The Great Grid Upgrade

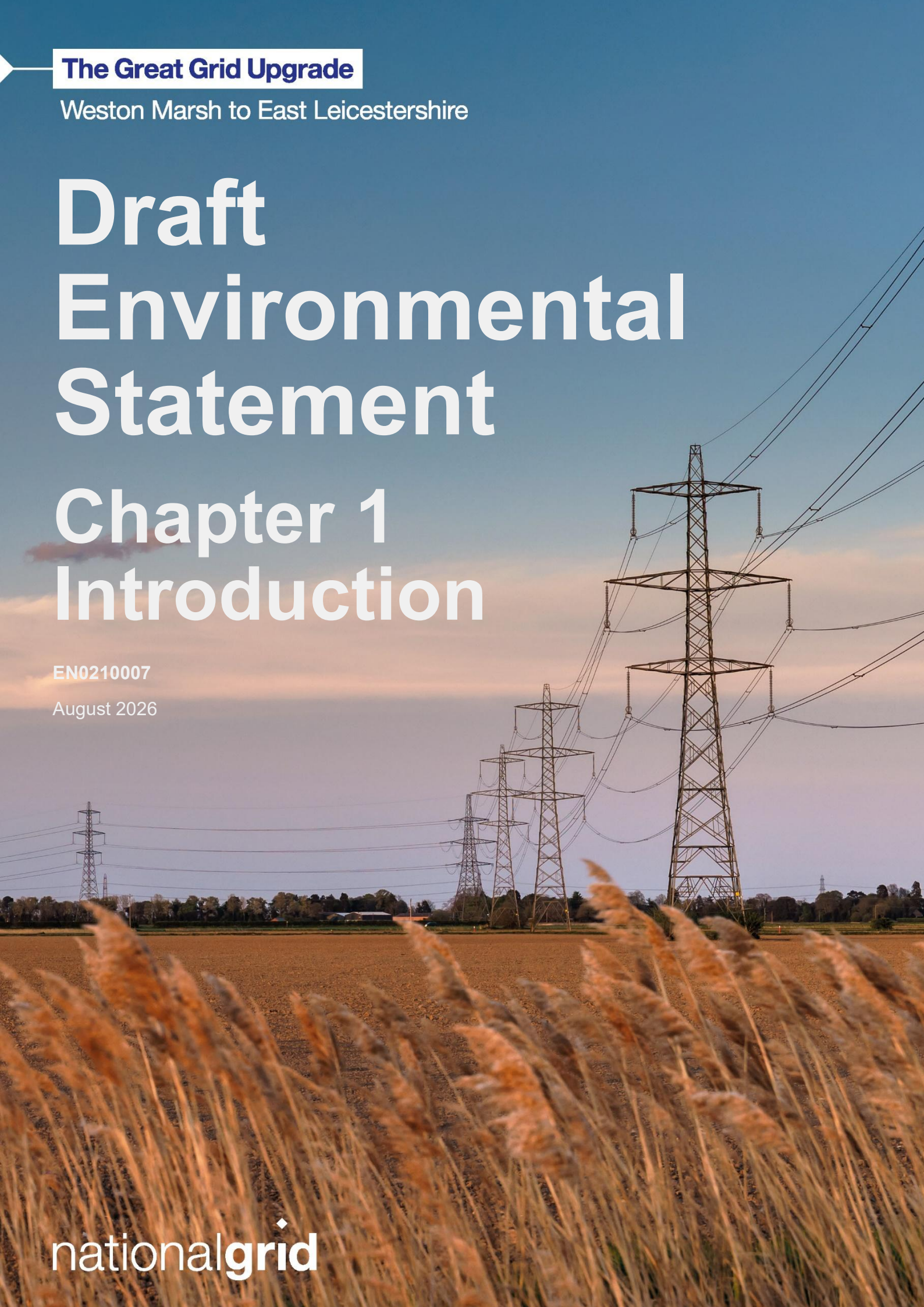
Weston Marsh to East Leicestershire

Draft Environmental Statement

Chapter 1 Introduction

EN0210007

August 2026



nationalgrid

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1. Introduction

1.1 Overview

1.1.1 This Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) non-statutory Draft Environmental Statement (DES) (referred to in this document as 'DES') has been prepared by National Grid Electricity Transmission plc (National Grid) and is intended to give consultees an understanding of the potential likely significant effects (positive or negative) of the Weston Marsh to East Leicestershire Project ('the Project'), to enable them to prepare well-informed responses to the second stage of National Grid's voluntary pre-application consultation exercise (Stage 2 Consultation). The Project is a Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project (NSIP), as defined under section 16 of the Planning Act 2008 (Ref 1.1) because it comprises a new electricity line above ground with a length of more than 2 kilometres (km), and with an operating voltage of more than 132 kilovolts (kV). This Project is also part of The Great Grid Upgrade – the largest overhaul of the UK electricity transmission grid in generations.

1.1.2 The proposal by National Grid is to reinforce the transmission network with a new 400 kV electricity transmission overhead line over a distance of approximately 60 km. The new overhead line starts from the proposed substation at Weston Marsh (to be delivered by the Grimsby to Walpole Project). The new overhead line goes west to a new 400 kV substation proposed to the west of Corby Glen (referred to as 'WMEL-A') to connect to the existing 4VK[1] overhead line. It then continues west to a second proposed new 400 kV substation to the west of the village of Ab Kettleby and north west of Melton Mowbray, Melton (referred to as 'WMEL-B'), connecting to the existing ZA[1] overhead line. The Project also includes approximately 66 km of reconductoring[2] of the existing overhead transmission line from the WMEL-B substation to the existing Grendon substation, east of Northampton.

1.1.3 National Grid owns, builds, operates and maintains the high voltage electricity transmission network in England and Wales, transporting electricity from generators (such as wind farms, solar farms and power stations) to local distribution network operators. Under the Electricity Act 1989 (Ref 1.2), National Grid holds a transmission licence, under which it is required to develop and maintain an efficient, coordinated and economical electricity transmission system.

