

Scoping Opinion

August 2024

With reference to,

Application for a Development Consent Order (DCO)

Project: Grimsby to Walpole Great Grid Upgrade

Applicant: National Grid Electricity Transmission

Submitted by: Ashby cum Fenby Parish Council



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Introduction:

Ashby cum Fenby is a small rural parish located in North East Lincolnshire, characterised by its tranquil landscape, rich biodiversity, and deep historical roots. The parish is enveloped by agricultural fields, woodlands, and small watercourses that collectively create a diverse and thriving habitat for a wide range of wildlife. This setting is not just a backdrop but a defining feature of the community's identity and way of life. The proposed erection of 400kV overhead transmission lines as part of the Grimsby to Walpole project presents significant risks to this delicate and cherished environment—risks that could profoundly alter the character and ecological integrity of Ashby cum Fenby and surrounding areas both during construction and throughout the operational life of the infrastructure.

The Ashby cum Fenby Parish Council (the Parish Council) welcomes this opportunity to submit a Scoping Opinion, and it does so with a clear and resolute stance: the Environmental Statement (ES) must be thorough, credible, and transparent in its assessment of the potential impacts of this project. The Parish Council has strong concerns that without diligent study and consideration, the proposed development could have severe and lasting negative effects on the local environment, ecology, landscape, and the overall well-being of the community.

The Parish Council insists that the Environmental Statement accompanying the Development Consent Order (DCO) application should be comprehensive, leaving no stone unturned in its examination of the potential adverse effects. The Council's position is that full consideration must be given to alternative solutions to overhead lines, with a rigorous assessment of the cumulative environmental costs over time, as opposed to merely focusing on immediate monetary savings and future maintenance expenditures. This is not a matter of preference but of necessity to ensure that the unique character and ecological richness of Ashby cum Fenby and surrounding areas are preserved for future generations.

The Parish Council strongly believes that the Environmental Statement (ES) accompanying the Development Consent Order (DCO) application should suitably consider in detail and as a minimum the key areas outlined in this document.

Executive Summary

The Ashby cum Fenby Parish Council has undertaken a comprehensive review in response to the proposed Grimsby to Walpole project by National Grid Electricity Transmission. The focus of this Scoping Opinion is to ensure that the Environmental Statement (ES) accompanying the Development Consent Order (DCO) application thoroughly addresses a full range of potential impacts on the local environment, ecology, landscape, cultural heritage, community well-being, and socio-economic conditions within Ashby cum Fenby and its surrounding areas.

Ashby cum Fenby, a small rural parish in North East Lincolnshire, is known for its tranquil landscape, rich biodiversity, and deep historical roots. The introduction of 400kV overhead transmission lines poses significant risks to these valued attributes, potentially leading to substantial visual, ecological, and socio-economic impacts. The Parish Council emphasises the need for a rigorous exploration of alternative solutions, particularly underground cabling, to minimise these adverse effects.

Key areas of concern include the impact on landscape character, the disruption to local flora and fauna, the potential harm to heritage assets like St. Peter's Church, and the threat to community well-being through visual intrusion, noise, and potential declines in property values. The Parish Council also highlights the importance of assessing cumulative impacts in conjunction with other regional projects such as the Viking CCS, and advocates for the diligent use of the Quality of Life Capital (QoLC) Tool to ensure that all aspects of community well-being are fully considered.

1.0 Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment

1.1 Landscape Character

The ES must undertake a comprehensive assessment of the impact that the proposed 400kV overhead transmission lines will have on the landscape character of Ashby cum Fenby and its surrounding areas. The parish's proximity to the Lincolnshire Wolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) is particularly significant. The Lincolnshire Wolds AONB is recognised for its national importance due to its distinctive rolling hills, open fields, and tranquil rural scenery, which have remained largely unspoiled by modern development.

1.1.1 Disruption to Rural Character

The introduction of towering overhead transmission lines would be highly incongruent with the existing rural character of the area. The visual contrast between the modern, industrial structures of the pylons and the traditional, agricultural landscape would be stark and jarring. This alteration would be particularly noticeable in the open fields and low-lying areas where the expansive views are a defining characteristic of the landscape.

Ashby cum Fenby's rural identity, characterised by its gently rolling farmland and historic field boundaries, would be significantly undermined by the presence of these large-scale industrial structures. The sense of place that residents and visitors associate with the area, which is tied to its agricultural heritage and scenic beauty, would be eroded.

1.1.2 Impact on Local Flora and Fauna

The landscape of Ashby cum Fenby is not only visually appealing but also supports a diverse range of flora and fauna, some of which are likely to be sensitive to changes in the landscape. The physical presence of pylons and any associated maintenance paths required for them could lead to habitat disruption, particularly in areas of hedgerows and small woodlands that serve as wildlife corridors.

1.2 Key Viewpoints and Sensitivity

The ES should prioritise the identification and analysis of key viewpoints within Ashby cum Fenby that would be most affected by the proposed overhead transmission lines. Specific locations to consider include, but are not limited to:

1.2.1 Ashby Lane

Ashby Lane is a key route within the parish that offers unobstructed views across the surrounding countryside. The introduction of pylons along this route would significantly alter these views, replacing the rural landscape with a more industrial vista. The experience of traveling along this road, which currently offers a connection with the natural landscape, would be diminished.

1.2.2 Main Road

Main Road, being one of the primary thoroughfares through the village, is frequently used by both locals and visitors. The pylons, visible from this road, would disrupt the visual experience for motorists, cyclists, and pedestrians, particularly where the road crosses or runs parallel to open fields.

1.2.3 Barton Street

The unspoiled views from Barton Street, Willow Lakes, and the Landmark Restaurant are of considerable value, both aesthetically and economically. The introduction of 400kV overhead transmission lines would have a significant adverse effect on these key viewpoints, potentially altering the character of the area and reducing its appeal to visitors. The Parish Council strongly recommends that the ES includes a detailed and rigorous assessment of these impacts, supported by visual simulations, and fully explores alternative solutions to preserve the visual integrity of this cherished landscape.

