

Meeting note

Project name	Outer Dowsing Offshore Wind Farm
File reference	EN010130
Status	Final
Author	The Planning Inspectorate
Date	04 October 2021
Meeting with	Outer Dowsing Ltd
Venue	Microsoft Teams
Meeting objectives	Project Introduction Meeting
Circulation	All attendees

Introductory comments

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. A note would be circulated for comment following the meeting. Publication of the meeting note on the NI website could be delayed for 6 months, if requested by the Applicant for commercial sensitivity reasons, or until any formal steps are taken by the Applicant, such as making a Scoping request.

Project Description

The Applicant described the consortium which constituted the Outer Dowsing Offshore Wind project ("the Project"). The consortium members are Total Energies and the Green Investment Group.

The Consortium were awarded Preferred Bidder status by The Crown Estate as part of the Round 4 Offshore lease auction in January 2021. Round 4 projects are currently in the Plan-Level HRA stage, which assesses the potential impacts of Round 4 on the UK national network of protected areas. If successful through this stage, an Agreement for Lease will be awarded to develop the Project, subject to meeting certain conditions and deadlines during the 10-year option period.

The Project is located approximately 54km off the Lincolnshire coast and Humber Estuary. It is 500 square km in area and is located to the east of the Triton Knoll offshore wind project. The name of the Project originates from a charted sandbank on the western boundary of the Project.

The area is bisected by a Special Area of Conservation (SAC) (Harbour Porpoise) and contains oil and gas installations and pipelines that are in the process of being decommissioned or will be decommissioned in the near future. The Applicant stated that the array site boundaries do not overlap with any benthic designated sites. The site is bounded by shipping navigation routes and the area is relatively unconstrained in this

respect. However, the Applicant explained it was aware of the potential for cumulative displacement of shipping traffic due to the presence of other offshore wind farms proposed and being constructed in the area. The Applicant has also considered the impact of the proposals on aviation and helicopter operations for offshore oil and gas.

The Inspectorate enquired whether there were any proposals for Carbon Capture and Storage projects in the vicinity of Outer Dowsing. The Applicant explained they were aware of CCS proposals to the north of the area, including the Endurance Reserve, but these did not directly affect their development area.

The Applicant explained that they were working with National Grid to secure an onshore grid connection. It was anticipated that National Grid would award onshore connections to all the Round 4 Offshore Wind projects in 2022.

Activities to date

The Applicant explained it had been undertaking digital aerial ornithology and marine mammal surveys since March 2021 and geophysical survey work on the array site commenced in August 2021, which will run through to December 2021.

The Applicant has been engaging with the Crown Estate on the Plan Level HRA and has commenced introductory meetings with key stakeholders.

Introductory meetings had been held with Natural England, RSPB, The Wildlife Trusts, MMO, Historic England, and Oil and Gas Operators. There was ongoing engagement with National Grid, BEIS and Ofgem with regard to the onshore connection agreement and the Offshore Transmission Network Review (OTNR). Introductory meetings had also been held with shipping/navigation stakeholders including, MLA, THLS, Humber Port Authority and shipping operators.

Various meetings had been held with the Offshore Wind Industry Council (OWIC).

Programme

The Applicant provided a high level overview of anticipated project submission timelines, noting that following confirmation of the onshore grid connection the Applicant intended to submit a Scoping Request in the latter half of Q1 2022. The Applicant reflected on the challenges posed to the Scoping timeline in the event there was any delay to the awarding of the onshore connection by National Grid. They requested advice from the Inspectorate about the possibility of a staggered submission of the Scoping Report; with a first part solely focused on the offshore elements and a subsequent submission to cover the onshore connection (when known). The Inspectorate highlighted the challenges this posed in terms of meeting the regulatory requirement to describe the whole project as part of the Scoping request and strongly advocated a single scoping submission submitted when the cable route was known.

Habitats Regulations Assessment

The Inspectorate enquired whether the Applicant intended to submit a derogation case as part of the application.

The Applicant commented that it was likely that a derogation case would be submitted with the application, on a “without prejudice” basis. The Applicant was engaged with Government and industry to develop a strategic approach to compensation.

The Inspectorate welcomed this approaching highlighting the need to avoid any late-stage compensation cases, which had impacted recent examinations and Secretary of State decision-making timelines.

Practical Arrangements

The Inspectorate explained that it would send the Applicant a schedule of information needed to set up the project page on the NI website. Once the information was received, the Inspectorate would prepare the project page but not publish it until the Applicant gave the go-ahead.

In the meantime, a PINS project mailbox would be set up and the Inspectorate would inform the Applicant of the Case Team members. The project mailbox would be the main communication channel once it was set up, in the meantime, the Applicant should contact Mark Wilson and Hefin Jones.

The Applicant’s legal advisor confirmed they had access to the SI template.

AOB

There was a general discussion about the role of the Inspectorate in the Evidence Plan Process. The Inspectorate was happy to attend Working group meetings, which typically take place on a quarterly basis. The Inspectorate did not usually chair these meetings.

There was a general discussion about Project Speed. The Inspectorate explained that, at present, there was a focus on a few transport schemes. Any findings would be fed through to Government; however, any resulting changes to the process and the timescales of how and when that may happen were uncertain at the present time. Developers should proceed to programme their projects according to the current legislation.

There was a brief discussion about the emerging new suite of Energy National Policy Statements. It was anticipated they would be designated in advance of the submission of the Outer Dowsing project. The Applicant should continue to use the extant versions of the Energy NPSs but also take into account emerging NPSs and any clear “directions of travel” signposted in them.

Specific decisions/ follow-up required?

The following actions were agreed (now all completed):

- The Inspectorate to send the Applicant the new project information request to set up the project page on the NI website.
- Inspectorate to set up a project email address.
- Future meeting date to be considered by the Applicant.