1.1.4 National Grid is also required, under section 38 of the Electricity Act 1989, to comply with the provisions of Schedule 9 of the Act. Schedule 9(1) requires that the licence holder, in the formulation of proposals to transmit electricity:

'(a) shall have regard to the desirability of preserving natural beauty, of conserving flora, fauna and geological or physiographical features of special interest and of protecting sites, buildings and objects of architectural, historic or archaeological interest; and

[1] Each existing overhead electricity transmission line is given a unique identity code.

[2] The replacement of existing conductors (the wires carrying the electricity between the towers), and fittings, but retaining existing towers and alignment.

(b) shall do what [the licence holder] reasonably can to mitigate any effect which the proposals would have on the natural beauty of the countryside or on any such flora, fauna, features, sites, buildings or objects'.

1.2 The Need for the Project

1.2.1 The electricity industry in Great Britain is undergoing unprecedented change. The closure of fossil fuel-powered generation and ageing nuclear power stations means substantial investment in sustainable generation and interconnection capacity is required to maintain energy security and supply standards. Growth in onshore renewable technologies, offshore wind generation, and interconnectors with Europe has resulted in many planned connections, particularly along the East Coast. The UK Government's legally binding "Net Zero" commitment to achieve a 100% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 2050 under the Climate Change Act 2008 (Ref 1.3) requires a decisive transition away from fossil fuels. This has driven and will continue to drive investment in low-carbon energy sources.

1.2.2 Historically, the transmission system relied on coal-powered generation, but the shift to low-carbon energy has resulted in the closure of these power stations, with more closures expected. New generation capacity is geographically distant from these historical hubs, requiring substantial updates to the transmission system to serve urban areas such as the Midlands and the South East, which have the highest concentrations of electricity demand. As the UK decarbonises, national energy demand will increase, and fossil fuel generation will be replaced by low-carbon alternatives in new locations.

1.2.3 National Grid must be able to connect new generators and at the same time ensure the transmission system meets performance and security standards set out in the National Electricity Transmission System (NETS) Security and Quality of Supply Standard (SQSS) (Ref 1.4). This means that where the boundary capacity of the NETS is exceeded against the SQSS, National Grid must resolve the capacity shortfall. This is known as 'boundary reinforcement'.

