



Preliminary Meeting Note

Application: Hornsea Project Four Offshore Wind Farm

Reference: EN010098

Time and date: Tuesday 22 February 2022 at 10:00

Venue: Virtual Microsoft Teams Meeting

This meeting note is not a full transcript of the Preliminary Meeting. It is a summary of the key points discussed.

<https://infrastructure.planninginspectorate.gov.uk/projects/yorkshire-and-the-humber/hornsea-project-four-offshore-wind-farm/?ipcsection=docs>

1. Welcome and Introduction

Jo Dowling welcomed those present and introduced herself as the lead member of the Panel of Examining Inspectors, and Stephen Bradley, Gavin Jones, Rod MacArthur and Andrew Mahon introduced themselves as panel members to examine the Hornsea Project Four Offshore Wind Farm application.

The Examining Authority (ExA) explained the appointment was made under delegation from the Secretary of State (SoS) for the Department for Levelling Up, Housing, and Communities on 6 January 2022.

The ExA it would be examining the application made by Ørsted Hornsea Project Four Limited ('the Applicant') before making a recommendation to the Secretary of State for the Department of Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, who will decide whether an Order granting Development Consent for the proposed project, which is a Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project (NSIP), should be made.

The ExA explained the purpose of the Preliminary Meeting (PM) and noted that the Examination will commence after the PM closes.

The ExA confirmed that all documents and submissions received and accepted during the Examination will be published on the [project-specific page of the National Infrastructure Planning website](#).

Audio recording

The full recording of this Preliminary Meeting is available on the National Infrastructure Planning website and can be accessed [here](#).

General Data Protection Regulation

The ExA explained the Planning Inspectorate's duties under General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). Further info relating to the GDPR can be found in the Planning Inspectorate's [Privacy Note](#).

The ExA then asked all attendees introduced themselves. Full details can be found in the recording and transcript of the Preliminary Meeting.

2. Examination Process

The ExA briefly explained the examination process under the Planning Act 2008 (PA2008). Details can be found at [Annex B](#) to the [Rule 6](#) letter of 24 January 2022. Further information on the examination process can be found in the [Advice Note 8.4](#).

The ExA asked attendees for any questions regarding the examination process (with exception of events). No comments were made by any of the parties in attendance.

The ExA advised of the current approach regarding the holding of events. The public health restrictions regarding the holding of in-person events that were in place because of the COVID-19 pandemic have in the main been lifted. Going forward, the Planning Inspectorate's guidance was for events to be held either wholly or partially virtually (also referred to as "blended" where people can attend either in person at a physical venue or 'dial in' to the physical venue and attend virtually), rather than returning to solely in-person events. This better enables everyone to participate.

The ExA noted from the responses received at the Procedural Deadline that East Riding of Yorkshire Council (ERYC) [[PDL-004](#)] and Natural England (NE) [[PDL-006](#)] have indicated that they are happy attending virtually.

The Applicant raised its preference for substantive hearings discussing technical matters to take place in person and stated its reasons for this. However, it recognised the benefits for a blended or virtual approach for other parties, particularly in light of bank holidays during the Examination.

The ExA advised that all events during the Examination would have an opportunity for virtual attendance. This would enable participation for all parties (including those with mobility issues, capacity, or concerns regarding COVID-19).

The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) confirmed a similar position to those expressed by ERYC and NE in support of virtual events.

3. Initial Assessment of Principal Issues

The ExA explained the purpose of the Initial Assessment of Principal Issues (section 88 of the PA2008), which can be found at [Annex C](#) to the [Rule 6](#) letter of 24 January 2022, and asked for any observations on them.

RSPB discussed ornithology matters under the Habitats Regulations Assessment principal issue. It considered that the timing and nature of the provision of information by Applicant during the course of the Examination would interact with the level of detail that may be relied upon in the draft Development Consent Order (DCO) and Deemed Marine Licence condition and any associated outline plans, and whether or not any additional requirements or conditions might be necessary. It stated its strong support for the submissions made by NE [[RR-029](#)]. It viewed a link between the level of confidence with impact assessments, discussions and agreements on predicted adverse effects and the appropriate nature and scale of any compensation measures.

