

National Grid briefing

Planning and Infrastructure Bill written evidence

May 2025

Summary

National Grid sits at the heart of Britain's energy system, connecting millions of people and businesses to the energy they use every day. We are embarking on the largest overhaul of the electricity grid in generations, which will support 55,000 more UK jobs by the end of the decade. Over the next five years, we will be investing over £30 billion to upgrade our electricity networks across England and Wales, enabling both economic growth and decarbonisation of the UK power sector.

The Planning and Infrastructure Bill ('the Bill') is a crucial piece of legislation that will help reform the way we plan, consent, connect and deliver nationally significant infrastructure across a range of sectors. Whilst the measures in the Bill are wide ranging, this briefing highlights our views on proposals directly related to electricity networks and associated infrastructure. In this space, the Bill will need to accomplish the following four objectives:

- 1. Embrace an ambitious set of planning reforms that streamline and reduce project delivery timelines**
- 2. Establish the legal foundation for a new strategic approach to grid connections**
- 3. Ensure communities benefit directly from hosting grid infrastructure**
- 4. Clarify the roles of key strategic measures in the Bill such as the Nature Restoration Fund and Spatial Development Strategies (SDS)**

Embrace an ambitious set of planning reforms that streamline and reduce project delivery timelines

(Clauses 1-8)

- The planning regime is one of the biggest barriers to delivering clean energy infrastructure at the pace required, so we welcome a number of reforms included in the Bill that will reduce the risk of delays, provide more certainty for projects from legal challenge and accelerate energy infrastructure projects. These include provisions to:
 - **Remove current statutory requirements for Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects (NSIP) to allow a more meaningful and agile approach to consultation (via amendment NC44).** In its place, Government should prepare focused guidance to create clarity around how developers can best engage communities on their emerging proposals in practice. Importantly, developers would no longer be required to prepare and consult on Preliminary Environmental Information Reports, which in practice are lengthy, technical documents that are difficult to understand. This will free up developers to engage with stakeholders in a more meaningful way and provide the right level of information at the right time.
 - **Create greater flexibility across infrastructure consenting pathways so that developers can opt for the consenting route which is most suitable for the size and complexity of the project.** This will be delivered by creating an option for promoters to make a request to the Secretary of State to opt out of the NSIP regime and instead seek consent via alternative consenting routes (e.g. Town and Country Planning Act or Electricity Act) where that would be faster, more proportionate, or better suited to the needs of the project.
 - **Limit the impact of Judicial Review challenges by reducing the number of attempts for challenge from three to two, or one where the claim is found to be entirely without merit.** In addition to this change, we also need to ensure that the courts are adequately set up and resourced to both hear and determine claims that have merit as quickly as possible.
 - **Mandate regular five-yearly reviews of the National Policy Statements (NPS) and a new streamlined procedure for making changes to NPS to ensure they can quickly respond to legislative changes, published government policy, and/or relevant court decisions.** This will help strike a welcome balance between reflecting up-to-date government policy and ambition whilst maintaining a stable policy framework necessary for major infrastructure projects.

- **Allow local planning authorities to set their own planning fees**, which we support, provided that they result in a high-quality, improved service that meets statutory timeframes for decision (these are often missed) and that these are not excessive and are on a 'not for profit' basis.
- Alongside this Bill, the Government should also look to deliver changes to streamline and accelerate land rights including changes to permitted development and land access, to reduce burdens and increase flexibility for network developers looking to access and upgrade existing infrastructure. As a further step, we would encourage a review of the NSIP thresholds which should look at increasing overhead line thresholds above 2km to avoid inadvertently extending timescales for carrying out relatively minor works to the network.

Establish the legal foundation for a new strategic approach to grid connections

(Clauses 9-13)

- The move to a more a strategic approach to grid connections at both a transmission and distribution level is a welcome one and will support both the delivery of economic growth and the clean power by 2030 ambition.
- The outdated 'first come, first serve' model has led to an oversubscribed pipeline with far more contracted capacity in the queue than is required, delaying those projects that do need to progress, and underscoring the need to shift to a 'first ready, first connected' approach.
- The Bill facilitates this shift by granting the Secretary of State and/or the regulator, Ofgem, temporary powers to vary electricity licences, thereby enabling the prioritisation of the connections queue for 3 years from Royal Assent. This is an important change and one that will support in reducing timelines for projects connecting to the grid prioritising those that are ready and needed.
- Whilst these changes are welcome, the Bill will need to be passed in statute quickly to deliver the necessary legal protections to implement the reform process in 2025.

Ensure communities benefit directly from hosting grid infrastructure

(Clause 22)

- In addition to reforming the planning and connections process, it is important to consider the communities hosting transmission infrastructure and ensure they receive lasting tangible benefits.
- The Bill includes provisions for households living close to new transmission infrastructure to receive discounts on their bills. This comes alongside community fund guidance which establishes a framework rewarding communities for hosting this infrastructure.
- Under powers in the Bill, households within 500 metres of new or upgraded electricity transmission infrastructure could receive up to £2,500 off their bills over 10 years.
- The bill discount scheme is expected to be in place from 2026 and apply to new onshore, above ground transmission cables and associated infrastructure (e.g. substations) and some major upgrades of existing projects.
- The principles set out in both this Bill and the accompanying community fund guidance are the right approach but more clarity on the governance and implementation on how the bill discount scheme is administered alongside the secondary legislation that will underpin it, will be required.

Clarify the roles of key strategic measures in the Bill such as the Nature Restoration Fund and Spatial Development Strategies (SDS)

(Clauses 61-70 and 47)

- The Bill proposes some new measures on which further detail is needed in order to determine the impacts on the delivery of energy infrastructure projects and the transition more broadly. This includes:
 - **The Nature Restoration Fund** The ambition to create a more strategic and streamlined approach to environmental mitigation is welcome, though further detail is needed as to how on the model will work in practice, including how it would work for long, linear projects passing through multiple local authorities.
 - **The Spatial Development Strategies:** We support the shift to a more a strategic approach to planning, through the introduction of Spatial Development Strategies. However, greater clarity is needed on how SDSs will align in the plan-making cycle with forthcoming strategic energy plans such

as the Strategic Spatial Energy Plan, the Centralised Strategic Network Plan, the 10 Year Infrastructure Strategy, Regional Energy Strategic Plans and the new AI Growth Zones.