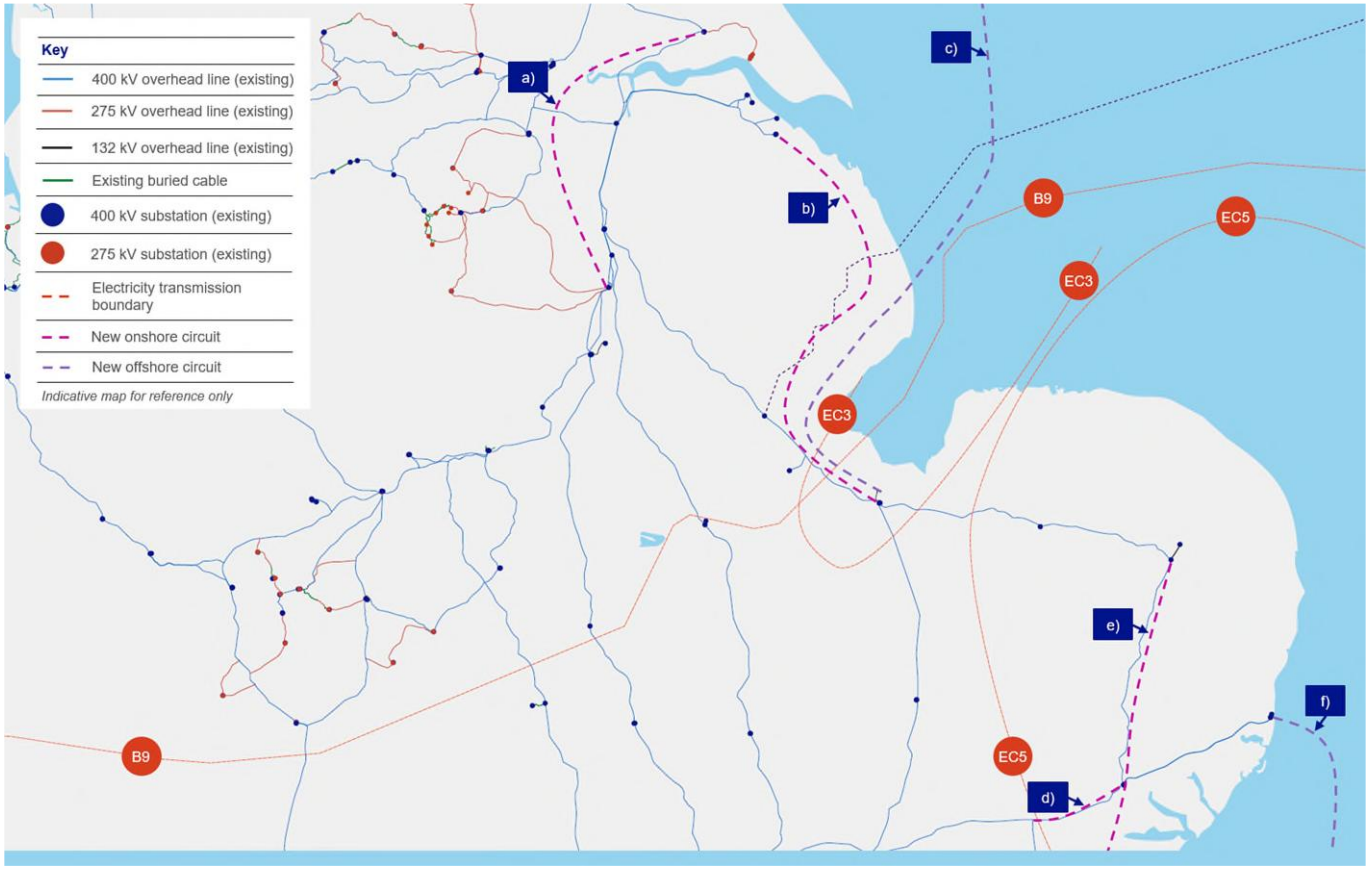
1.2.4 Generators apply to the National Energy System Operator (NESO) to connect to the NETS. Once agreed, these connections are contractually secured and National Grid is obliged to provide them. The NETS must be designed to handle existing and new connections in peak demand conditions and to have sufficient spare capacity to prevent widespread supply interruptions from defined fault conditions. Performance standards require the system to maintain frequency, avoid overloads, stay within voltage limits, and remain electrically stable during faults.