The representative for Mr and Mrs Dransfield raised the consideration of the Applicant's pre-application consultation as a possible principal issue, as set out in their clients' Relevant Representation (RR) [[RR-013](#)].

The Applicant advised it would respond to RR at Deadline 1, including concerns about pre-application consultation.

4. Procedural decisions

The ExA explained the procedural decisions made under section 89(3) of the PA2008 and asked for any observations.

The procedural decisions can be found at [Annex E](#) to the Rule 6 Letter.

The ExA advised that since the Rule 6 Letter was issued, a number of additional submissions had been accepted:

- A letter of representation from Hull City Council [[AS-001](#)];
- A written submission from the Holderness Fishing Industry Group [[AS-025](#)]; and
- A written submission from the National Federation of Fishermen's Organisations [[AS-026](#)].

In addition, the ExA has accepted a number of documents from the Applicant that were submitted in response to s51 advice issued by the Planning Inspectorate on 26 October 2022 [[PD-003](#)]. These can be found in the [Examination Library](#) under references [AS-002 to AS-024].

The ExA highlighted the submissions received at the Procedural Deadline on 11 February 2022, which can be found in the [Examination Library](#) at references [[PDL-001 to PDL-007](#)]. The ExA asked attendees for any procedural questions regarding these submissions. No comments were made by any of the parties in attendance.

The Applicant briefly outlined the points raised in its Procedural Deadline submission [[PDL-001](#)] in relation to the proposed provision of a schedule of changes as opposed to updated clean and tracked versions of documents at each deadline. However, it would submit updated documentation as requested by the ExA and before the end of Examination.

The Applicant also outlined the points raised in its Procedural Deadline submission [[PDL-001](#)] in relation to whether a Statement of Common Ground (SoCG) with the National Farmers Union (NFU) was required. The ExA advised that following review, a SoCG with NFU would not be required, and this would be confirmed in the Rule 8 letter. The ExA asked the Applicant to respond to the request made by the solicitors on behalf of NEO Energy (SNS) Ltd for a SoCG with all the offshore oil and gas operators.

The Applicant considered the matter of a SoCG with NFU to be closed. A draft joint position statement has been provided to NEO Energy (SNS) Ltd and comments were awaited: this was expected to be submitted at Deadline 2. In relation to other parties referenced in NEO's letter, those parties did not make a similar request and the Applicant is in commercial negotiations with those parties. The Applicant would provide an update on these negotiations at Deadline 1. It did not anticipate SoCGs with those parties, but these could be provided at Deadline 2 if required.

The Applicant raised the issue of a SoCG in relation to Endurance and noted that the RR by BP Exploration Operating Company Limited (BP) had not been submitted at the time the Rule 6 letter was issued. It was progressing a joint position statement with BP, the appointed operator on behalf of the licence holder, and this would be submitted at Deadline 1. On that basis, the Applicant was not progressing with other parties like Drax and Shell, who were not part of

Northern Endurance Partnership (NEP) but were considered potential customers of the NEP project.

BP confirmed that it would query the current position of discussions with its legal teams and provide clarification by Deadline 1.

National Grid Carbon Limited confirmed its interest was specifically the terrestrial carbon capture and underground storage network and it wouldn't anticipate any involvement relating to NEP.

The RSPB advised that the provision of an initial SoCG by 8 March 2022 appeared unlikely as it had not yet been approached by the Applicant for an initial draft. The Applicant confirmed a draft SoCG would be sent to RSPB today. The RSPB confirmed it would work with the Applicant to progress the matter.

In relation to the point raised by ERYC in its submission [[PDL-004](#)] regarding the issues surrounding the submission of its Local Impact Report, the ExA is satisfied with the approach that is being proposed and this will be confirmed formally in the Rule 8 letter. Nothing further was raised by ERYC.

5. Examination Timetable

The ExA noted requests, already received in writing, to amend the draft Examination Timetable at [Annex D](#) of the Rule 6 letter, and also welcomed further suggestions from the parties in attendance.

The ExA highlighted key points in the draft Examination Timetable for written questions, and the ability to request information from named parties at any point during the Examination if this is considered necessary. This would be done through the issue of a Rule 17 letter. The ExA highlighted Deadline 1 for written notification of attendance at an Accompanied Site Inspection or Hearings, Local Impact Reports from the relevant local authorities, comments on the published Relevant Representations, and initial Statements of Common Ground, amongst other matters. It also highlighted Deadline 2 for the submission of full written representations, responses to its first written questions and any comments on the Local Impact Reports, along with other matters.