1.2.4 Local Footpaths and Bridleways

The footpaths and bridleways around Ashby cum Fenby are popular with walkers and riders who come to enjoy the peaceful countryside. These routes offer views that are highly valued for their tranquillity and natural beauty. The imposition of overhead lines and pylons would not only be a visual intrusion but could also affect the recreational use of these paths, as users may find the altered landscape less appealing.

1.2.5 Assessment Tools

The ES should employ visual impact assessments that include detailed photomontages and computer-generated models to accurately depict the scale and visual impact of the proposed transmission lines from these key viewpoints. This approach will help in understanding the full extent of the visual intrusion and its implications for both residents and visitors.

1.3 Cumulative Visual Impact

The cumulative visual impact of the proposed overhead transmission lines must be thoroughly assessed in the context of existing infrastructure and any other planned developments in the region.

This is particularly important because the landscape around Ashby cum Fenby is currently free from large-scale industrial infrastructure. Introducing overhead transmission lines could set a precedent for further development, leading to a gradual erosion of the rural landscape character over time. The ES should consider how proposed pylons will interact visually with existing local structures, such as smaller power lines or communication assets, to assess the cumulative effect on the landscape.

1.3.1 Planned Developments

The ES should also take into account any planned developments in the area, including new housing projects, highway expansions, energy/utility services, decarbonisation projects or

agricultural developments. The combined visual impact of these, alongside the proposed transmission lines, could lead to a more fragmented and less coherent landscape, reducing the overall aesthetic and recreational value of the area.

1.4 Mitigation Measures

Given the potential significant adverse effects of overhead transmission lines on the landscape and visual amenity of Ashby cum Fenby, the ES should explore all feasible mitigation measures, including:

1.4.1 Underground Cabling

One of the most effective mitigation strategies would be to place the transmission lines underground. Although this option may involve higher initial costs, the long-term benefits in terms of preserving the landscape character, reducing visual intrusion, and protecting the area's ecological and recreational value could outweigh these costs over time. The ES should provide a detailed analysis of underground cabling's technical feasibility, environmental benefits, and economic implications.

1.4.2 Alternative Route Planning

If underground cabling is not deemed feasible for the entire route, the ES should explore alternative routes for the overhead lines that would minimise their visual impact or consider undergrounding of sections to preserve key areas. This could involve routing the lines through less sensitive areas or avoiding key viewpoints altogether.

1.4.3 Visual Screening

The use of visual screening, such as strategically planted trees or hedgerows, should be considered. While this may not eliminate the visual impact, it could help to soften the intrusion and reduce the starkness of the pylons in the landscape, but this should be modelled to assess the likelihood of effectiveness and subsequently illustrated.

1.4.4 Community Consultation:

Engaging with the local community to identify specific concerns and preferences regarding mitigation measures is crucial. The ES should document these consultations and consider incorporating community feedback into the final mitigation strategy. This collaborative approach would help ensure that the measures implemented are responsive to the needs and values of the residents of Ashby cum Fenby and surrounding areas.

1.5 Conclusion - Section 1.0

The Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment within the ES should be both thorough and sensitive to the unique characteristics of Ashby cum Fenby. Given the area's proximity to the Lincolnshire Wolds AONB, the rural character, and the high landscape value, any development of overhead transmission lines poses significant risks to the visual amenity and environmental integrity of the area. The Parish Council strongly advocates for the careful

consideration of alternative solutions, such as underground cabling, and for the diligent assessment of cumulative impacts and mitigation measures to protect this valued landscape.

2.0 Ecological and Biodiversity Impact

2.1 Habitats and Species

The ES must include a thorough and detailed assessment of the ecological and biodiversity impacts that the proposed 400kV overhead transmission lines could have on the diverse range of habitats and species found within Ashby cum Fenby and the surrounding areas. The parish is characterised by a mosaic of habitats, including hedgerows, small woodlands, watercourses, and agricultural fields, all of which support a variety of wildlife, some of which are protected or of conservation concern.

2.2 Specific Habitats in Ashby cum Fenby

Hedgerows: The hedgerows in and around Ashby cum Fenby are particularly significant as they serve as important wildlife corridors, allowing animals to move safely between different habitats. These hedgerows are often ancient and species-rich, providing shelter and food sources for birds, insects, and small mammals. The construction of overhead transmission lines could lead to the loss or degradation of these hedgerows, impacting the species that rely on them.

Small Woodlands: The small woodlands dotted around the parish are crucial habitats for a variety of wildlife, including birds, bats, and small mammals. These woodlands often contain mature trees that are important for nesting birds and roosting bats. The installation of pylons and the subsequent clearing of vegetation for maintenance access could result in the destruction of key habitats within these woodlands.

Agricultural Fields: The agricultural fields surrounding Ashby cum Fenby are not only valuable for crop production but also provide habitats for ground-nesting birds and foraging grounds for raptors like kestrels and barn owls. The introduction of tall pylons could alter the behaviour of these species, potentially leading to changes in foraging patterns or displacement from traditional nesting sites.

2.2.1 Birds

The area around Ashby cum Fenby is known for its rich birdlife, including several species that could be particularly vulnerable to the impacts of overhead transmission lines:

Barn Owls (*Tyto alba*): Barn owls are frequently observed in the open fields and along the hedgerows of Ashby cum Fenby. These birds of prey rely on low-level hunting flights to capture small mammals. The presence of overhead lines presents a significant collision risk for barn owls, particularly during low-light conditions when they are most active.

Kestrels (*Falco tinnunculus*): Kestrels are another common sight in the area, often seen hovering over fields in search of prey. The tall structures associated with overhead transmission lines could disrupt their hunting patterns and increase the risk of collision, especially for juveniles that are less adept at navigating obstacles.

Skylarks (*Alauda arvensis*): Skylarks, which are ground-nesting birds, are known for their distinctive song flights. The open fields around Ashby cum Fenby provide ideal breeding grounds for these birds. However, the introduction of pylons could lead to habitat disruption and displacement, particularly if construction activities disturb nesting sites.

Migratory Birds: The area also serves as a corridor for migratory birds. Overhead transmission lines could pose a collision risk for these species, especially during migration periods when large numbers of birds pass through the area. The ES should include a seasonal analysis of bird movements to assess the potential risks to migratory species.

