# Ardleigh village faces loss of farmland and heritage under National Grid’s Great Grid Upgrade plans



The village of Ardleigh in Essex, renowned for its picturesque landscape and tranquil waters, now stands on the brink of an irrevocable transformation. Under the guise of progress, the National Grid’s plans for 160ft electricity pylons and disruptive trenching threaten to mar the countryside that local residents hold dear. This initiative, framed as Britain’s ‘Great Grid Upgrade’, is being pushed forward in response to energy demands that many argue could be addressed through more thoughtful means.

Since its launch in April 2023, this £16 billion project has set a course to create 625 miles of so-called ‘pylon highways’ stretching from Grimsby to Norfolk, significantly altering the identity of countless communities along the way. The specific line that endangers Ardleigh runs from Norwich to Tilbury and has ignited anger among residents who feel sidelined in decisions that impact their futures. The ambitious plans threaten to construct three substations within this historic parish, documented in the Domesday Book, alongside a large interconnector designed primarily for energy export to Europe, raising valid questions about the priorities at play.

Local voices such as Jayne and Bruce Marshall are outraged over the potential loss of up to 80 per cent of their farmland. Gilly and Paul Whittle fear their £1.5 million home may lose half its value, asserting that such repercussions are seldom acknowledged in high-level discussions. Increasingly, communities across the nation are expressing their dissatisfaction with what appears to be a reckless surge towards renewable energy goals, driven more by political aspirations than genuine community welfare. Critics contend that this government approach lacks sensitivity, endangering homes, livelihoods, and the rural landscape cherished by so many.

Notably, Sir Tony Blair has voiced his concern about the implications of these plans, labeling them ill-considered and echoing sentiments shared by many about the lack of meaningful consultation with affected communities. Residents are left questioning why alternative solutions, such as burying the cables, which could save millions while preserving the environment, are not in the conversation. A report highlighting the potential for £600 million in savings by opting for a less invasive approach underscores a critical inadequacy in the government’s current strategy.

Local businesses also feel the weight of this controversy. Robert Blyth, a vineyard owner near the proposed pylons, worries that industrial construction will disrupt the local ecosystem and harm his crops. He raises concerns about the balance of local wildlife and agriculture, while local hubs like the Skylark café, which serves as a vital community point, risk severe repercussions. Owner Matt Wilsher’s lament regarding the lack of consideration for local economies highlights the widespread anxiety felt among entrepreneurs in the area.

As grassroots campaigns like the Essex Suffolk Norfolk Pylons take shape, the call for a more rational approach to electricity supply is gaining momentum. Residents like Gilly Whittle emphasize that no one disputes the necessity for increased electricity. However, they caution against the haste of these plans, which seem driven by an arbitrary political timeline rather than real community needs.

With electricity demand in the UK expected to rise significantly over the coming decades—even projected to increase by 50 per cent within the next five years—the urgency for infrastructure upgrades is clear. However, the current plans demonstrate a disregard for the real impact on local communities, reflecting a troubling trend of top-down decision-making that neglects the voices of those directly affected.

In contrast with other regions see reformative electric grid initiatives amid climate challenges, the UK’s National Grid’s strategy appears increasingly disconnected from grassroots concerns. As the Great Grid Upgrade approaches its scheduled start in Ardleigh in 2027, the persistent discontent and demands for a more thoughtful approach remain palpable.

Ardleigh’s historic charm and natural beauty are hanging in the balance, prompting important questions about the priorities of energy projects and the necessity for genuine community input. As the dialogue unfolds, it serves as a stark reminder of the vital need to balance energy expansion with the preservation of cherished local environments.

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.reuters.com/business/energy/britains-national-grid-invest-4-bln-new-york-infrastructure-2024-03-20/> - Britain's National Grid's U.S. unit plans to invest over $4 billion to upgrade New York's electricity infrastructure, marking its largest investment in the state's century-old transmission system. The 'Upstate Upgrade' program includes more than 70 projects expected to be completed by 2030, aiming to meet increasing energy demands driven by electric vehicles and artificial intelligence. The initiative involves constructing or rebuilding over 1,000 miles of transmission lines and 45 substations, supporting New York's goal of an emission-free electric system by 2040 and projected to create jobs and economic gains.
3. <https://www.apnews.com/article/2dce477552c1056a2cf4e54519d97343> - The Biden administration announced a historic $3.5 billion investment to enhance the resilience of the U.S. electric grid, addressing challenges posed by extreme weather events like wildfires. The funding supports 58 projects aimed at improving grid reliability, fostering renewable energy integration, and mitigating disaster risks. Key projects include substantial investments in rural areas of Georgia and Louisiana, as well as significant grants for areas impacted by wildfires, such as the Midwest and California. Energy Secretary Jennifer Granholm emphasized the urgency of modernizing the grid to meet new energy demands and withstand natural disasters.
4. <https://www.ft.com/content/2aac5ac8-6640-4308-990e-7c73387c2d40> - National Grid acknowledged that outdated computer systems and infrastructure often prevent the optimal use of battery storage, which can deliver cheaper, greener energy. Craig Dyke from National Grid's electricity system operator (ESO) noted that batteries are underutilized up to 30% of the time when they are cheaper than other energy sources. Battery storage groups argue that this inefficiency increases costs for consumers and results in greater reliance on fossil fuels. National Grid plans to reduce the rate of unused batteries to single digits by early next year, following a system upgrade in December 2023.
5. <https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/britains-national-grid-proposes-74-bln-energy-system-upgrade-2024-03-19/> - Britain's National Grid proposed a £58 billion ($74 billion) investment to upgrade the country's energy system beyond 2030 to meet rising electricity demand and support renewable power projects. The plan involves extending the offshore power grid and creating a new north-to-south electrical spine to transport electricity from Scotland to southern regions of England, along with new transmission lines. Scotland is set to develop numerous wind projects, far surpassing its peak electricity demand. The plan requires government and regulatory approval, with funding details yet to be outlined.
6. <https://ardleigh.website/pylons-and-substations> - The Ardleigh Parish Council is actively campaigning against National Grid's plans to install 50-meter-high pylons and substations in the area, which would occupy valuable farmland. The council has coordinated with the Essex Suffolk Norfolk Pylons Campaign and plans to hold public meetings to inform residents about the proposed scheme and its potential impact on Ardleigh. National Grid has arranged drop-in sessions in nearby locations, and the council encourages residents to participate in consultations and provide feedback through various channels.
7. <https://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/1807116/pylons-national-grid-essex-ardleigh> - Residents in Ardleigh, Essex, have united to oppose National Grid's plans to build 164-foot pylons and substations in their community. The proposed infrastructure threatens to disrupt habitats, communities, and valuable farmland. Campaigners, including Rosie Pearson from the Essex, Suffolk, and Norfolk Pylons campaign group, highlight the potential loss of wildlife, heritage assets, and the blight on homes and businesses. While supporting the transition to net-zero emissions, locals condemn National Grid's approach and lack of consideration for alternative solutions like burying cables or constructing an offshore grid.