1.2.5 The existing electricity transmission system in Scotland and the North and Midlands of England was primarily constructed in the 1960s, to connect large coal-fired power stations and nuclear power stations. However, due to the changes noted above in terms of delivering net zero emissions, the existing network does not have the capacity to reliably and securely transport all the electricity that will be connected by 2030, whilst operating to the required standards.

1.2.6 As a result, and to comply with its duties, National Grid needs to reinforce the electricity network along the East Coast to allow power flows across boundaries to be exported from the East Midlands region. The reinforcement would provide additional capability to connect areas of demand, allowing power flows across boundaries, and linking interconnectors to and from Europe.

1.2.7 National Grid has concluded that the existing high voltage electricity network in the East Midlands Region does not have the capacity needed to reliably and securely transport all of the energy that will be connected into the network, while meeting the SQSS. This is documented within Section 4 of the 2025 Strategic Options Report (SOR) (Ref 1.5).

Image 1.1 The existing National Electricity Transmission System and proposed investments (labelled a-f) in the North, Midlands and East Anglia, and the B9, EC3 and EC5 transmission boundaries – as taken from the 2025 Strategic Options Report (Ref 1.5)



1.2.8 The proposed investments as shown in **Image 1.1** are listed below:

a) North Humber to High Marnham;

b) Grimsby to Walpole;

c) Eastern Green Link 3 and 4 (EGL3 and EGL4);

d) Bramford to Twinstead;

e) Norwich to Tilbury; and

f) Sea Link.

1.2.9 The Project is required to provide reinforcement across boundaries B9 and EC3 (as shown in **Image 1.1**) because the current network arrangements are not sufficient to meet the standard for the projected levels of power flow. Boundaries split the system into two parts, crossing critical circuit paths that carry power between areas and where power flow limitations may be encountered. Boundaries help identify regions where reinforcement is most needed by enabling analysis of power transfers between separated areas. As detailed in the National Grid (2025) Weston Marsh to East

Leicestershire: Strategic Options Report (SOR) (Ref 1.5), there are three distinct issues that need to be resolved by system reinforcements:

- provision of 5,793 MW of boundary capability to the B9 boundary;
- provision of 6,930 MW capacity to the EC3 boundary; and
- connection of the east to west corridors to alleviate power flow constraints on the East Coast.

1.2.10 The SOR identified a long list of technically feasible options which individually meet the need case set out in paragraph 1.2.9. The potential benefits of each technically feasible option were then considered, allowing focus on those that best meet the obligations to the environment and consumers. This process identified a preferred Strategic Proposal (a new 400 kV transmission connection between the new Weston Marsh 400 kV substation infrastructure, a new 400 kV substation on the ZA 400 kV line north of Market Harborough, the routeing of the proposed reinforcement via a new 400 kV substation on the 4VK 400 kV line north of Ryhall, and reconductoring part of the existing network between Market Harborough and Grendon) which was outlined in the SOR. Following the selection of the Strategic Proposal, the routeing and siting stage was undertaken. This identified a preferred route option for the proposed overhead line, together with Siting Zones and preferred Siting Areas for proposed substation infrastructure. This resulted in an emerging preferred corridor (as reported in the Corridor Preliminary Routeing and Siting Study (CPRSS) (Ref 1.6)) being identified.

1.2.11 Both the SOR and CPRSS were produced for Stage 1 Consultation, which was held from 11 June to 6 August 2025. The emerging preferred corridor in the CPRSS was consulted on in the Stage 1 Consultation.

1.2.12 Following the Stage 1 Consultation, feedback received was considered and changes were made to the Project to reflect feedback where possible – further details are included within **Chapter 3 Main Alternatives Considered**. The SOR has been updated and published for the Stage 2 Consultation – see **Strategic Options Report.**

1.2.13 The Overarching National Policy Statement (NPS) for Energy EN-1 (December 2025) (Ref 1.7) and the National Policy Statement for Electricity Networks Infrastructure EN-5 (December 2025) (Ref 1.8) provide the national planning policy framework against which the Project's compliance will be assessed. Both NPS EN-1 and EN-5 state that the Government has demonstrated that there is an urgent need for new nationally significant energy infrastructure projects.