2.2.2 Bats

Ashby cum Fenby is likely home to several species of bats, which utilise the hedgerows, woodlands, and agricultural landscapes for foraging and roosting:

Common Pipistrelle (*Pipistrellus pipistrellus*) and Other Bat Species: Bats rely on linear features like hedgerows and woodland edges to navigate and forage. The introduction of tall pylons could disrupt these flight paths, potentially leading to habitat fragmentation. Additionally, the electromagnetic fields (EMFs) generated by high-voltage lines might interfere with the echolocation abilities of bats, further impacting their ability to forage and navigate effectively.

Roosting Sites: The mature trees in the area could also serve as roosting sites for bats. The clearing of vegetation for pylon installation and maintenance could result in the loss of these critical roosting sites, leading to a decline in local bat populations.

2.2.3 Protected Species

Several protected species may be present in the Ashby cum Fenby area, including:

Badgers (*Meles meles*): Badgers are known to inhabit the area, utilising the hedgerows and woodlands for foraging and sett-building. The construction and maintenance of overhead lines could lead to the disturbance or destruction of badger setts, which are protected under UK law.

Great Crested Newts (*Triturus cristatus*): If present, great crested newts could be at risk from habitat disruption, particularly in areas with ponds or damp, low-lying fields that serve as breeding sites. The loss of connectivity between these habitats due to infrastructure development could severely impact their populations.

Reptiles: Species such as slow worms and grass snakes, which are often found in the rough grasslands and hedgerows, could also be affected by habitat fragmentation and loss of cover due to the construction of pylons.

2.3 Habitat Fragmentation

The potential for habitat fragmentation caused by the installation of overhead transmission lines and the associated infrastructure is a major concern in the Ashby cum Fenby area:

Wildlife Corridors: The hedgerows and small woodlands that crisscross the landscape are vital wildlife corridors that facilitate the movement of species between habitats. The construction of pylons could lead to breaks in these corridors, isolating wildlife populations and reducing genetic diversity.

Impact on Connectivity: The reduction in habitat connectivity could have cascading effects on the local ecology, including increased vulnerability to predators, reduced access to food resources, and challenges in finding suitable mates. This fragmentation could lead to long-term declines in local wildlife populations.

2.4 Mitigation Strategies

Given the potential significant adverse impacts on the local ecology and biodiversity, the Parish Council strongly advocates for the exploration of underground cabling as a primary mitigation strategy:

Underground Cabling: Installing cables underground would preserve the integrity of habitats, maintain wildlife corridors, and reduce the visual impact on the landscape. While this option may involve higher initial costs, the long-term benefits to biodiversity and landscape character are considerable.

Creation of New Habitats: If overhead lines are deemed necessary, the ES should detail specific mitigation measures such as the creation of new habitats to offset losses. This could include planting new hedgerows, creating ponds for amphibians, and managing woodland areas to enhance biodiversity.

Habitat Management Plans: The ES should also include a comprehensive habitat management plan to ensure that any impacts on local wildlife are minimised during both the construction and operational phases of the project. This could involve timed construction activities to avoid sensitive periods, such as bird nesting seasons, and ongoing monitoring of wildlife populations.

2.5 Conclusion - Section 2.0

The ecological and biodiversity impacts of the proposed 400kV overhead transmission lines in Ashby cum Fenby are significant and wide-ranging. The area's diverse habitats and species, some of which are protected, could be severely affected by habitat loss, fragmentation, and the risks associated with overhead structures. The Parish Council urges a thorough and detailed assessment within the ES, supported by robust mitigation strategies, to protect the ecological integrity of Ashby cum Fenby and ensure that the local wildlife continues to thrive.

3.0 Cultural Heritage and Archaeology

3.1 Impact on Heritage Assets

The ES must conduct a thorough assessment of the potential impact that the proposed 400kV overhead transmission lines could have on both designated and non-designated heritage assets within and around Ashby cum Fenby. This village, with its deep historical roots and largely unspoiled rural character, contains several important heritage assets that contribute to its unique identity. The introduction of large-scale, modern infrastructure such as overhead transmission lines has the potential to significantly alter the historical and cultural landscape, which has remained relatively unchanged for centuries.

St. Peter's Church (Grade II Listed) - 1346925:*

St. Peter's Church, a Grade II* listed building, is one of the most significant heritage assets in Ashby cum Fenby. Dating back to the medieval period, this church is not only a place of worship but also a landmark of historical and architectural importance. The church's setting, surrounded by open fields and approached by traditional rural lanes, is integral to its historical significance.

The visual intrusion of overhead transmission lines would have a profound impact on the setting of St. Peter's Church. The towering pylons, which would be visible from various angles around the church, could detract from the sense of continuity with the past that the site currently provides. The contrast of ancient architecture with modern industrial structures would undermine the church's historical context, diminishing its value as a heritage asset.

3.1.1 Other Heritage Assets

In addition to St. Peter's Church, Ashby cum Fenby and its surrounding areas are home to several other heritage assets, including historic farmhouses, traditional cottages, and ancient field boundaries. These structures contribute to the overall historical landscape, which reflects the agricultural heritage of the region.

The impact on non-designated heritage assets, such as the medieval field systems or old pathways, should also be assessed. These elements of the landscape are often overlooked but are crucial in understanding the historical development of the area. The introduction of pylons and overhead lines could disrupt these historical features, leading to a loss of cultural continuity and a fragmentation of the historic landscape.

3.2 Setting and Context

The setting and context of heritage assets are as important as the assets themselves, especially in a place like Ashby cum Fenby, where the landscape plays a significant role in the historical narrative of the area. The ES should carefully evaluate how the overhead transmission lines would alter the setting of these heritage assets, taking into account both direct and indirect effects on the cultural landscape.

3.2.1 Visual Impact on the Cultural Landscape

The visual impact of the proposed transmission lines is not limited to the immediate vicinity of individual heritage assets. The broader cultural landscape, characterised by its open, agricultural nature, is itself a heritage asset that tells the story of centuries of farming and rural life. The introduction of overhead lines would fragment this landscape, creating a inharmonious visual element that is out of place in a setting defined by its historical continuity.

