# Ardleigh community fights National Grid’s plan to scar Essex countryside with 160-foot pylons



The picturesque village of Ardleigh in Essex, known for its serene landscapes and historic charm, is facing an impending transformation that could forever alter its character. The local community stands on the forefront of resistance against ambitious plans by Ed Miliband and the National Grid, which are set to introduce a series of 160-foot electricity pylons and sprawling substations into this tranquil area. The proposed changes are part of the £16 billion "Great Grid Upgrade," launched in April 2023, aiming to develop over 625 miles of new high-voltage direct current connections across the UK. This initiative includes a significant line running from Norwich to Tilbury in Essex, encroaching on the pastoral beauty of Ardleigh.

For those who call Ardleigh home, the stakes are alarmingly high. Local residents Jayne and Bruce Marshall fear that they could lose up to 80 percent of their farmland, while Gilly and Paul Whittle worry that the value of their £1.5 million home could plummet by half due to the proximity of pylons. Even landowners less directly affected, such as Robert Blyth and Rosie Forshaw, are concerned about how construction will disrupt their newly-established vineyard, which produces thousands of bottles of wine annually. With heavy construction traffic projected to inundate their narrow country lanes, residents are left contemplating a future where their livelihoods and the natural beauty of their surroundings are irreversibly damaged.

The anger among Ardleigh residents resonates beyond their village. It is part of a broader discontent across the UK, as various communities band together to oppose the relentless march of pylons, reminiscent of the fervent backlash against the HS2 rail project. A growing cacophony of voices in Westminster now questions the rationale behind such aggressive infrastructural plans. Critics have not only labelled the proposals as an assault on rural beauty but have also drawn attention to the environmental degradation they may precipitate. Sir Tony Blair has weighed in, branding Miliband’s net-zero ambitions as "doomed to fail," reflecting a growing disquiet among even the former Labour leader's circle.

Fundamentally, many community voices are concerned that the government is dismissing their legitimate concerns as mere "Nimbyism," underestimating the broader implications for social equity and environmental stewardship. Rosie Pearson, founder of the Essex Suffolk Norfolk Pylons campaign group, passionately argues that the rush to meet political timelines overlooks more sustainable approaches, such as burying cables or upgrading existing infrastructure, which have been successfully implemented in other European nations. Her sentiments echo widespread calls for a more community-centred approach to energy challenges, emphasising the essential balance between immediate electrical needs and the long-term viability of local landscapes.

Despite local opposition, Miliband and the National Grid maintain that the country must quickly adapt its energy infrastructure to meet increasing demands. The anticipated electricity usage is projected to rise by 50 percent in the next five years and may double in the next quarter-century, necessitating substantial augmentation of the existing network. However, the chosen method of doing so is being met with scrutiny. Reports suggest that burying cables could, in fact, be the more cost-effective and environmentally friendly option, potentially saving up to £600 million for the Norwich to Tilbury route.

Local officials, including Ardleigh’s MP Sir Bernard Jenkin, have urged a reconsideration of the current proposals, suggesting alternative offshore routes for cable deployment that would protect land and landscapes. Both he and community leaders advocate for exploration into these offshore solutions to mitigate the environmental and aesthetic impact, insisting that the government's current trajectory could lead to irreversible harm.

Residents like Jayne Marshall are particularly anxious about the implications for local food security. With the agricultural landscape at risk, she argues that haste toward decarbonisation is misplaced given the global challenges affecting food production. In her orchard, nurtured with care, she embodies the struggle between rural livelihoods and larger political ambitions that could render their land unrecognisable.

As Ardleigh braces for potential upheaval, the debate surrounding the Great Grid Upgrade reflects deeper tensions about energy policy, local governance, and the fight to preserve rural heritage amid an unavoidable push for progress. Whether this community can successfully advocate for alternative solutions in the coming years remains uncertain, but their battle resonates with a crucial question: what price are we willing to pay for our energy future, and, more importantly, who gets to pay it?

### Reference Map

1. Paragraph 1: (1)
2. Paragraph 2: (1), (4)
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9. Paragraph 9: (1), (5)
10. Paragraph 10: (1), (4)

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## 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.ft.com/content/e414a15d-ee6d-4e2c-afcf-2d38760e7046> - A letter to the Financial Times criticizes the UK's approach to the Great Grid Upgrade, highlighting two main issues: labeling community opposition as 'Nimbyism' and the exclusive focus on using pylons. The author argues that alternative methods, such as updating existing grids and burying cables, have proven more efficient and cost-effective in other countries. Additionally, European nations like Belgium, the Netherlands, Germany, and Denmark coordinate their offshore grids to reduce costs and infrastructure. In contrast, the UK's government persists with a flawed, expensive 'radial' approach, leading to disorganized infrastructure and unnecessary damage.
3. <https://www.bernardjenkin.com/news/pylons-update-archaeological-explorations-ardleigh-new-substation> - An update from Bernard Jenkin MP discusses the archaeological excavations at the proposed site for a new electricity substation near Ardleigh. The MP argues that these excavations are unnecessary and premature, suggesting that alternative solutions, like the use of an offshore 'bootstrap', could eliminate the need for the substation. He emphasizes the importance of integrating offshore grid solutions to streamline infrastructure, reduce environmental impact, and better respect local communities.
4. <https://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/1807116/pylons-national-grid-essex-ardleigh> - Residents in Ardleigh, Essex, have united to oppose the construction of 164ft pylons planned by National Grid to transport green power across East Anglia. The plans include substations the size of 11 football pitches, threatening valuable farmland. Rosie Pearson, founder of the Essex, Suffolk, and Norfolk Pylons campaign group, warns that the experiences of locals are part of a larger issue affecting the region. Nearly 27,000 people have signed a petition urging energy bosses to build an offshore grid instead of crisscrossing the land with cables.
5. <https://www.ardleighmatters.org.uk/pylons/> - The Ardleigh Matters website discusses the East Anglia GREEN proposal by National Grid to reinforce the high-voltage power network in East Anglia. The plan involves surrounding Ardleigh with 50m high pylons and installing substations the size of 11 football pitches, taking up valuable farmland. The website provides information on the project and other action groups, urging residents to sign up against the pylons and participate in local consultations.
6. <https://www.pritipatelmp.com/campaigns/opposing-national-grids-pylon-plans/> - Priti Patel MP has been campaigning against National Grid's plans for over 100 miles of new pylons and overhead power lines in East Anglia, advocating for the development of an offshore grid as an alternative. The campaign includes various news articles and updates related to the opposition of the pylon plans, highlighting concerns about the environmental impact and the need for alternative solutions.
7. <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 councils express concerns about the significant impact on landscapes and local communities, and claim that an offshore solution has not been sufficiently investigated. They highlight that not enough of the cabling would go underground to avoid areas of natural beauty, and that alternative options have not been fully considered.