1.2.14 The policies in NPS EN-1 and EN-5 seek to achieve an appropriate balance between the need to build vital infrastructure and the impacts this can have on the environment and communities and to ensure that the planning policy framework is suitably robust to support the infrastructure required for the transition to net zero carbon emissions. NPS EN-1 recognises in paragraph 3.3.1 that electricity meets a significant proportion of our overall energy needs and our reliance on it will increase. NPS EN-1 also outlines that nationally significant low-carbon infrastructure including electricity grid infrastructure projects are given 'Critical National Priority' (CNP) status to reflect the urgent need for critical national infrastructure that will assist in achieving a secure, economic and net zero energy supply.

1.2.15 NPS EN-1 sets out the Government's overarching policy regarding the development of NSIPs in the energy sector. NPS EN-1 emphasises the need for new energy

projects to contribute to a secure, reliable and affordable energy supply. NPS EN-1 is underpinned by the principle that there will be a need for significant amounts of new large-scale energy infrastructure to meet the Government's energy objectives. NPS EN-1 recognises that to '*produce the energy required for the UK and ensure it can be transported to where it is needed, a significant amount of infrastructure is needed at both local and national scale. High quality infrastructure is crucial for economic growth, boosting productivity and competitiveness*' (paragraph 2.1.2). It continues '*There is an urgent need for new electricity network infrastructure to be brought forward at pace to meet our energy objectives'* (paragraph 3.3.65).

1.2.16 NPS EN-1 paragraph 3.3.68 states that substantial onshore reinforcement works are needed to meet decarbonisation targets, and that forecasts show that the transmission network will require a doubling of north to south power transfer due to increased wind generation in Scotland and the North of England, with substantial reinforcement in the Midlands to accommodate increased power flows.

1.2.17 Section 4.2 sets out the CNP for low carbon infrastructure and states:

> '*Government has committed to the Clean Power 2030 Mission, subject to the security of supply, to underpin its 2050 net zero ambitions'* (paragraph 4.2.1) and that '*Government has concluded that there is a critical national priority (CNP) for the provision of nationally significant low carbon infrastructure.*' (paragraph 4.2.16)

1.2.18 NPS EN-1 (paragraph 4.2.17) and EN-5 recognise that low carbon infrastructure includes electricity grid infrastructure. This includes power lines, network reinforcement and upgrade works and associated infrastructure such as substations; all are classed as CNP. NPS EN-1 asserts that the need case for this type of energy infrastructure should be given substantial weight.

1.2.19 Paragraph 2.1.5 of NPS EN-5 reinforces the aims of NPS EN-1 which supports the urgent need for new low carbon infrastructure and confirms that:

> '*…all power lines in scope of EN-5 including electricity network reinforcement and upgrade works, and associated infrastructure such as substations, are considered to be CNP infrastructure.*'

1.3 The Requirement for Environmental Impact Assessment

1.3.1 Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) is a process required by UK law which brings together information about the likely significant effects of a development. The legal basis for EIA lies in European Community Directive 85/337/EEC2 ('the EIA Directive') (Ref 1.16). The EIA Directive was transposed into UK law through several pieces of legislation.

1.3.2 In relation to NSIPs, EIA is required for certain developments under The Infrastructure Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2017 (the 'EIA Regulations') (Ref 1.9). Under the EIA Regulations, EIA is mandatory for development projects defined under Schedule 1. Those projects defined in Schedule 2 only require EIA if they are likely to have significant effects on the environment by virtue of their nature, size or location. As the Project comprises an overhead line with a voltage of 220 kV or more and its length is greater than 15 km, the Project falls within the provisions of Schedule 1. An Environmental Statement (ES) will therefore be prepared for the application for a Development Consent Order (DCO) in accordance with Regulation 8(1)(b) of the EIA Regulations. The ES will be based on the EIA Scoping Opinion adopted by the Planning Inspectorate (on behalf of the

Secretary of State) on 17 December 2025 (**Appendix 5B Scoping Opinion**), as required by Regulation 14(3)(a) of the EIA Regulations.