The sense of place in Ashby cum Fenby is closely tied to its visual and historical integrity. The uninterrupted views of the countryside, which have remained largely unchanged for generations, are a key aspect of the village's cultural significance. Overhead transmission lines would disrupt these views, particularly from key vantage points such as the churchyard of St. Peter's Church, where the congregation and visitors alike can currently experience the landscape much as it would have appeared hundreds of years ago.

3.2.2 Indirect Effects on Heritage Assets

The indirect effects of the overhead transmission lines on the cultural landscape could include a decrease in the perceived historical value of the area. For example, visitors to Ashby cum Fenby who come to experience its heritage and rural tranquillity might find the presence of large pylons incongruent with the historical narrative they seek to engage with. This could lead to a decline in heritage tourism, which is an important aspect of the local economy and community identity.

The psychological and emotional connection that residents and visitors have with the heritage assets of Ashby cum Fenby could be eroded by the visual presence of overhead transmission lines. The church, the farmhouses, and the historic landscape are all part of a cultural continuum that links the present day with the past. The introduction of modern infrastructure could break this continuum, leading to a disconnection from the historical roots that define the village.

3.2.3 Agricultural Heritage and Landscape Continuity

The agricultural landscape around Ashby cum Fenby is not just a backdrop but a living part of the village's cultural heritage. The patterns of fields, hedgerows, and lanes that crisscross the area are the result of centuries of farming practices. Overhead transmission lines, with their need for clear corridors and maintenance access, could disrupt these patterns, leading to a loss of traditional land use and the erosion of the cultural landscape.

The ES should assess how the proposed development might impact the continuity of this agricultural heritage. This includes considering how the installation and maintenance of overhead lines could alter the physical landscape, from the removal of ancient hedgerows to the potential abandonment of certain fields that are disrupted by pylons. The loss of these historical elements would represent a significant cultural and ecological loss to the area.

3.3 Mitigation Measures

Given the significant potential impacts on the cultural heritage and historical context of Ashby cum Fenby, the ES must explore all possible mitigation measures to preserve the integrity of these assets.

3.3.1 Underground Cabling

The most effective mitigation strategy would be the use of underground cabling. By avoiding the visual intrusion of pylons, underground cables would preserve the historic landscape and the setting of heritage assets like St. Peter's Church. This approach, though likely more costly, would protect the cultural heritage of Ashby cum Fenby for future generations.

3.3.2 Sensitive Routing

If undergrounding is proven to be not technically feasible, the routing of overhead lines should be carefully considered to minimise the visual impact on heritage assets. This could involve placing lines further away from key historical sites, using existing natural features like woodlands to screen the pylons from view, or choosing routes that avoid crossing open landscapes directly visible from heritage sites.

3.3.3 Landscape and Heritage Conservation Plans

The ES should also propose a comprehensive landscape and heritage conservation plan that includes measures to protect and enhance the setting of heritage assets. This might involve restoring or reinforcing traditional landscape features, such as hedgerows, to maintain the historical integrity of the area in the face of new developments.

3.3.4 Community Engagement

Engaging with the local community to understand the cultural and emotional significance of the heritage assets is crucial. The ES should include consultations with residents and heritage organisations to ensure that the proposed development does not diminish the value of Ashby cum Fenby's historical and cultural landscape.

3.4 Conclusion – Section 3.0

The cultural heritage and archaeology of Ashby cum Fenby are integral to its identity as a village with deep historical roots and a largely unspoiled rural character. The potential impact of 400kV overhead transmission lines on both designated and non-designated heritage assets could be profound, altering the setting and context of these assets in ways that diminish their historical and cultural significance. The Parish Council urges a thorough and sensitive assessment of these impacts within the ES, with a strong emphasis on exploring mitigation strategies that preserve the cultural landscape and heritage of Ashby cum Fenby for future generations.

4.0 Community and Socio-Economic Impacts

4.1 Impact on Local Community

The ES must carefully consider the potential adverse effects that the proposed 400kV overhead transmission lines could have on the local community of Ashby cum Fenby. This village, known for its rural charm, tight-knit community, and tranquil environment, faces significant risks to its residential amenity and quality of life due to the proposed development.

4.1.1 Visual Intrusion

The visual impact of overhead transmission lines would be profound in Ashby cum Fenby, where the unspoiled rural landscape is a central aspect of the village's appeal. The towering pylons and overhead lines would be visible from many parts of the village, including from homes, public spaces, and popular walking routes. For a community that values its scenic surroundings, the introduction of industrial infrastructure could lead to a significant decrease in the overall quality of life.

Residents who have chosen to live in Ashby cum Fenby often do so for its aesthetic appeal, which is characterised by open vistas, green fields, and historical landscapes. The presence of overhead transmission lines would disrupt these views, leading to a sense of loss and frustration within the community. This visual intrusion could also affect local social gatherings, events, and outdoor activities that rely on the pleasant environment of the area.

4.1.2 Noise During Construction and Operation

The construction phase of the project is likely to involve significant noise, which could disrupt the peace and quiet that residents of Ashby cum Fenby currently enjoy. Construction activities, the movement of heavy machinery, and the installation of pylons could lead to an increase in noise levels, causing stress and disturbance to residents, particularly those living closest to the proposed line route.

Once operational, the transmission lines may generate a low-frequency hum, especially during wet weather conditions and fog. While often minimal, this noise can still be a source of irritation for residents, particularly in a quiet rural area where ambient noise levels are typically low. The long-term exposure to such noise could have cumulative effects on residents' well-being, contributing to stress and potentially leading to health issues over time.

4.1.3 Impact on Mental Health and Well-being

The mental health and well-being of residents is a critical concern, especially in a community like Ashby cum Fenby where many individuals have chosen to live due to the peaceful environment. The visual impact of the overhead lines, combined with noise and the perceived loss of environmental quality, could lead to increased anxiety, stress, and a sense of powerlessness among residents.

The ES should consider the psychological impact of the overhead lines on residents who may feel that the development is an imposition on their chosen way of life. This is particularly relevant for individuals who have moved to the area seeking a retreat from urban environments and who value the tranquillity and natural beauty of Ashby cum Fenby as essential to their mental well-being.

4.1.4 Community Identity and Cohesion

The proposed development could also affect the sense of community identity and cohesion in Ashby cum Fenby. The village's identity is closely tied to its rural setting and historical continuity, and the introduction of modern infrastructure could be seen as a threat to this identity. Residents may feel a sense of loss or disillusionment, which could affect community morale and participation in local activities.

