

DEDHAM VALE SOCIETY

Pylons Bulletin June 2010

National Grid's original timetable was for consultation on route corridor options to close at the end of February 2010, to be followed immediately by selection of the route corridor and consultation about detailed alignment. Consultation still continues, nominally about the choice of route corridor, but in practice about the stage prior to that, ie the choice between a new line of pylons from Bramford to Twinstead and the alternatives. NG attempted not to consult about this – the real issue – but have been obliged to do so, thanks to the community groups including DVS which refused to engage on NG's terms and debate the choice of route corridor. NG now envisage announcing the route corridor in September, but accept that if consultation takes longer, that will be delayed. We continue to work against any new pylons.

All this became clear at a meeting on Monday 14 June organised by the Infrastructure Planning Commission (IPC), the body which the previous government created to decide major infrastructure applications such as the Bramford – Twinstead pylons.

There were four groups at the meeting:

IPC, led by a Commissioner, Jan Bessell;

NG, led by someone new to us, Hector Pearson, Stakeholder Group Manager from corporate HQ (ie not a techie or a consultant like those we had met before);

Councils – Suffolk & Essex CCs, Babergh and Braintree DCs;

Campaign groups – those opposing all route corridors, so including DVS; and Groton Pylon Alliance (which essentially is concerned only to oppose the northern corridors 3 & 4).

The substantive part of the meeting opened by Charles Aldous – Chairman of the Colne-Stour Countryside Association and a retired senior QC - making a statement on behalf of the groups opposing all route corridors. This attacked both legs of the NG case: the **need** for new transmission capacity, and the **choice** between options for new transmission capacity.

On **need**, NG's original public case was that new generating capacity – two gas power stations, Sizewell C and offshore wind farms – necessitated new pylons. We now know

Sizewell C is delayed by at least four years and will not start generating until 2020 at earliest

Wind farms do not add to the need for transmission capacity, because they are an alternative to fossil fuel capacity. If the wind blows, that much less gas power is needed, and vice-versa.

Upgrading the existing pylons will provide more than enough capacity for the two new gas power stations.

NG now tell us that their need case is not a matter of capacity, but of security of transmission. This is a highly technical matter, and one which emerged as central to their case only as the original consultation closed. We have had minimal opportunity to probe this issue, but already it appears that there are options to deal with security of supply issues other than by a second line of pylons Bramford – Twinstead. The simplest is simply to turn down the new gas power stations, should there be an incident threatening security of supply. NG were clearly on the back foot on this at the meeting.

On **choice**, we pointed out that NG had offered no justification for concluding that the lesser cost of pylons outweighed their environmental detriment. They simply said "It's a judgement call, which it is for NG to make". We pointed out that their judgement had to be able to stand objective scrutiny ie had to be justified. This seemed an altogether new idea to them. Their stance was that environmental assessment is to be confined to micro-analysis of the choices within a predetermined route corridor.

NG are also on the back foot about making public all the responses they received to their consultation. This is now automatic for responses to local planning applications. NG proposed not to do so, on the grounds that some contained matter personal to the respondent. The IPC then revealed that they will make all consultation responses public if and when the application reaches them (subject to "redacting" – ie blacking-out - any personal material – again, standard practice with local planning applications). We put it to NG that they should therefore make them public now, when they might assist the consultation process.

We shall, with the other groups we have been working with, follow this up.