1.3.3 This DES was originally prepared having regard to the now revoked Regulation 12 of the EIA Regulations (Ref 1.9), which prior to 24 July 2026 required a DCO applicant to publicise and consult on preliminary environmental information, defined as information being '….*reasonably required for the consultation bodies to develop an informed view of the likely significant environmental effects of the development (and of any associated development)*'. As this provision is no longer in force, this DES is now being provided on a purely voluntary and non-statutory basis by the Applicant to support its Stage 2 Consultation. Further detail on this is provided within paragraph 1.5.

1.4 Geographical Context

1.4.1 **Figure 1.1 Project Location Plan** presents the location of the Project. **Figure 1.2 Draft Order Limits** presents the draft Order Limits, which form the boundary of the entire area within which the Project could take place. The Project is located in the East Midlands region within the following local authority administrative areas:

- South Holland (Lincolnshire) – the eastern part of the Project (Section 1);
- South Kesteven (Lincolnshire) and Melton (Leicestershire) – the central parts of the Project (Section 2 and Section 3) with offsite highway works within Charnwood; and
- Harborough (Leicestershire), North Northamptonshire and West Northamptonshire (unitary authorities) – the reconductoring works commence at WMEL-B and proceed southwards, passing through these unitary authorities (Section 4 and Section 5).

1.4.2 The Project is located in an area that is predominantly rural, with large parts of the land under arable use. The towns of Spalding, Bourne, Melton Mowbray, Market Harborough, Kettering, and Wellingborough are located within 5 km of the Project. There are also multiple villages and individual properties near to the Project.

1.4.3 There are numerous overhead lines of varying voltage in the vicinity of parts of the Project, as shown on **Figure 1.1 Project Location Plan**. Most notable are the existing 400 kV 4ZM overhead line which routes parallel to the eastern edge of the draft Order Limits near Weston Marsh, the existing 400 kV 4VK to which the proposed WMEL-A Substation would connect, and the existing 400 kV ZA to which the proposed WMEL-B Substation would connect. There is also one existing 400 kV substation located within 1.5 km of the draft Order Limits, the existing Spalding North Substation.

1.4.4 The topography of the wider geographical area is predominantly flat and low-lying, comprising large-scale arable fields with clusters of urban and rural settlement. **Chapter 4 Project Description** outlines the environmental features that are present within, and in proximity to, the draft Order Limits.

1.4.5 The Project has been broken down into five geographical Sections (referenced throughout this DES), based on Local Authority boundaries. These are shown on **Figure 1.1 Project Location Plan**, presented in further detail on **Figure 1.2 Draft Order Limits**, and comprise:

- Section 1: Infrastructure within South Holland District;
- Section 2: Infrastructure within South Kesteven District;
- Section 3: Infrastructure within Melton Borough with an additional area of offsite works in Charnwood Borough;
- Section 4: Infrastructure within Harborough District; and
- Section 5: Infrastructure within Northamptonshire (including both North Northamptonshire and West Northamptonshire unitary areas).

1.5 Purpose of this Report

1.5.1 This report responds to provisions of the Planning and Infrastructure Act 2025 (Ref 1.10) which came into force on 24 July 2026 which revoke a number of pre-application consultant requirements previously contained in the Planning Act 2008, as well as associated guidance to which applicants must have regard to determine the steps they might take in readiness for submitting an actual application which was issued by the Secretary of State on 3 July 2026.

1.5.2 From 24 July 2026, NGET's previously adopted approach of undertaking a two-stage pre-application consultation for DCO projects is also now no longer applicable to the Project. Under the previous approach, an initial voluntary non-statutory consultation on project options and development was followed by statutory consultation under sections 42 and 47 of the Planning Act 2008. Following the recent legislative changes, sections 42 and 47 have been repealed, and there is no requirement to undertake either stage of consultation.

