

Meeting note

File reference	EN010060
Status	Final
Author	Adam Price
Date	22 January 2014
Meeting with	Progress Power Limited, Suffolk County Council and Mid-Suffolk District Council
Venue	The Crossways Inn, Scole, Diss IP21

Attendees

Applicant:

Chris McKerrow (Progress Power Limited)
Kirstin Gardner (Progress Power Limited)
Chris Girdham (Peter Brett Associates)
Andy Gregory (Parsons Brinckerhoff)

Suffolk County Council:

Michael Wilks (Planning Projects Manager)
John Pitchford (Head of Planning)

Mid-Suffolk District Council:

Nick Ward (Corporate Manager)

Planning Inspectorate (PINS):

Jeffrey Penfold (Case Manager)
Tom Carpen (Infrastructure Planning Lead)
Adam Price (Assistant Case Officer)

Meeting

Objectives

Tripartite meeting to discuss aspects of project

Circulation

Attendees

Summary of Key Points and Advice Given:

Introduction

The Planning Inspectorate outlined its openness policy and ensured those present understood that any issues discussed and advice given would be recorded and placed on the Planning Inspectorate's website under s.51 of the Planning Act 2008. Further to this, it was made clear that any advice given did not constitute legal advice upon which the applicant (or others) can rely.

Project Description and Update

The applicant gave a description of the proposed development.

Two options for the proposed 8" gas pipeline route were discussed. One option would run in an easterly direction, connecting to the existing National Grid National Transmission System (NTS). The second would travel south along the runway of Eye Airfield, diverting to the east, and connecting to a new compound, constructed for the proposal. Connection to the National Grid Network is proposed via a buried, 400Kv cable. The proposed works for said connection would require Horizontal Directional drilling ('HDD') under the A140. This would allow connection to the existing overhead National Grid transmission lines that run parallel to the A140 Norwich road, and near to the villages of Yaxley, Mellis and Thrandeston.

The connection would require the construction of a new substation – part of an Electrical Connection Compound ('ECC') – situated on land close to the National Grid transmission lines and located north of Yaxley and Mellis. The proposed substation building would measure approximately 150m by 150m.

Suffolk County Council ('SCC') queried the dimensions, making reference to a National Grid generic substation design and whether the applicant could work with National Grid to establish a site-specific design. The applicant explained the measurements constitute a minimum set of required dimensions to achieve a compliant connection.

The applicant explained that there were a number of options for the access road to ECC by means of a new junction off the A140 from Old Norwich Road.

SCC queried the level of flexibility predicted on different components of the project; for example number of stacks required. The applicant explained that there would be some scope for flexibility; however, turbine units would be determined by the capacity mechanism.

Pre-application consultation exercises:

The local authorities noted that they were aware of local concern about the adequacy of consultation to date. The applicant considered that consultation had been appropriate. The Inspectorate directed the local authorities to the s55 checklists to understand how applications were accepted, or not having regard to the tests for consultation.

Further consultation with affected s42 consultees would take place on revised ECC access route options. The Planning Inspectorate stressed the importance of differentiating between statutory and non-statutory consultation exercises within its Consultation Report.

SCC queried the method of non-statutory consultation and those who would be targeted. The applicant confirmed all those identified as s42 consultees for the purposes of statutory consultation would be provided with an Information Update. The Information Update would be made available in the public domain and those in the immediate area would also receive a summary of the information update in the form of a letter drop.

In response to this SCC asked if the applicant would extend the exercise to be considered a full statutory s47 consultation. The applicant stated it would seek legal advice on the matter.

The Planning Inspectorate stressed the importance of clarity to all parties about what they were being consulted on, including an opportunity to respond to new material to and ensuring that no-one is prejudiced from commenting on the application. The applicant confirmed that all parties would be provided with the opportunity to provide feedback and that channels existed to enable them to do so.

The applicant highlighted that a draft of the DCO had not yet been circulated for comment with local authorities. The intention is to allow for this shortly, accompanied with a schedule of requirements.

SCC explained the importance of assessing the schedule of requirements alongside an Environmental Statement (ES). The local authorities expressed disappointment at the level of engagement in the preparation of the ES to date.

Formal Position of Local Authorities

SCC confirmed the authority supported the principle of the development of a gas-fired power station on Eye Airfield but had raised a large number of matters that they consider need addressing at this pre-application stage including provision of further information on the grid connection and substation siting. It was noted that the preliminary environmental information was also lacking in a number of respects in particular concerning transport. Mid-Suffolk District Council ('MSDC') also support the principle of the development; however, remain conscious of issues to be addressed prior to submission.

In response, the applicant explained that work continues on the production of an ES, with meetings intended with local authorities. SCC made a request for greater engagement from the applicant on socio-economic matters – the potential local benefits (jobs, work for local businesses) were a key factor in the authority's decision to lend 'in-principle' support to the development.

Issues arising from consultation exercises:

SCC highlighted issues with the proposed design and layout of the proposed development and stressed that consultation on this may avoid an 'off the shelf' approach in terms of its design. The applicant explained that an architect had been commissioned to work on the design aspects of the development and that it was their intention to present their current approach in the near future in the form of a workshop.

A 'Substation Siting Report' is currently being produced and would provide justification for siting options.

The Inspectorate queried what information has been made available for consultation purposes. The applicant confirmed two options – deemed viable by the applicant - had been consulted on, with the said siting report providing just reasoning for such choices.

SCC highlighted that they would have preferred consultation on more preliminary findings on such options, before a process of elimination had begun.

The Planning Inspectorate recommended that further consultation be carried out with regard to the issue of substation siting. It was stated that this should be done as a means of gauging an understanding of the thoughts of the relevant parish councils as otherwise this could potentially pose an issue at the examination stage, should the application be accepted.

Current Issues

The Inspectorate asked the applicant if all projects within the local area were to be considered within the cumulative impacts assessment. The applicant explained that there were very few projects locally, however, it was explained that this information would be provided within the ES.

SCC explained that they were currently not clear on the weight that would be given to the 'need' for the project given that it was to be a 'Peaking Plant', in operation for a limited amount of time. The Planning Inspectorate explained that it would be for the Examining Authority to take a view on this and that it would be dependent on the nature of the impacts in relation to the content of the National Policy Statements.

The Inspectorate asked the applicant about the status of compulsory acquisition agreements. The applicant explained that agreements had been reached for both the main site and the gas connection but discussions were still on-going for the electricity connection.

SCC asked how the issue of 'community benefits' was being approached by Examining Authorities. The Inspectorate said that experience suggested that the materiality of this to examinations appeared to be peripheral.

Planning Inspectorate Outreach Presentation

The Inspectorate conducted a brief presentation on the Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects (NSIP) process to representatives of local parish councils and interest groups and member of the county and district council. This was focussed on the pre-application stage of the process and included advice into how to become involved in consultation and the formation of the project application.

The Inspectorate agreed to provide follow up advice regarding which local authorities and parish councils are considered 'relevant' for the purposes of pre-application consultation.

The Inspectorate agreed to follow up advice regarding the involvement of local authorities at the pre-application stage in forming a 'principal' view on a project.

Other matters:

The applicant confirmed an anticipated submission date of the end of March. The Planning Inspectorate affirmed that no new information can be submitted during the statutory 28-day acceptance period.