



Meeting note

Project name	Rampion 2 Offshore Wind Farm
File reference	EN010117
Status	Final
Author	The Planning Inspectorate
Date	5 May 2020
Meeting with	RWE Renewables UK Ltd
Venue	Online meeting via Teams
Meeting objectives	Inception meeting
Circulation	All attendees

Summary of key points discussed and advice given

The Planning Inspectorate (the Inspectorate) advised that a note of the meeting would be taken and published on its website in accordance with section 51 of the Planning Act 2008 (the PA2008). Any advice given under section 51 would not constitute legal advice upon which applicants (or others) could rely. The Inspectorate explained that the publication of the meeting note could be delayed up to six months, if requested by the Applicant for commercial sensitivity reasons, or until a formal scoping request had been submitted.

Introduction to the project and to the developer RWE

The Applicant gave an overview of the Rampion Offshore Windfarm Extension project, and provided details of the proposed development. RWE is an international energy company committed to become Carbon Neutral by 2040. RWE is the majority owner in Rampion following acquisition of the renewable energy businesses 'E.ON Climate & Renewables' that developed the original Rampion project. Project continuity remains as there are no major changes in terms of key contracts at working level. In 2018 The Crown Estate (TCE), which owns the seabed in the UK, invited developers to indicate their interest in the future of existing wind farms. The Applicant expressed their interest and in 2019 was awarded development rights for an extension in the area to the west of the existing windfarm. Another sizeable area of the original Rampion Zone (Zone 6) of Round 3, launched in 2009/2010 and which was never used in the original project, has been also considered for any future extension.

The proposed development will provide capacity up to 1200MW, partly reflecting how the technology has been advancing in recent years. The proposal is open to consultation. The Applicant is considering the next generation turbines, with the intention of installing a maximum of 116 new turbines. The development will include up to three offshore substations and up to four circuits of the export cables.

The existing Rampion project is capped at 400MW, and the two combined agreements will potentially allow for larger scale projects. The Applicant expects that a new agreement for lease will be concluded within the next few weeks.

In response to the Inspectorate's query on the consent constraints for the area, the Applicant advised of the key issues which occurred during the examination for the original Rampion project, relating to the Sussex Heritage Coast along with Seven Sisters, sensitivity of the area to shipping, and routes to avoid traffic. The planned extension is to the west of the existing development, which would extend the horizontal view of the overall windfarm. The Applicant stated that the use of the existing cable route for the proposed cable route of the new extension is not being proposed due to the lack of space to utilise it again, and also ruled out landfall connection to the east. They had identified a potential corridor that skirts around the Oakham area, towards Climping on the coast.

Stakeholder engagement

The Applicant advised of the discussions to date with ten Local Authorities and the relevant consultees: Natural England (NE), South Downs National Park Authority (SDNPA), West Sussex County Council (WSCC), NATS, Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA), Marine Management Organisation (MMO) and the Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science (CEFAS). The Applicant intends to build on the established relationships within communities that were involved in the previous Rampion development, and will also look at new methods of engagement and ways of communicating their plans to allow all consultees to participate in the process.

Scoping

The Applicant confirmed that they have defined a Scoping Boundary and identified the preliminary route corridor with a single cable corridor and single landfall point but are continuing to refine the area which will be discussed as part of the early engagement. The survey work started in March 2019 will continue, and to date the Applicant has conducted surveys in relation to the offshore marine mammals and birds, and the onshore ground truthing for remote sensing habitat classification to inform the onshore baseline. The remote sensing proved to be a useful tool for initial assessment of the area to inform targeted ecological surveys. While preparing the Scoping Report the Applicant is conscious of the Covid-19 situation, and some surveys may not be able to be carried out at the moment, such as a noise survey. They will consider some degree of flexibility when filling any potential gaps in the baseline surveys.

The Inspectorate stated that it always considers all projects individually on a case by case basis, and advises applicants to work on agreements with statutory bodies, with an understanding that the engagement with the stakeholders generally follows a two-year process of surveys. In the case of this proposal it appears that the Applicant has been familiar with the site over a long period of time. However, the Applicant will be required to provide robust evidence so it stands up to scrutiny during the Examination.

The Applicant informed the Inspectorate of their intention to submit the Scoping Request in July 2020, and asked for any further advice in the current situation. The Inspectorate is able to receive electronic submission of the Scoping Request from the Applicant and the Inspectorate will request consultees respond electronically in the first instance. The Inspectorate advised that the GIS shape file is required 10 working days in advance of

submitting a scoping request. The Inspectorate is in the process of updating Advice Note Seven: Environmental Impact Assessment: Preliminary Environmental Information, Screening and Scoping (AN7).

EIA Matters

The Applicant is taking a Rochdale envelope approach with the intention that the exact parameters become refined as the project develops, including lessons learnt from the previous Rampion project. The Applicant advised of the proportionate approach to the process, and the proposal to compile a Commitments Register and establish 'simple' and/or 'detailed' assessment. The Inspectorate welcomed this approach and advised of its support for proportionate EIA, and the Commitments Register which should be included in the consultation to ensure input from the consultees. The Inspectorate advised this could assist in developing good design of the project in line with the National Design Commission's advice.

The Inspectorate advised the Applicant to ensure consistency in presenting information as per AN7, and it is helpful if they are confident about advance agreements in relation to certain issues being scoped out.

Evidence Plan Steering Group

The Applicant outlined their approach to the Evidence Plan Process (EPP), the formal tool of engaging with parties during the pre-application stage which would then feed into the project design. The Inspectorate agreed that the EPP has been widely used on other NSIPs, and some EPPs led to achieving agreement on many issues including those beyond the Habitats Regulations. Its benefits include the opportunity to obtain upfront agreement between parties on matters relating to the Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) and providing an opportunity to discuss disagreements whilst retaining focus on the evidence base.

The Applicant intends to circulate draft Terms of Reference for the Evidence Plan to the relevant stakeholders, and propose to hold meetings by teleconferences. The Steering Group will oversee the development of the plan and adapt the process for introducing new elements to the project. The Applicant wished to know whether the Inspectorate would be available to Chair the Steering Group meetings. In response the Inspectorate advised that its involvement would depend on resources and establishing what value can be brought to the process. It was helpful to understand different aspects of the project and key issues arising at this stage. The Inspectorate advised of its role within the wider scope of the PA2008, and its impartiality.

Consultation

The Inspectorate also advised on the approach to the pre-application consultation in the current situation when movement is restricted. Applicants should continue to engage with the relevant authorities on their Statement of Community Consultation, ensuring that the process is thorough and avoid committing to anything that might not be achievable. There should also be some flexibility in consultation methods to allow for changes in Government advice. This will help to avoid any issues during the acceptance of the application.

Compulsory Acquisition

The Applicant advised that initial land referencing is underway to identify landowners and interests, with an intention to negotiate with landowners as far as practicable. In regard to the land acquisition matters the Inspectorate requested that the Applicant provides updates in relation to the agreements with landowners, or any issues relating to request to access land under s53 PA2008.

Outline of the current timeframe for the application

The Applicant advised of their current consenting programme which proposes submission of the Scoping Request in July 2020, formal consultation in January - February 2021, and submission of the DCO application in August 2021.

Specific decisions

The following actions were agreed:

- The parties agreed to arrange future meetings around key milestones during the pre-application stage, with the next meeting after the issue of the Scoping Opinion by the Inspectorate.
- Inspectorate to inform the Applicant of the details required to set up the project on the National Infrastructure website.
- Inspectorate to set up a new project email address.