. I commend them in their efforts and look forward to hearing from them. I hope that together we can all push forward and deliver on this agenda.

Question put and agreed to.

Firms agree Scotland to England renewable energy 'superhighway'

Scottish Power, National Grid and SSE project will support 'hundreds of green jobs'



Scottish Power, National Grid and SSE have agreed a multibillion-pound project that will help bring Scotland's vast reserves of renewable energy to millions of homes in England. Photograph: Xinhua/Alamy Stock Photo

Jillian Ambrose

Mon 16 Nov 2020 13.39 GMT

Three of Britain's biggest energy companies have agreed to build giant underwater power cables to bring Scotland's vast reserves of renewable energy to millions of homes in England.

The multibillion-pound energy "superhighway", to be built by **Scottish Power**, National Grid and SSE, could help to unlock the potential of the prime minister's plan to build enough offshore wind farms to power every home in the country by 2030.

The so-called Eastern Link will run from two separate points in Scotland – Peterhead and Torness – for more than 270 miles along the east coast of Scotland to Selby and Hawthorn Point in the north of England.

The companies set out their plan to move ahead with the "interconnector" project on the same day that the government announced they will co-sponsor **the UN's Cop26 climate talks** in Glasgow next year alongside NatWest. The companies said the project will support "hundreds of green jobs" during its operation and construction, which is due to begin in 2024.

Advertisement

The 2GW power project will use some of the longest subsea high-voltage power cables in the world to transmit enough clean electricity from Scotland's wind farms to keep the lights on in around 4.5m homes in England.

It will also have the potential to double in size to 4GW as Britain's North Sea energy boom gains pace in the years ahead. The east coast of Scotland is already home to almost 1GW of offshore wind farms and hosts a pipeline of projects totalling 4.4GW. After the next leasing round for offshore wind licence areas there could be up to 10GW in Scottish waters in the coming years.

In total the government hopes [to build 40GW of offshore wind power capacity](#) in UK waters within the next decade, as part of plans to meet the UK's legally-binding 2050 target to build a carbon neutral economy. The new power cable project for the eastern coast of the country, follows the troubled £1.3bn Western Link project – developed by Scottish Power and National Grid – which is [under investigation by the industry regulator](#) for failing to start up on time, and continuing to experience problems.

Nicola Shaw, National Grid's UK executive director, said the new project "will become part of the backbone of the UK's energy system".

"It's a great example of companies working together on impressive engineering feats that will help the country hit its net zero carbon target by 2050," she said.

Keith Anderson, Scottish Power's chief executive, added that the companies "firmly believe" the UK can achieve the net zero target, "but it must be done [through investment and innovation](#) in essential projects like the Eastern Link, providing benefits for customers and society in the long term".

Alistair Phillips-Davies, the chief executive of [SSE](#), described the project as "one of the most exciting energy developments over recent decades", and said it was "essential to delivering the UK's 40GW offshore wind target by 2030".

"With the eyes on the UK ahead of Cop26 next year, this project clearly demonstrates how the UK is leading the world in tackling the climate emergency and supporting thousands of jobs and supply chain opportunities," he said.