



Meeting note

Project name	North Falls Offshore Wind Farm
File reference	EN010119
Status	FINAL
Author	The Planning Inspectorate
Date	9 November 2023
Meeting with	North Falls Offshore Wind Farm
Venue	Microsoft Teams
Meeting objectives	Project 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.

General Project Update

Q2 & Q3 2023:

The Applicant stated that it had been working to establish a regional working group with the Marine Management Organisation (MMO), Natural England (NE) and the Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (DEFRA) and other developers to consider Habitats Regulation Assessment (HRA) matters, with a focus on Red Throated Diver compensation proposals.

Following a Seascape, Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (SLVIA), as well as analysis of navigational safety ornithology and fishing, the northern array of the project was removed. The Applicant has also made changes to the electrical circuitry of the site, reducing the 4 primary circuit cables down to 2.

The Applicant discussed the Good Neighbour Agreement (GNA) and accompanying committee, which was formed in June 2023 with Five Estuaries Offshore Wind Farm (5E). The committee will meet bi-monthly to discuss reducing environmental impacts as well as opportunities for joint onshore construction to reduce disturbance to local communities who host the project.

The Applicant updated the Inspectorate on its leading role within the Offshore Coordination Support Scheme (OCSS), noting that the fund will support technical and regulatory feasibility studies. However, the Applicant's intention is to include optionality for an

onshore and a offshore connection in the Development Consent Order (DCO) application, since there continues to be high levels of regulatory and technical uncertainty around an offshore grid connection. Indeed, the OCSS scheme will be a continual workstream for a number of years.

HRA Compensation Conclusion pre/post PEIR

The Applicant stated that it had presented without prejudice compensation measures in the Preliminary Environmental Impact Assessment (PEIR) for a number of European sites. The Applicant advised that it continues to consult and engage with NE on project level impacts alongside project level compensation proposals. The Applicant is currently expecting written responses from NE in coming weeks on their project level compensation proposals.

However, the Applicant noted that the newly created Energy Act 2023 may provide an opportunity to solve regional compensation issues through the use of the proposed Marine Recovery Fund. As yet, it is not clear what the forthcoming Department for Environment and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) library of compensation will cover. The Applicant is seeking to obtain further information from DEFRA and the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero (DESNZ). The Applicant had arranged meetings with DEFRA in Q1 2024.

DCO Optionality

Where possible, the Applicant will collaborate with 5E on the expected radial connection between the offshore array and onshore grid connection point. The possibility of an offshore grid connection is still being considered and the Applicant confirmed that this would be included as an option in the dDCO (rather than a separate marine licence), noting that the assessment work has considered this option. Regulatory changes by Ofgem and DESNZ would be required to facilitate an offshore connection. The Applicant's decision on whether to proceed with an offshore connection would be made at the time of the Final Investment Decision (FID).

Q4 2023 Work Plan

The Inspectorate asked about the proposed onshore substation and design matters. The Applicant will be meeting the Design Council for England, accompanied by Essex County Council in December 2023, alongside 5E at the proposed substation site.

The Applicant talked about joint sessions with 5E to discuss onshore matters including traffic and transport, and undertaking a combined approach to engagement with landowners where these were in common to the projects. In addition, the Applicant and 5E is reviewing onshore joint construction delivery options, yet risks around funding, discharge of Requirements, CFD auction and EPC procurement alignment would all be required to be the same. There are programme risks around each of these milestones.

The Applicant will be reviewing its current DCO programme, and the submission is expected in 2024. The Applicant anticipates updating PINS on its 2024 DCO submission during its next update meeting currently proposed in early February 2024.