4.2 Property Values

The impact of overhead transmission lines on property values in Ashby cum Fenby is a significant concern for the local community. The rural character of the area is a key factor in its desirability, and any perceived or actual reduction in the quality of the environment could lead to a decline in property values.

4.2.1 Rural Setting and Market Desirability

Ashby cum Fenby's appeal lies in its combination of rural charm, historical features, and peaceful environment. Potential buyers are often drawn to the area for these reasons, and the introduction of overhead lines could deter future purchasers who are seeking an unspoiled rural setting. The visual intrusion of pylons could make properties less attractive, leading to longer times on the market and possibly lower selling prices.

The ES should include a detailed analysis of how property values could be affected, taking into account the specific characteristics of Ashby cum Fenby's housing market. This analysis should consider the experiences of other rural areas where similar infrastructure has been introduced and provide a comparative assessment of the potential decline in property values.

4.2.2 Impact on Residential Sales

For current homeowners, the overhead lines could result in a significant financial loss if property values decline. This is particularly concerning for residents who have invested in the area with the expectation of long-term stability and appreciation in property values. The uncertainty and potential financial impact could cause stress and anxiety, particularly for those planning to sell their homes in the near future.

The ES should also consider the potential impact on property sales, as the presence of overhead lines could lead to a reduction in buyer interest and a subsequent decrease in market activity. This could have broader socio-economic implications for the village, as reduced property turnover can lead to stagnation in the local economy and a decrease in community renewal.

4.3 Health and Well-being

The potential health impacts associated with electromagnetic fields (EMFs) from overhead transmission lines are a critical issue for the residents of Ashby cum Fenby, particularly given the proximity of residential areas and public spaces to the proposed route.

4.3.1 Concerns Over EMFs

While scientific studies on the health impacts of EMFs have produced mixed results, there remains a level of public concern regarding the long-term exposure to EMFs from high-voltage transmission lines. Residents living close to the proposed route may experience anxiety over potential health risks, particularly for vulnerable groups such as children, the elderly, and those with pre-existing health conditions.

The ES should provide a comprehensive review of existing research on EMFs and health, specifically addressing the concerns of the local community. It should also include monitoring and modelling of EMF levels in residential areas, schools, and public spaces to assess the potential exposure and ensure that it falls within safe limits as established by relevant health guidelines.

4.3.2 Long-term Mental Health Impacts

Beyond the physical health risks, the perceived threat of EMFs can contribute to long-term mental health issues, including stress, anxiety, and sleep disturbances. For residents of Ashby cum Fenby, who value their rural environment for its health benefits, the introduction of overhead lines could undermine their sense of security and well-being.

The ES should also consider the cumulative mental health impacts, combining the stress of visual intrusion, noise, potential property devaluation, and EMF concerns. The importance of addressing these issues through community support initiatives and clear communication strategies should be emphasised.

4.3.3 Impact on Public Spaces

The proposed overhead transmission lines may pass close to public spaces that are important for community well-being, such as woodlands, recreational fields, and walking paths. The presence of pylons near these areas could deter their use, reducing opportunities for outdoor activities that are crucial for physical and mental health.

The ES should assess how the development could impact the use of public spaces and propose mitigation strategies to ensure that residents continue to have access to safe, pleasant environments for recreation and social interaction.

4.4 Conclusion – Section 4.0

The community and socio-economic impacts of the proposed 400kV overhead transmission lines in Ashby cum Fenby are multifaceted and significant. The potential for visual intrusion, noise, health concerns, and property devaluation poses serious risks to the quality of life and

well-being of the local community. The Parish Council emphasises the need for a comprehensive assessment of these impacts within the ES, including detailed community consultations and socio-economic analyses, to fully understand and address the concerns of residents. Mitigation strategies should be developed to protect the unique character of Ashby cum Fenby and ensure the continued health and well-being of its community.

5.0 Alternative Options Analysis

5.1 Consideration of Alternatives

The ES must thoroughly investigate and evaluate alternative options for the proposed 400kV transmission lines to minimise the environmental and social impacts on Ashby cum Fenby and the surrounding areas. Given the rural, historical, and ecological sensitivity of this region, it is essential that all feasible alternatives are explored to protect the local environment, cultural heritage, and community well-being.

5.1.1 Undergrounding Cables

Environmental and Aesthetic Benefits: Undergrounding transmission lines presents a significant opportunity to preserve the visual and environmental integrity of Ashby cum Fenby. Unlike overhead lines, underground cables would not disrupt the unspoiled rural vistas or the setting of heritage assets such as St. Peter's Church. This approach would maintain the historical continuity of the landscape, ensuring that the village's character remains intact for future generations.

Reduced Impact on Wildlife: Underground cables would also mitigate many of the ecological risks associated with overhead lines, such as collision hazards for birds and habitat fragmentation. By avoiding the construction of tall pylons, undergrounding could preserve important wildlife corridors, particularly the hedgerows and small woodlands that are crucial for local species like bats, barn owls, and other protected wildlife. This option would significantly reduce the likelihood of disrupting the movement and foraging patterns of these species.

Minimising Community Disruption: For the local community, underground cables would minimise the visual intrusion and noise that typically accompany overhead lines. This would help preserve the quality of life in Ashby cum Fenby, where residents place a high value on their peaceful and aesthetically pleasing environment. Additionally, the potential impacts on property values and mental well-being would be greatly reduced if the infrastructure were hidden underground.

5.1.2 Collaboration with Other Projects (e.g., Viking CCS)

Integrated Infrastructure Planning: The ES should consider opportunities for collaboration with other infrastructure projects, such as the Viking CCS (Carbon Capture and Storage) project. By aligning the routing and planning of the transmission lines with these projects, it may be

possible to share corridors, reduce redundant infrastructure, and limit cumulative environmental impacts.

Synergies in Sustainability: Collaborative planning could also support broader environmental sustainability goals. For example, if the Viking CCS project requires new pipelines or infrastructure that could be co-located with the transmission lines, this could reduce the overall land use impact and potentially lower costs for both projects. Such synergies could enhance the environmental stewardship of both initiatives, leading to a more sustainable outcome for the region.

