The Parish Councils of Assington, Bures St Mary, Leavenheath, Little Cornard, Polstead & Stoke by Nayland

Written comments following Bramford-Twinstead (EN020002) Issue Specific Hearing 4 & Further combined response to Examining Authority's Submission Deadline 4

1. Context

1.1 The parish councils are grateful for the Examining Authority's continuing attention to their concerns over the impacts of the proposed scheme on the setting of the Dedham Vale AONB and the location of the Dedham Vale East Cable Sealing End Compound (DVEast CSEC).

1.2 We are grateful also for the guidance and suggestions made to us by the Examining Authority (ExA) relating to the submission of further information, and to the ExA for the providing time and opportunity to investigate, refine and articulate our position.

1.3 This submission is intended to serve as our response at Submission Deadline 4 and addresses a number of subjects raised during Issue Specific Hearing 4 (ISH4) that are relevant to documents submitted by the applicant and statements made at the hearing. We envisage that further submissions will follow as our research develops further.

1.4 This note should be read in conjunction with our submission at Submission Deadline 3. We have sought not to repeat statements made in that submission, but rather to supplement our opinions with evidence drawn from further research and to respond directly to various relevant assertions made by the applicant at ISH4.

1.5 As before, this submission represents the view of all six organisations, whose parishes form a continuous line across the western half of the proposed development.

2. Relocation of the DVEast CSEC in Section D/E to Layham Quarry

2.1 In this section, we comment on applicant's Document 8.5.2: Applicants Comments on Written Representations: October 2023: Chapter 3 in which the applicant sets out his reasons for selecting the current Millfield Woods site for locating the DVEast CSEC ahead of a location within the boundary of Layham quarry.

2.2 We have also referenced the official audio record of ISH4 (Part 2: 09.11.2023). Statements made by the applicant and others are referenced by timecode indicated thus [XX:XX:XX].

2.3 We wish to reinforce the industrial scale and nature of infrastructure required within a CSEC, essentially massive civil engineering structures comprising steelwork lattice gantries of near 15metres height distributed over a 50metre width (APP-023, Document 2.11.5). Such structures would be impossible to screen using embedded planting beneath the descending overhead power lines or above buried cables, and as such are destined to remain an essentially alien intrusion into the countryside for as long as the infrastructure is required.

2.4 The applicant maintains that it has sought to identify CSEC sites that can benefit from *"natural screening and natural topography"* [ISH4 00:39:20]. We strongly support this objective which is consistent with the Horlock Rules.

2.5 As we understand it, the applicant has a statutory duty in relation to the preservation of amenity under Schedule 9 of the Electricity Act 1989. It binds itself at Section 1.4 to follow the guidelines set out in The Horlock Rules. Section 2.6 recognises its duties under Schedule 9 to give due regard to the preservation of amenity and to take reasonable steps to mitigate the effects of its relevant proposals.

2.6 At Section 2, the applicant sets out its approach to design and siting of substations. Section 2.7 states that amenity issues include form, silhouette and colour of the entire development in relation to the surrounding areas, and also related issues as overhead line entries, since these are dominant features in any substation. At Section 3. 2, the guidelines state that the siting of new substations, sealing end compounds and line entries should, as far as reasonably practicable seek to avoid altogether

internationally and nationally designated areas of the highest amenity, cultural or scientific value by the overall planning of the system connections.

2.7 Section 3.4 refers to Local Context, Land Use and Site Planning. It states that the siting of substations, extensions and associated proposals should take advantage of the screening provided by landform and existing features and the potential use of site layout and levels to keep intrusion into surrounding areas to a reasonably practicable minimum. We contend that for purposes of considering landscape and amenity impact, a cable sealing end compound can be considered in the same way as a substation. The differences only exist in engineering purpose.

2.8 The Holford Rules originally formulated for the CEGB and which predate the Horlock Rules have, nevertheless, been endorsed by the applicant. Holford states at Rule 3 the where possible inconspicuous locations should be chosen for angle towers, terminal towers and sealing end compounds.

2.9 It is our assertion that, in positioning the CSEC at Millfield Woods, the applicant has disregarded the guidelines cited above and that the use of part Layham Quarry would entirely mitigate the amenity impact of the proposed CSEC.

