

Meeting note

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| Project name | North Falls Offshore Windfarm project |
| File reference | EN010119 |
| Status | Final |
| Author | The Planning Inspectorate |
| Date | 23 February 2021 |
| Meeting with | North Falls Offshore Wind Farm Ltd |
| Venue | Microsoft teams |
| Meeting objectives | Project Update Meeting Q1 2021 |
| Circulation | All attendees |

Summary of key points discussed and advice given

The Applicant and The Planning Inspectorate (the Inspectorate) Case team introduced themselves and their respective roles. 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.

Project update and programme

The Applicant continued to work with National Grid in relation to the location of the onshore connection. It had been undertaking feasibility work on potential sites since early 2019. The Applicant's timeline and objectives included the Contracts for Difference auction in 2025, discharge of requirements, and connection in 2030. It was currently undertaking technical assessments in line with these objectives.

There was a level of confidence regarding the offshore locations, however greater certainty about the onshore connection was required. The Applicant was completing electrical engineering assessments and reinforcement work using a wider landfall selection as a result. Cable land fall assessments were completed, taking into account National Policy Statement (NPS) considerations, environmental and physical constraints. The Applicant had identified potential offshore cable corridors and its informal engagement continued on that basis. It was engaging with the Port of London Authority along with other bodies, with a view to shaping the scoping report on the basis of feedback. It was looking to progress geophysical surveys in 2021 to obtain relevant data from a benthic ecology perspective, on the array and cable corridor. Other technical data collection to support the project design was also ongoing.

The Applicant had made contact with Essex County Council and Tendring Council regarding the proposed development. It was seeking voluntary agreement with landowners for simple pedestrian surveys and Phase 1 baseline habitat surveys. These could lead to later species specific surveys and other survey work was progressing to inform site and route selection.

An indicative programme was:

- 2021 to 2022 - Scoping and Statement of Community Consultation (SoCC) mid quarter 2 2021, onshore and offshore surveys, followed with consultation in summer 21, summer 22 and autumn/winter 22.
- Spring 2023 – Environmental impact and project level HRA completed. Work commenced on Statements of Common Ground (SOCG) where possible.
- Summer 2023 - DCO submission
- 2025 – The Inspectorate recommendation to Secretary of State (SOS). CFD objective achieved.
- 2025 to 2030 - Project design finalised, major component and construction contracts awarded. FID achieved and wind farm constructed.

National Grid assumptions on substation location for purpose of scoping

The Applicant was reviewing other developers scoping reports in the area, and their approaches to the Rochdale envelope to help inform its own approach. It highlighted its wish to scope as early as possible, with a wider red line boundary, and queried whether this would be acceptable with the Inspectorate. The Inspectorate advised it would be the Applicant's decision on when to scope, and there were no restrictions on size of the red line boundary so long as it was defined and consistent with the shape file. However, the Inspectorate did advise the Applicant to carefully consider the best time to request a scoping opinion. In order to gain the most benefit, the Applicant should consider requesting the opinion once there was sufficient certainty about the design of the proposed development and the main design elements likely to have a significant environmental effect. The Applicant should avoid submitting requests with multiple and varied design and layout options. However, if this was unavoidable and options remained under consideration, the Applicant should be aware that this could affect the ability of the Inspectorate and consultation bodies to provide detailed comments. In addition, should a high level of uncertainty remain around key design elements of the proposed development this would be likely to limit the Inspectorate's ability to agree to scope out aspects/matters to enable the refinement of the Environmental Statement (ES). The Applicant said at present the onshore options were smaller parcels of land in a wider area, rather than one continuous area. It was considering the best approach to consultation with statutory bodies on this basis. The Inspectorate suggested that further discussion on the definition of the boundary would be beneficial as the Applicant got closer to scoping submission.

The Applicant queried the impact of the red line boundary changing between the scoping opinion and submission. The Inspectorate advised that the ES submitted must be based upon the most recent scoping opinion. Should substantial changes to the red line boundary occur, the Inspectorate advised that the Applicant should consider re-scoping the Proposed Development. For less substantial boundary refinements, the Inspectorate advised it would be helpful for the Applicant to make clear upon submission exactly what red line boundary and other changes to design parameters had occurred since the time of scoping and why. It should also be made clear where assessments had been updated to reflect such changes with updated plans (depicting the final iteration of the red line boundary) to be provided as part of the submission. When seeking flexibility, the Applicant must provide reasoned justification and clearly define the parameters and these should be consistent across all documents (ES, DCO, etc).

Coordination

The Applicant raised the issue regarding the quantum of NSIP projects both on and off shore in the East of England area (including reinforcement work by National Grid). In particular, the resource challenge this poses for statutory bodies and other stakeholders in the region. It was exploring the potential to engage with different projects with a view to identifying areas of coordination where possible. The Inspectorate advised whilst it was important to highlight the distinguishing features of this project, it was also important to reduce duplication of work for statutory parties where possible. If elements of different projects were the same a coordinated approach may be beneficial.

National Policy Statement (NPS) Review

The Inspectorate advised there was no updated information to supplement the Energy White Paper commitment to review the NPS, which was expected by the end of 2021. The Applicant advised of its intention to participate in any consultation.

Update from PINs (the Inspectorate)

The Inspectorate advised that it would be updating Advice Note 10 in light of the Defra policy paper on the impact of Brexit on the Habitats Regulations.

The Inspectorate also advised the Applicant that an updated version of "Advice Note 14: Compiling the Consultation Report" had been published.

Specific decisions/ follow-up required

The following actions were agreed:

- Next meeting to be arranged between the Applicant and the Inspectorate for April 2021.