1.5.3 Given that these legislative changes were introduced after NGET had substantially prepared for statutory consultation under sections 42 and 47, NGET has determined that it is appropriate for this Project to undertake a second stage of pre-application consultation (referred to in this DES as the Stage 2 Consultation) following the voluntary consultation exercise undertaken in summer 2025 (Stage 1 Consultation). This Stage 2 Consultation will engage with those consultees previously consulted with under the Stage 1 Consultation and provide them with a further opportunity to comment on the development of the Project and inform detailed aspects of the Project prior to submission of the DCO application.

1.5.4 In addition, there is no longer a statutory requirement to provide a Preliminary Environmental Information Report (PEIR) as part of a DCO applicant's pre-application consultation. Instead, applicants are now responsible for determining the consultation approach appropriate to their NSIP and the adequacy of that consultation approach is no longer a matter to be taken into account by the Planning Inspectorate or the Secretary of State in the acceptance or determination of the application.

1.5.5 These changes came into effect a substantial period following the date on which the Project had commenced producing this report under the pre-24 July 2026 regulatory framework. Now that the new framework is in force, this report should now only be treated as a non-statutory DES which has been produced voluntarily by National Grid to provide draft environmental information to consultees as part of its Stage 2 Consultation.

1.5.6 This DES has been prepared by competent experts (refer to **Appendix 1A Competency Expert Statement**) and is intended to give consultees an understanding of the potential likely significant effects (positive or negative) of the

Project to enable them to prepare well-informed responses to Stage 2 Consultation. All conclusions and assessments are by their nature preliminary and are based on the current early Project design as described within this DES. All assessment work has applied (and any ongoing work continues to apply) a precautionary principle, in that where limited information is available (in terms of the proposals for the Project and baseline information), a realistic worst case is assessed. The final assessment will be presented within the ES submitted with the application for development consent. This would consider and take into account the representations made during Stage 2 Consultation and ongoing engineering design informed by the EIA process.

1.5.7 The DES has been informed by the EIA Scoping Opinion adopted by the Planning Inspectorate (on behalf of the Secretary of State) on 17 December 2025 (**Appendix 5B Scoping Opinion**).

1.5.8 Any likely significant effects identified within the DES are identified on a preliminary basis and may be subject to change as individual assessments progress. Therefore, likely significant effects provisionally identified within this DES may later be found not to be significant when further baseline information becomes available and/or following the completion of the design and identification of further mitigation measures reported in the ES.

1.5.9 This DES comprises the written statement (the chapters of this report), the associated technical appendices, and figures which have been collated and split into separate parts.

1.5.10 **Table 1.1** outlines the structure of this DES, listing the chapters and supporting appendices along with a summary of their contents.

Table 1.1 Structure of the DES

Chapter / Appendix	Context
Chapter 1. Introduction	Introduces the Project and the purpose and structure of the DES.
Chapter 2. Regulatory and Planning Policy Context	Includes a review of the regulations and policy relevant to the Project.
Chapter 3. Main Alternatives Considered	This chapter outlines the evolution of the Project, main alternatives considered by National Grid and the reasons for selecting the emerging preferred options for the Project, including environmental considerations.
Chapter 4. Description of the Project	This chapter describes the Project including permanent structures and associated temporary works. It describes the general characteristics of the Project, outlines areas of flexibility in relation to design parameters, and how these would be addressed in the environmental assessment through the application of the Rochdale Envelope.