2.10 A photograph of the Millfield Woods site taken from Millwood Road is shown in Figure 1. Whilst it may benefit from some natural screening provided by its adjacency to Millfield Woods North & South, both designated Ancient Woodlands and County Wildlife Sites along its northern and southern boundaries respectively, the site gets no effective screening from the east – that is, from Millwood Road, or from the west and the AONB, and the applicant relies on its vegetation reinstatement (APP-184, Document 7.8.2, Sheet 12) and low embedded planting proposals (APP-185, Document 7.8.3) to act as a softening screen.

2.11 The Millfield Woods site has no screening provided by the natural topography.

2.12 The applicant is correct in asserting that the site is located at a distance of 1km from the edge of the AONB but this is only when measured along the east-west axis of the Works. The CSEC site is only 350metres from the edge of the AONB to the south, and walkers on Cherry Billy's Lane (APP-012 Document 2.7 Sheet 12) will encounter the CSEC gantries on passing the woodland edge within one minute of leaving the AONB. The same alien views will be experienced by the occupants of vehicles on either Heath Road or Millwood Road on a similar timescale. These landscape impressions can be summarised in our opinion as having a detrimental impact on the setting of the AONB.

2.13 The applicant has made play of the historical change to the compound location that it made following the non-statutory consultation in March 2022 [ISH4 00:39:00]. Whilst the move away from the edge of the AONB to the Millfield Woods site was welcomed, that of itself should not be promoted in defence of its current site selection. Sites should in our view be selected on the basis of their standalone merits, and in that regard, we consider that the applicant has failed to diligently explore, fairly represent or actively promote the advantages of superior alternatives, particularly the Layham Quarry option.

2.14 **It is our proposition that the 70 x 45metre CSEC compound can readily be transposed to a site immediately adjacent to the western boundary of the quarry** and coincident with the line of Work No 2 and the site of new pylon RB32. This is a distance of just over 800metres from Millfield Woods site and results in the elimination of three new pylons. As far as we are aware, there are no civil engineering constraints that would impede construction or operation at this location, which appears to be in an already worked-out section of the quarry.

2.15 A photograph of the site taken from Pope's Green Lane is attached at Figure 2. It is hard for us to determine current levels within the quarry, but we believe it to be in excess of 10metres when compared to the surrounding landscape. The quarry is also reasonable well served with a degree of natural woodland. **It therefore follows that this site meets the applicant's aspirations for sites with inherent natural screening and natural topography.**

2.16 As identified in previous submission (para 4.9), the quarry is already significantly affected by Work No 4 and Work No 8 (APP-010 Sheet 12) with at least 40 x 40metre construction sites at three locations within the quarry where 132kV pylons are planned for replacement in approximately similar locations by the much higher pylons suitable for 400kV transmission lines, along with the construction of access and longitudinal haul roads.

2.17 The extent of planned disturbance in the quarry is best illustrated by the applicant's submission (APP-183, Document 7.8.1, Sheets 11 and 12). We note that site clearance for the construction of Pylons 30 and 31 involve a degree of woodland removal from the Layham Pit Woodland and Meadow County Wildlife Site, while Pylon 32, the suggested site for DVE CSEC, requires only topsoil strip, it being located entirely on what is described as "open mosaic habitats on previously developed land" (APP-014 Document 2.8.2 Sheet 12). We can see no engineering reason why a temporary CSEC construction compound could not be similarly and judiciously accommodated locally, along with shared permanent access to the CSEC compound with the quarry operator.

2.18 In its Document 8.5.2: Applicants Comments on Written Representations, the applicant asserts that extending the undergrounding from Millfield Woods to the quarry would be constrained by the two blocks of woodland at Millfield Wood and the existing operational overhead line, presumably a reference to clearances required to pylons 4YL033 to 036 and the associated overhead cables (APP-018, Document 2.10, Sheet12). This point was reinforced in the recent hearing {ISH4 00:42:36] where the applicant confirmed when asked that the presence of woodland and operational lines presented a constraint to moving to the quarry that meant that there was insufficient open area available to extend the undergrounding to the quarry site.