The ExA advised that the precise deadline for submission of information is at 23.59 on each of the specified dates to ensure fairness to all parties, reflecting the circumstances for parties who are working or otherwise occupied in the daytime and who rely on evenings to work on their representations. It acknowledged the Applicant's request in its procedural deadline submission that this be changed to 18.00 and asked the Applicant if it had anything to add. The Applicant confirmed it did not, other than confirming that the rationale was to support the health and wellbeing of its team.

The ExA noted the Applicant's and NE's procedural deadline submissions in relation to the public holidays within the Examination Timetable. NE was not present to comment. The Applicant advised it was willing and able to meet the timetable as drafted and noted that the ability to attend hearings virtually may assist with any resource constraints around public holidays. The ExA highlighted the statutory timeframes for the Examination and advised it would take the matters raised into account when finalising the Timetable in the Rule 8 letter.

RSPB commented on its Procedural Deadline submission and its request for clarification from the Applicant in respect of the timeframe for submission of further documentation relating to offshore ornithology matters, to assist with resource management. It raised that, due to the complexity of the project, it was consulting with a higher number of colleagues to discuss

specialist matters. The Applicant advised that it would be providing a list of documentation at Deadline 1, and its current programme would be to submit further such documentation by Deadline 2 at the latest.

The ExA noted the RSPB's point in its procedural deadline submission in relation to the timing of the proposed Issue Specific Hearing on the draft DCO. The ExA highlighted that the draft timetable includes a request to the Applicant to produce updated versions of the draft DCO at each major deadline. The Applicant advised of its intent to provide an updated draft DCO at Deadline 1, reflecting a number of suggestions made within RRs.

6. Hearings and Site Inspections

The Examining Authority summarised the Unaccompanied Site Inspections (USI) carried out on 9 and 10 February 2022 and drew all parties' attention to the published notes from those USIs [\[EV-001\]](#) and [\[EV-002\]](#). An Accompanied Site Inspection (ASI) would only be necessary to view any remaining land where there is no public right of access, or where there is no clear view from public viewpoints. The draft Examination Timetable included a deadline for suggesting prospective new locations for any ASI on 8 March 2022. Submissions should include what would need to be done to arrange access. If required, an ASI was timetabled for the week commencing 18 July 2022.

The ExA highlighted the time reserved in the draft timetable for an Open Floor Hearing in the evening of 11 April 2022 and the provisional deadline of 8 March 2022 for requests to be heard at this or any future Open Floor Hearing.

Other Hearings may be requested by Interested Parties or deemed necessary by the ExA. The draft timetable includes an Issue Specific Hearing on the draft DCO and Compulsory Acquisition Hearing on 12 and 13 April 2022 respectively. The week commencing 25 April 2022 is reserved for a set of further Issue Specific Hearings, with topics and format to be announced. The ExA advised that it would consider the resource issues raised by NE when finalising the arrangements for Hearings, including the potential for reserve dates the following week. Interested Parties who wish to be heard at any of these Hearings must notify the ExA in writing by Deadline 1 (8 March 2022).

The week commencing 18 July 2022 is reserved in the draft Examination Timetable for additional Hearings, if it becomes apparent to the ExA that they are necessary. Topics and formats would be announced by the ExA in good time ahead of the dates, and an opportunity to register would be offered.

The ExA highlighted that its discretion to accept late submissions into the Examination would only likely be used in exceptional circumstances as late submissions may jeopardise the Examination Timetable and could restrict the ability of other parties involved in the Examination to respond to the information.

Further information relating to hearings and site inspections can be found in [Advice Note 8.5](#).

7. Any Other Business

The ExA asked attendees for any further comments. No comments were made by any of the parties in attendance.

8. Close of meeting

The ExA thanked the attendees for their participation and reiterated that all points raised would be considered.

The ExA reiterated that the Rule 8 letter with the confirmed Examination Timetable and first set of written questions would be issued as soon as possible after the close of this meeting.

The meeting was closed at 11.07.