5.2 Technical and Economic Viability

The ES must provide a transparent and detailed analysis of the technical and economic viability of these alternative options, particularly focusing on the long-term benefits and costs associated with undergrounding transmission lines.

5.2.1 Technical Considerations

Feasibility of Undergrounding: The ES should evaluate the specific technical challenges associated with undergrounding in the context of Ashby cum Fenby's geology, hydrology, and land use patterns. For instance, the area's soil composition, water table levels, and proximity to sensitive archaeological sites must be assessed to determine the feasibility of underground cables. The potential for disruption during the installation phase and the need for ongoing maintenance access should also be addressed.

Technological Advances: Advances in technology have made undergrounding more feasible and cost-effective in certain contexts. The ES should explore whether modern technological systems could be utilised to enhance the efficiency and reliability of underground cables while minimising environmental impacts that might be intensified with overhead lines.

5.2.2 Economic Considerations

Cost-Benefit Analysis: While undergrounding typically involves higher initial costs compared to overhead lines, the ES should provide a comprehensive cost-benefit analysis that considers the long-term economic impacts. This analysis should account for the potential savings in environmental mitigation, the preservation of property values, and the avoidance of social and community disruption.

Long-term Environmental and Economic Benefits: The long-term economic benefits of undergrounding should not be underestimated. These may include the continued attractiveness of Ashby cum Fenby as a place to live, which would help maintain property values and support the local economy. Additionally, by avoiding the visual and ecological impacts of overhead lines, undergrounding could enhance the area's appeal to tourists, particularly those interested in its historical and natural assets.

Sustainability and Future-Proofing: Investing in undergrounding also supports environmental sustainability by reducing the need for future mitigation and ensuring that the infrastructure is resilient to changing environmental conditions. The ES should consider how undergrounding

could contribute to future-proofing the region's infrastructure against the impacts of climate change, such as more frequent and severe weather events that could affect the reliability of overhead lines.

5.3 Alternative Methods to Support Environmental Sustainability

Reducing Carbon Footprint: The ES should explore how the choice of transmission line methods could support the broader goal of reducing the carbon footprint of infrastructure projects. For instance, underground cables, while energy-intensive to install, might offer lower operational emissions and reduced environmental degradation over time.

Biodiversity Offsetting: If undergrounding or other alternatives are not fully feasible, the ES should consider implementing biodiversity offsetting measures to compensate for any unavoidable impacts. This could involve creating new habitats, enhancing existing ones, or funding conservation projects in the region to ensure that the overall ecological health of the area is maintained.

5.4 Conclusion – Section 5.0

The Alternative Options Analysis within the ES is critical for ensuring that the proposed 400kV transmission lines are designed and implemented in a way that minimises environmental, social, and economic impacts on Ashby cum Fenby. The Parish Council strongly advocates for a rigorous exploration of undergrounding cables, leveraging collaboration with other projects to reduce the overall environmental footprint. By carefully weighing the technical and economic viability of these alternatives, the ES can support a solution that protects the unique character, heritage, and ecology of Ashby cum Fenby, while also aligning with broader sustainability goals for the future.

6.0 Cumulative and In-Combination Effects

6.1 Comprehensive Analysis

The ES must conduct a thorough and detailed assessment of the cumulative effects that the proposed 400kV overhead transmission lines will have in combination with other existing and planned projects in the region, such as the Viking CCS (Carbon Capture and Storage) project. Ashby cum Fenby and its surrounding areas are characterised by a unique blend of rural tranquillity, historical continuity, and ecological richness. It is crucial to consider how the introduction of multiple large-scale infrastructure projects could collectively impact the landscape, ecology, and community life in this sensitive area.

6.1.1 Cumulative Visual Impact

Existing and Planned Infrastructure: The visual landscape of Ashby cum Fenby is largely unspoiled, with open fields, hedgerows, and traditional buildings dominating the scenery. However, the introduction of overhead transmission lines, when combined with other infrastructure projects such as the Viking CCS, could lead to significant cumulative visual

impacts. The skyline, currently free from large industrial structures, could become increasingly cluttered, leading to a gradual industrialisation of the rural landscape.

Key Viewpoints at Risk: Specific areas, such as the views from Barton Street, Willow Lakes, and the Landmark Café Restaurant, which offer sweeping vistas across the countryside and towards the Humber estuary, are particularly sensitive to cumulative visual impacts. The ES must assess how the combined presence of overhead lines, CCS infrastructure, and any other planned developments could degrade these views, making the landscape appear more fragmented and less natural.

Impact on Rural Character: The rural character of Ashby cum Fenby, which is central to its identity and appeal, could be eroded by the cumulative visual effects of multiple projects. The ES should consider how the incremental addition of industrial infrastructure might alter the perception of the area from a peaceful, historically-rich village to a corridor for energy infrastructure. This shift could diminish the area's attractiveness to residents and visitors alike.

6.1.2 Cumulative Ecological Impact

Habitat Fragmentation: The combined impact of multiple infrastructure projects could exacerbate habitat fragmentation in and around Ashby cum Fenby. The area's hedgerows, woodlands, and watercourses form critical wildlife corridors that support a diverse range of species, including protected birds, bats, and other fauna. The introduction of overhead lines, in combination with infrastructure required for projects like the Viking CCS, could disrupt these corridors, isolating habitats and reducing biodiversity.

Species at Risk: The cumulative ecological impact could be particularly severe for species that rely on large, connected habitats. For example, barn owls and kestrels, which are already at risk from collision with overhead lines, could face additional threats if other projects further fragment their hunting grounds. Bats, which depend on continuous hedgerow networks for foraging and navigation, could also suffer from the combined effects of habitat disruption and increased EMF exposure from multiple sources.

Increased Pressure on Local Ecosystems: The local ecosystems in Ashby cum Fenby are finely balanced and could be tipped into decline by the cumulative pressures of multiple developments. The ES should evaluate how these pressures might lead to a reduction in species populations, changes in habitat quality, and the potential for local extinctions, particularly for sensitive species like great crested newts and badgers.

