# Communities unite to resist Ed Miliband’s £16bn Great Grid Upgrade pylons threat



The idyllic village of Ardleigh in Essex appears tranquil, yet beneath its picturesque surface lies a brewing storm. Local residents face the daunting prospect of 160ft electricity pylons and a 400ft-wide trench for cables, part of what has been termed the "Great Grid Upgrade." Spearheaded by Ed Miliband and the National Grid, this £16 billion initiative aims to modernise the UK’s electricity infrastructure, but has ignited fierce opposition among communities that fear losing both their homes and livelihoods.

The ambitious scheme, launched in April 2023, plans to stretch 625 miles of “pylon highways” from Grimsby in Lincolnshire to Walpole in Norfolk, with additional routes connecting Chesterfield to Willington in Derbyshire and East Yorkshire to Nottinghamshire. Politically, the push for this vast network coincides with a growing demand for renewable energy, expected to increase by 50% within the next five years and possibly double in 25. However, for Ardleigh, the oncoming pylons represent more than just an infrastructure upgrade; they threaten to alter the very fabric of community life.

Residents, facing potential loss of property values, are resolute in their opposition. Jayne and Bruce Marshall may lose up to 80% of their farmland, while Gilly and Paul Whittle’s £1.5 million home could be halved in value. Their fears stem not merely from financial losses but from the feel of their home being irrevocably transformed into an industrial landscape. As Gilly noted, “I’m not a Nimby or nay-sayer... We are rushing into these pylon plans for the sake of a political deadline.” This sentiment echoes among many, highlighting the clash between renewable ambitions and community integrity.

Across the region, the local outcry is reminiscent of the past protests surrounding HS2, the controversial high-speed rail project. Leading figures, including Sir Tony Blair, have publicly critiqued Miliband's eco-schemes, suggesting that the aggressive decarbonisation targets could be not just unrealistic, but detrimental. Labour-affiliated union leaders share similar concerns, asserting that a balance between environmental goals and community interests must be struck.

The National Grid posits that the pylons are essential to support a modernised energy system. However, critics argue that the potential environmental destruction and impact on property values undermine sustainable development. Studies have shown that homes near pylons can lose significant value, with property consultancy Allsop revealing a so-called “pylon penalty.” Research indicates that in Birmingham, homes near pylons sold for up to 23% less than the city average, while country properties suffer even greater declines.

Local entrepreneurs are also feeling the pressure. Robert Blyth and his sister own a vineyard affected by the proposed pylons, raising concerns about the project’s impacts on their crops and surrounding wildlife. Their thriving business, which has attracted a loyal customer base, faces an uncertain future. “National Grid don’t care about me and whether my business can survive this,” said Matt Wilsher, operator of the vineyard's café, underscoring sentiments that resonate across the local economic landscape.

The pushback against the pylons isn't just about aesthetic or property concerns—it's also an issue deeply tied to agricultural viability and food security. Jayne Marshall, involved in fruit cultivation, emphasised the importance of maintaining the community's agricultural roots, lamenting that the urgency behind the net-zero ambitions could jeopardise essential food production. Echoing this view, Dr Jonathan Dean from the Campaign for the Protection of Rural Wales pointed out that there are better methods for electricity transmission that remain unexplored. “What is a price worth paying?” he questioned, challenging the notion that the current trajectory is the only path forward.

Various stakeholders, including local councils from Essex, Norfolk, and Suffolk, have expressed their unified opposition. Their letter to the National Grid articulates concerns not only about the impact on landscapes but also highlights alternatives that have yet to be considered, such as offshore cabling solutions that could mitigate many issues raised by residents. As MP Bernard Jenkin has argued, these options deserve exploration, especially considering the significant cultural and ecological heritage at stake.

Despite the backlash, Miliband has dismissed these criticisms, labelling them as “old nonsense and lies” while referring to opponents as “obstructionists.” Yet this response may not dampen the rising tide of frustration from local communities watching their landscapes change irrevocably.

As Ardleigh braces for potential upheaval, many hope that enough voices raised in opposition will lead to genuine reconsideration of how Britain modernises its energy infrastructure. Ultimately, the question remains: can the government meet its ambitious green goals while preserving the very communities that form the backbone of rural Britain?

