

Meeting note

Project name	North Falls Offshore Wind Farm
File reference	EN010119
Status	Final
Author	The Planning Inspectorate
Date	10 May 2023
Meeting with	The Applicant
Venue	Microsoft Teams
Meeting objectives	PEIR update 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.

PEIR and Statutory Consultation

The Applicant gave an update on the statutory consultation. Project information will be provided through a consultation portal and webinars will be held via Microsoft Teams. Through May and June five events will be held across the Tendring District Council area in the affected communities with information boards and copies of the PEIR. The Applicant will provide 3D interactive models aimed at communities whose viewpoints will be impacted by the proposed development and will show 17 different coastal viewpoints. It was confirmed that there will be no events held in Suffolk or Kent, but information boards will be available showing the 3D models. The events have been planned so as not to clash with those held for East Anglia Green. A Planning Performance Agreement (PPA) is in place with Essex County Council, the host authority, to support both the PEIR and the scoping process.

Offshore Transmission Network review (OTNR) update

The Applicant will use the PEIR as a benchmark for the optionality, and it was reaffirmed that the radial option would require a cable landfall and a proposed substation zone. The Applicant will use feedback to inform the proposed substation zone. There is scope for a co-located substation with the Five Estuaries Project and it will be co-located with National Grid. The Applicant gave an overview of the site selection process and confirmed that a refined redline boundary would be provided with the PEIR. The Applicant is still working closely with SeaLink and Nautilus in terms of the Offshore Transmission Network Review.

The DCO strategy will contain all three potential options, and the optionality will continue throughout PEIR. The Inspectorate advised the Applicant to provide a

thorough evidence base of the effects arising from the different options and to give thought to how far the worst-case optionality argument can be continued.

Environmental matters

The Applicant confirmed that the environmental statement (ES) will assess the worst-case scenario for all options taken forward to the DCO application. The Applicant indicated that in some instances the proposed coordinated routing with Five Estuaries OWF would represent the worst case whereas in other instances the project alone would be worst case.

The Inspectorate advised that it would be worth giving thought to presenting the effects for each option in the ES as the options are quite different. The Inspectorate highlighted a potential risk for statutory consultation bodies providing advice if insufficient information about each option was provided.

The Applicant advised that it was in discussion with its advisors about the approach to the ES in this regard.

The Applicant confirmed that its expert working group sessions with Natural England (NE) are continuing and it is setting up meetings with the Marine Management Organisation (MMO). Discussion with NE has focused on offshore ornithology and potential compensation measures on a without prejudice basis.

The Inspectorate asked about the Applicant's approach to habitats regulations assessment (HRA) and assessment of alternatives if feasible alternative options exist. The Applicant confirmed that this matter is being considered and that its approach will be to focus on feasible options.

Offshore and Onshore Coordination

The Applicant explained that there will be additional embedded mitigation and described that it was closer to resolution on the offshore cable corridor, considering the various constraints associated with shipping and navigation, ornithological and benthic ecology. The array boundary is likely to change with the cable route, which is also to be refined, and will be large enough to encompass both North Falls and Five Estuaries. The Applicant also outlined possible worst-case scenarios of the two possible options as well as a focus on the combination of traffic and transport impacts of the two projects in the area, these will be shown in the PEIR. It was explained that the different options present different sets of impacts and the effects may be worse to one than the other.

Next steps

The Applicant set out the possibility of running another round of consultation to explain this information and continue communication around the changes to the redline boundary.

There was a discussion about submission of draft documents, and the importance of reviewing the dDCO given the complexity of the Applicant's optionality. The Applicant talked about working with Five Estuaries for 3-4 months on drafting, and potentially sharing with PINS for review.

The Applicant plans to submit the application in Q4 2023.