2.19 **We are bound to challenge these assertions by the applicant on the face of the evidence provided by the applicant.** The land plans appear to us to demonstrate that there is ample clearance to both the Millfield Woods North and South and to any of the retained pylons and overhead lines between there and the quarry to construct and extend the undergrounding in standard cross-section (APP-027, Document 2.11.9) from the current site to the quarry. From a civil engineering perspective, the supposed constraints do not appear to have affected the capacity for undergrounding just 100-200metres to the west of the Millfield Woods site (APP-018, Document 2.10, Sheet 12). **For the applicant to assert otherwise appears to us to misrepresent the case against the quarry.**

2.20 The applicant acknowledges the inactive status of current site but does not mention that CSEC might be located in what we understand to be worked-out area of the site.

2.21 The applicant further asserts that CSEC in quarry may prejudice future mineral extraction activities, citing a relatively recent application to extend the allocation, but does not acknowledge that this permission relates to a site south of Pope's Green Lane, 350metres to the south of the centreline of Work No 2. The applicant also suggests that CSEC may *"prejudice the future extraction of minerals at this allocated site"*, citing Suffolk County Council's (SCC) Policy MP10 regarding safeguard areas for future mineral extraction. However, it is unclear to us whether SCC has ever been asked whether it would wish or consent to extending the quarry boundary to the west towards Polstead Heath, or whether it would be content to "unsafeguard" an area outside of the consented site to enable underground cables.

2.22 We have in our previous submission addressed the risks of encountering historic landfill and archaeology. In relation to potential disruption to protected species, we have studied the extensive material provided by the applicant in relation to the presence of dormice, bats and the like and we note that there is little to choose between the Millfield Woods site and our suggested quarry site in terms of activity. Clearly, a degree of temporary disruption will occur during construction, but we would confidently suggest that the applicant's reinstatement proposals would actively encourage repopulation. We remind the ExA that the applicant's proposals for pylon replacement will in any event result in disruption to wildlife and protected species within Layham Quarry.

2.23 A significant further benefit will arise from extending the undergrounding, and that relates to the removal of new pylons RB32, RB33 and RB34A, best illustrated by reference to the Zone of Theoretical Visibility (ZTV) plans for Section D (APP-147 Document 6.4.2, Sheet 3). This drawing shows that the three pylons in question would otherwise be visible for their full height extending for a considerable distance into the AONB, the northern boundary of which is located some 1.5km from the route. This is to us a further illustration of how the current proposals impact on the setting of the AONB.

2.24 We would respectfully suggest that there can be little dispute between any of the parties, including the applicant, local authorities and AONB Partnership, to the proposition that the quarry option presents a superior site from both natural screening and natural topographic perspectives. We would also represent that there are no civil engineering or material planning or environmental constraints that would impede an extension to the undergrounding and its relocation to the quarry site.

2.25 We would respectfully ask the ExA to give detailed consideration to (and recommend to the Secretary of State) curtailing Work No 2 and extending Work No 3 (APP-010) to the suggested site in Layham Quarry. We have no evidence to suggest that the authorities would object to this option if practical solutions were offered by the applicant and can assure the ExA that it would be warmly welcomed by the many residents that we represent.

3. Issues related to the incremental cost of undergrounding

3.1 We note with some alarm the applicant's statement (REP3-048, Table 3.1, p48) that the incremental cost of our proposed incremental undergrounding to use Layham Quarry as the location for the Dedham Vale East CSEC would be ~£16million. We are surprised by this premium, given the straightforward nature of the civil engineering works and the cancellation of three new overhead pylons.

3.2 While we understand the applicant's unwillingness to publish detailed cost estimates because of the risk of influencing contractors' tender prices during the pre-construction phase, we believe it is vital that the ExA requests sufficient detail on the incremental costs to assess the applicant's submissions, independently, given the proposal has a well-defined scope of 800m of trenched undergrounding and the crossing of Millwood Road.

3.3 For the same reasons, we believe that a similar assessment of the incremental cost of undergrounding through Section F should be presented for evaluation by ExA, noting that our proposal here would obviate the need for two CSECs completely.

3.4 We do not believe that the Secretary of State would be able to make a cost-benefit evaluation of our proposals, in accordance with EN-5 ¬ß2.9.24 without ExA's endorsement or otherwise of the reliability of the alleged additional costs, albeit that these might be examined *in camera*.

Appendix: views of potential locations for DVEast CSEC

Figure 1: Millfield Woods DVEast CSEC Site viewed from Millwood Road

Figure 2: View of proposed DV East CSEC in Layham Quarry viewed from Pope's Green Lane