6.1.3 Cumulative Community Impact

Impact on Quality of Life: The cumulative impact on the community's quality of life must be a central consideration in the ES. Residents of Ashby cum Fenby could face a compounding of negative effects, including increased noise, visual intrusion, and traffic disruptions, as a result of multiple overlapping projects. This could lead to heightened stress, reduced mental well-being, and a decline in community cohesion as the rural peace that residents value is steadily eroded.

Economic Impacts: The combined effect of multiple infrastructure projects could also impact the local economy, particularly if property values decline and tourism diminishes due to the industrialisation of the landscape. The ES should analyse how these economic impacts could affect local businesses, property owners, and the overall economic vitality of the village.

6.2 Strategic Approach

Given the potential for significant cumulative impacts, the ES must adopt a strategic approach to understanding how the proposed development fits within the broader energy infrastructure in the region and its combined effects on the environment, ecology, and communities.

6.2.1 Integration with Regional Planning

Alignment with Regional Infrastructure Plans: The ES should consider how the 400kV transmission lines align with broader regional infrastructure plans, including the Viking CCS project and any other energy developments. This includes assessing whether the cumulative impacts could be mitigated through integrated planning efforts, such as the co-location of infrastructure or the development of shared corridors to minimise land use and environmental disruption.

Strategic Environmental Assessments: The ES should be informed by Strategic Environmental Assessments (SEA) that have been conducted for the region. These assessments provide a framework for evaluating cumulative impacts and can help identify areas where the combined effects of multiple projects might exceed acceptable thresholds for environmental or community impacts. The ES should use this information to guide decision-making on route selection, mitigation strategies, and alternative options.

6.2.2 Long-Term Sustainability Considerations

Sustainability and Resilience: The ES should take into account the long-term sustainability and resilience of the region's infrastructure. This involves considering how the cumulative effects of multiple projects might affect the region's ability to adapt to future challenges, such as climate change, population growth, and shifts in land use patterns. The strategic approach should prioritise solutions that enhance the region's resilience, such as undergrounding cables to protect them from extreme weather or integrating green infrastructure to offset environmental impacts.

Balancing Energy Needs with Environmental Protection: The strategic approach should also seek to balance the region's energy infrastructure needs with the imperative to protect and preserve the environment and communities of Ashby cum Fenby and the surrounding areas. This might involve trade-offs, such as choosing less visually intrusive technologies, routing infrastructure through less sensitive areas, or using more advanced structures, even if these options are more expensive or technically challenging.

6.2.3 Mitigation and Offsetting Measures

Coordinated Mitigation Efforts: The ES should explore opportunities for coordinated mitigation efforts that address the cumulative impacts of multiple projects. This could include joint habitat

restoration projects, shared environmental monitoring programs, or coordinated community engagement initiatives to address concerns about cumulative impacts.

Biodiversity Offsetting: Where cumulative ecological impacts are unavoidable, the ES should consider biodiversity offsetting measures that ensure no net loss of biodiversity across the region. This could involve creating new habitats, enhancing existing ones, or funding conservation projects in other parts of the region to compensate for habitat loss and fragmentation in Ashby cum Fenby.

6.3 Conclusion – Section 6.0

The cumulative and in-combination effects of the proposed 400kV overhead transmission lines must be rigorously assessed within the ES to ensure that the development does not lead to unacceptable levels of environmental, ecological, and community degradation in Ashby cum Fenby. By adopting a strategic approach that integrates regional planning efforts and prioritises long-term sustainability, the ES can help mitigate these impacts and ensure that the development supports both the energy needs of the region and the preservation of its unique natural and cultural heritage. The Parish Council strongly advocates for this comprehensive and forward-thinking approach to safeguard the future of Ashby cum Fenby and its surrounding areas.

7.0 Considerations for Horses, Bridleways and Equestrian Activity

Ashby cum Fenby is well-known for its extensive network of bridleways and the popularity of equestrian activities in and around the village. The proposed installation of 400kV overhead transmission lines as part of the Grimsby to Walpole project could have significant impacts on both horses and their riders, as well as on the safety of pedestrians and vehicles in the area. Below are detailed considerations regarding these potential impacts.

7.1 Impact on Horses and Their Well-being

Visual and Auditory Sensitivity: Horses are highly sensitive animals, particularly to sudden movements, bright flashes, and loud noises. The presence of towering pylons and overhead cables could introduce visual elements that are unfamiliar and potentially frightening to horses. The height and scale of pylons, along with the presence of sagging wires that may move in the wind, could be perceived as threats by horses, leading to increased anxiety or spooking.

Construction activities associated with the installation of the transmission lines, including heavy machinery, loud noises, and ground vibrations, could also distress horses. This could result in behavioural changes, such as increased skittishness, reluctance to use certain bridleways, or in extreme cases, bolting, which could pose risks to both horses and riders.

Electromagnetic Fields (EMFs): There is ongoing research into the potential effects of EMFs on animals, including horses. Although the evidence is not yet conclusive, there is concern that prolonged exposure to EMFs from high-voltage transmission lines could affect the well-being of horses. Potential impacts might include changes in behaviour, increased stress

levels, or other health-related issues. The ES should include an assessment of these risks and consider any scientific studies related to the effects of EMFs on equines.

7.2 Safety of Riders, Pedestrians, and Vehicles

Risk of Accidents Due to Horse Spooking: Spooked horses can pose significant risks not only to their riders but also to pedestrians and vehicles in the vicinity. If a horse becomes startled by the overhead lines or the associated construction activities, it may bolt or behave unpredictably, potentially leading to accidents. This is particularly concerning in areas where bridleways intersect with roads or are close to pedestrian pathways.

The proximity of the bridleways to the proposed route of the overhead transmission lines should be carefully mapped out in the ES. Particular attention should be given to locations where bridleways cross or run parallel to roads, as these are potential hotspots for accidents.

7.3 Impact on Popular Bridleways

The bridleways in and around Ashby cum Fenby are widely used by the local community and attract riders from neighbouring areas and all over. The introduction of overhead lines could deter equestrians from using these routes due to concerns over safety and the well-being of their horses. This could reduce the accessibility and enjoyment of these bridleways, leading to a decrease in their use and potentially impacting the local equestrian culture and related businesses.