### Reference Map

* Paragraph 1: [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14697405/Halt-march-pylons-Furious-communities-desperate-protect-homes-livelihoods-action-stop-Ed-Milibands-latest-bid-despoil-countryside.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490)
* Paragraph 2: [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14697405/Halt-march-pylons-Furious-communities-desperate-protect-homes-livelihoods-action-stop-Ed-Milibands-latest-bid-despoil-countryside.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490)
* Paragraph 3: [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14697405/Halt-march-pylons-Furious-communities-desperate-protect-homes-livelihoods-action-stop-Ed-Milibands-latest-bid-despoil-countryside.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490)
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* Paragraph 5: [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14697405/Halt-march-pylons-Furious-communities-desperate-protect-homes-livelihoods-action-stop-Ed-Milibands-latest-bid-despoil-countryside.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490)[[2]](https://www.reuters.com/business/energy/battle-over-power-pylons-highlights-britains-net-zero-challenge-2024-05-30/)
* Paragraph 6: [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14697405/Halt-march-pylons-Furious-communities-desperate-protect-homes-livelihoods-action-stop-Ed-Milibands-latest-bid-despoil-countryside.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490)[[4]](https://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/1807116/pylons-national-grid-essex-ardleigh)
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* Paragraph 10: [[3]](https://www.bernardjenkin.com/news/pylons-update-archaeological-explorations-ardleigh-new-substation)
* Paragraph 11: [[4]](https://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/1807116/pylons-national-grid-essex-ardleigh)[[7]](https://www.essex.gov.uk/news/2024/opposing-183-kilometres-pylons-through-essex)
* Paragraph 12: [[5]](https://www.itv.com/news/anglia/2023-09-11/114-mile-pylon-plans-criticised-by-councils-in-letter-to-national-grid)
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* Paragraph 14: [[6]](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/households-near-new-pylons-to-save-hundreds-on-energy-bills)
* Paragraph 15: [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14697405/Halt-march-pylons-Furious-communities-desperate-protect-homes-livelihoods-action-stop-Ed-Milibands-latest-bid-despoil-countryside.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14697405/Halt-march-pylons-Furious-communities-desperate-protect-homes-livelihoods-action-stop-Ed-Milibands-latest-bid-despoil-countryside.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.reuters.com/business/energy/battle-over-power-pylons-highlights-britains-net-zero-challenge-2024-05-30/> - In East Anglia, UK, residents are opposing the installation of 50-meter-high electricity pylons planned by the National Grid. These pylons aim to transmit wind and solar power to cities as part of the government's 2050 net-zero emissions strategy. Campaigners advocate for underground or offshore High Voltage Direct Current (HVDC) cables, despite higher costs, arguing that the environmental impacts of the pylons undermine green goals. This local opposition underscores the challenges of balancing infrastructure upgrades, cost, and public support. The issue has also become a point of contention in the upcoming general election, with contrasting positions from the ruling Conservatives and opposition Labour Party.
3. <https://www.bernardjenkin.com/news/pylons-update-archaeological-explorations-ardleigh-new-substation> - Local MP Bernard Jenkin has expressed concerns over archaeological excavations for a proposed new electricity substation near Ardleigh, Essex. He argues that these excavations are unnecessary and premature, suggesting that alternative solutions, such as an offshore 'bootstrap', could eliminate the need for the substation. Jenkin emphasizes the importance of integrating offshore grid solutions to streamline infrastructure, reduce environmental impact, and better respect local communities. He also highlights the disruption caused by the excavations, which have affected crop planting and were subsequently flooded by Storm Babet, making it too late to plant winter wheat.
4. <https://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/1807116/pylons-national-grid-essex-ardleigh> - Residents in Ardleigh, Essex, are uniting to oppose the construction of 164-foot electricity pylons planned by the National Grid. These pylons are part of a 112-mile stretch intended to transport green power across East Anglia. Local concerns include the destruction of habitats, impact on communities, and the potential blight on property values. Campaigners argue that the pylons threaten valuable farmland and natural beauty, and they advocate for alternative solutions that do not disrupt local environments and communities. The opposition reflects broader apprehensions about the impact of large-scale infrastructure projects on rural areas.
5. <https://www.itv.com/news/anglia/2023-09-11/114-mile-pylon-plans-criticised-by-councils-in-letter-to-national-grid> - Plans for over 110 miles of electricity pylons through the East of England have been criticized in a joint letter to National Grid from three councils. The proposed route would span from Norwich to Tilbury, weaving through Norfolk, Suffolk, and Essex. The councils express concerns about the significant impact on landscapes and local communities, highlighting that alternative offshore solutions have not been sufficiently investigated. They also note that not enough of the cabling would go underground to avoid areas of natural beauty. National Grid asserts that the pylons are essential to support infrastructure needed to meet the UK's net-zero target.
6. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/households-near-new-pylons-to-save-hundreds-on-energy-bills> - The UK government has announced that households living near new or upgraded electricity transmission infrastructure will receive discounts on their energy bills. Under the upcoming Planning and Infrastructure Bill, residents within 500 meters of new pylons will get electricity bill discounts of up to £2,500 over 10 years. This initiative aims to provide financial benefits to rural communities hosting vital infrastructure and is part of the government's Clean Power Action Plan to connect more clean, homegrown power to the grid, unlocking growth, jobs, and investment across the country.
7. <https://www.essex.gov.uk/news/2024/opposing-183-kilometres-pylons-through-essex> - Essex County Council has confirmed its opposition to the installation of hundreds of pylons through Essex. National Grid's updated plans involve building 183 kilometers of pylons between Norwich and Tilbury, expected to stand 50 meters tall, along with a large substation in Tendring. The council argues that the project does not justify the 2030 delivery deadline and that alternative options have not been fully considered. They also express concerns about the impact on the road network and the lack of community benefits associated with the pylons. The council stands with Norfolk and Suffolk County Councils against National Grid's plans.