Chapter / Appendix	Context
Chapter 5. EIA Approach and Methodology	This chapter includes a description of the overall approach adopted for the EIA, and key aspects of the methodology employed in this DES that are proposed to be presented in the ES. This includes classification of impacts, assessment of effects and definition of their significance, and the approach to mitigation. This chapter also includes a summary of how the EIA Scoping Opinion has informed the EIA approach and methodology.
Chapters 6-18. Aspect chapters Aspect chapters (Landscape; Visual; Ecology and Biodiversity; Cultural Heritage; Water Environment; Geology and Hydrogeology; Agriculture and Soils; Traffic and Transport; Air Quality; Noise and Vibration; Socio-economics, Recreation and Tourism; Health and Wellbeing; and Climate Change).	There is a chapter for each environmental aspect scoped into the EIA. The chapters are structured as follows: • Introduction; • Legislation, Policy Framework, and Guidance: – Legislation and National Policy; – Regional and Local Policy; and – Guidance. • Scope of Assessment; • Stakeholder Engagement; • Assessment Methodology: – Study Area; – Data Collection; – Impact Assessment Methodology; and – Assessment Assumptions and Limitations. • Baseline Conditions: – Existing Baseline; and – Future Baseline. • Design, Standard, and Additional Mitigation Measures: – Design Measures; – Standard Measures; and – Additional Mitigation Measures. • Preliminary Assessment of Effects; • Monitoring; and • Further Assessment.
Chapter 19. Cumulative effects assessment	Outlines a description of the way in which cumulative effects will be assessed along with an initial indication of potential cumulative effects associated with the Project.

Chapter / Appendix	Context
Figures	Contains supporting figures to the DES where a visual aid to understanding is considered appropriate. These figures are split into separate parts for ease of reference and to meet file size requirements.
Technical Appendices	Contains additional technical information supporting the chapters above. These are split into separate appendices for ease of reference.

1.5.11 Where appropriate, this DES includes supporting preliminary assessments required by other regulatory regimes, including **Appendix 8A Habitats Regulations Assessment Screening**, **Appendix 10B Preliminary Flood Risk Assessment**, and **Appendix 10C Preliminary Water Environment Regulations compliance assessment**. These are described in further detail in **Chapter 8 Ecology and Biodiversity** and **Chapter 10 Water Environment**.

1.5.12 Consultation feedback will inform the ongoing development of the Project. The design of the Project and therefore the assessment of its effects will continue to evolve in response to consultation, any statutory requirements, and as further baseline information becomes available. As such, likely significant effects provisionally identified in this DES may later be found not to be significant. However, the baseline information voluntarily presented in this DES is considered sufficient to inform the preliminary assessment of the Project for the purpose of Stage 2 Consultation, and is supported by the professional judgement of specialists undertaking the environmental studies.

1.6 Competence

1.6.1 This DES has been prepared and coordinated by a team from leading organisations who are members of the Institute of Sustainability and Environmental Professionals (ISEP) (formerly the Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment) EIA Quality Mark Scheme (Ref 1.11). This is an independently reviewed voluntary standard, requiring organisations to commit to excellence in their EIA activities. All specialists have demonstratable expertise in their fields. These credentials are demonstrated by a competent expert statement, as detailed in **Appendix 1A Competent Expert Statement**.

1.7 Biodiversity Net Gain

1.7.1 Under the Environment Act 2021 (Ref 1.12) it will be mandatory for all (terrestrial) NSIPs submitted from 2 November 2026 to deliver Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG). The requirement is to achieve at least 10% measurable net gain, which is to be secured for at least 30 years. The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) published guidance on 2 June 2026 for applicants to inform their approach to delivering Biodiversity Net Gain for NSIPs (Ref 1.13). National Grid is currently working with other organisations to identify how Biodiversity Net Gain can best be

implemented and the securing mechanisms for maintaining habitats for the specified period.

1.7.2 National Grid's Social & Environmental Action Plan 2026-2031 (Ref 1.14) makes a commitment to achieving at least 10% gain in environmental value (including biodiversity) on all construction projects by 2031.

1.7.3 National Grid has committed (Ref 1.14) to deliver quantifiable enhancement for biodiversity from the pre-development baseline, measured using the Defra statutory biodiversity metric (Ref 1.15) applicable at the time of assessment, with actions formalised and secured by long-term management arrangements with external organisations and partners.

1.8 Stakeholder Engagement

1.8.1 Engagement and consultation with technical stakeholders and the local community is a key element of the EIA process and will inform the design and assessment of the Project.

1.8.2 This DES has been published as part of Stage 2 Consultation and is intended to give consultees an understanding of the potential likely significant environmental effects of the Project, to inform their responses to Stage 2 Consultation. These responses will be given due regard by the Project and inform ongoing engagement with consultees as design development and assessment progresses. How the Project responds and considers feedback from engagement will be described in the documents supporting the application for development consent, including relevant parts of the ES.

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