The ES should assess the impact on specific bridleways, including popular routes such as those running through local woodlands, open fields, and near the village itself. The potential for reduced use and the implications for local equestrian tourism and activities should be thoroughly examined.

7.4 Mitigation Measures for Safety

The Parish Council strongly recommends that the ES includes specific mitigation measures to address the safety concerns of horse riders. These could include:

Buffer Zones: Establishing sufficient buffer zones between the proposed transmission lines and bridleways to minimise the visual and auditory impact on horses.

Screening: The use of natural screening, such as trees or hedgerows, to obscure the view of pylons from bridleways, thereby reducing the potential for horses to become spooked.

Signage and Information: Providing clear signage and information along bridleways to alert riders to the presence of overhead lines and construction activities. This could help riders prepare their horses and navigate these areas more safely.

Alternative Routes: During the construction phase, consider providing alternative bridleway routes to ensure the safety and continued enjoyment of equestrian activities in the area.

7.5 Construction Traffic and Safety

The movement of construction vehicles along rural roads, many of which may be narrow and shared by horse riders, pedestrians, and local traffic, is another concern. Horses are often sensitive to large, noisy vehicles, and unexpected encounters with construction traffic could lead to dangerous situations.

The ES should include a projected traffic management plan that considers the needs of equestrians, ensuring that construction traffic is carefully managed, with appropriate speed limits and measures to reduce the risk of accidents. This might include scheduled road closures or the provision of alternative bridleway routes during peak construction times.

The proposed 400kV overhead transmission lines pose several potential risks to horses, riders, pedestrians, and vehicles in and around Ashby cum Fenby. The Parish Council emphasises the need for a thorough assessment of these risks within the Environmental Statement, with particular focus on the safety and well-being of the local equestrian community. We advocate for the implementation of robust mitigation measures to minimise the impact on bridleways and ensure that Ashby cum Fenby remains a safe and enjoyable area for horse riding and other outdoor activities.

8.0 Request for Diligent Use of the Quality of Life Capital (QoLC) Tool

Ashby cum Fenby Parish Council urges the Planning Inspectorate and National Grid to incorporate the Quality of Life Capital (QoLC) Tool as a critical component of the ES for the Grimsby to Walpole project. The QoLC Tool is intended to evaluate the broader impacts of development projects on the quality of life of local communities, taking into account both tangible and intangible factors that contribute to well-being.

Given the potential significant impacts of the proposed 400kV overhead transmission lines on the residents of Ashby cum Fenby and surrounding areas, it is essential that a thorough and diligent application of the QoLC Tool is undertaken. This approach will help ensure that all aspects of community well-being are fully assessed and that appropriate mitigation strategies are developed to address any negative impacts.

8.1 Comprehensive Assessment of Quality of Life Factors

The QoLC Tool should be used to assess how the proposed transmission lines will affect the social fabric of Ashby cum Fenby. This includes evaluating potential disruptions to community cohesion, the impact on local amenities, and the overall sense of place that residents associate with their village. The potential for visual intrusion, noise, and changes to the landscape should be carefully examined, as these factors can significantly influence the social well-being of the community.

The QoLC Tool should encompass an assessment of potential health impacts, including both physical and mental health. The stress and anxiety associated with the presence of large overhead lines, as well as concerns about EMFs, should be thoroughly investigated.

Additionally, the safety of residents, particularly in relation to the movement of horses and the use of bridleways, should be a key focus.

The economic impacts on the local community should be carefully analysed using the QoLC Tool. This includes assessing potential declines in property values, changes in the desirability of the area for tourism and equestrian activities, and the broader economic consequences for local businesses that rely on the rural character of the area.

8.2 Identification of Mitigation and Enhancement Measures

The QoLC Tool should help identify specific measures that can mitigate the negative impacts of the proposed development on the quality of life of local residents. These measures might include alternative transmission routes, underground cabling, enhanced landscaping and screening, and the provision of community benefits that directly address the concerns of residents.

In addition to mitigation, the use of the QoLC Tool should explore opportunities to enhance the quality of life in Ashby cum Fenby. This might involve investments in local infrastructure, support for community projects, or initiatives that enhance the natural environment and local amenities.

8.3 Engagement and Transparency

The Parish Council strongly advocates for the active involvement of the local community in the application of the QoLC Tool. This includes meaningful consultation with residents to gather their views and concerns, which should be fully integrated into the assessment process. The community's input is crucial for ensuring that the QoLC Tool accurately reflects the values and priorities of those most affected by the proposed development.

The results of the QoLC assessment should be made fully transparent to the public. This includes clear communication of how the tool was applied, the findings of the assessment, and the rationale behind any proposed mitigation or enhancement measures. Transparency is essential for building trust and ensuring that the community feels that their quality of life is being safeguarded.

The Parish Council of Ashby cum Fenby requests that the Quality of Life Capital Tool be diligently applied throughout the assessment process for the Grimsby to Walpole project. This tool is vital for ensuring that the full spectrum of impacts on community well-being is considered and that any adverse effects are appropriately mitigated. We believe that the careful use of the QoLC Tool will contribute to a more balanced and sensitive approach to the development, ultimately leading to outcomes that better reflect the needs and values of our community.

9.0 Conclusion

The Ashby cum Fenby Parish Council's Scoping Opinion outlines the significant potential risks associated with the proposed 400kV overhead transmission lines as part of the Grimsby to Walpole project. The Parish Council urges the Planning Inspectorate and National Grid to carefully consider the unique environmental, ecological, and cultural characteristics of Ashby cum Fenby and surrounding areas. The introduction of such large-scale infrastructure poses considerable threats to the parish's rural character, biodiversity, and community well-being.

The Parish Council advocates strongly for alternative solutions, such as underground cabling, to mitigate the visual and ecological impacts. Additionally, it calls for a thorough assessment of cumulative and in-combination effects, emphasising the need for a strategic approach that integrates regional planning efforts and prioritises long-term sustainability.

By addressing these concerns with the appropriate level of diligence and sensitivity, the Parish Council believes that the development can proceed in a manner that safeguards the unique attributes of Ashby cum Fenby, ensuring that the needs of both the community and the environment are met for future generations.

We look forward to continued engagement on this matter and request that our concerns be carefully considered.