



Meeting note

Project name	Xlinks Morocco-UK Power Project
File reference	EN010164
Status	Final
Author	The Planning Inspectorate
Date	6 November 2023
Meeting with	Xlinks 1 Limited
Venue	Microsoft 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, or until a formal scoping request had been submitted.

Section 35 direction and NSIP status

The Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero granted a direction under s35 of the PA2008 for the project in September 2023, meaning that the proposals can be applied for and considered under the DCO regime. The Applicant gave an overview of the planning policy background in relation to the application stating it considers EN-1 to be the relevant NPS.

Proposed Development

The Applicant introduced the project team and provided an overview of the proposed Xlinks Morocco-UK Power Project including reasoning as to why the project is needed.

The proposals are to supply the UK electricity network with up to 8% of demand with power generated by solar and onshore wind generators in Morocco, with a generation capacity of 11.5 GW and a total export capacity onto the GB transmission network of 3.6 GW. The project overall comprises two HVDC subsea cable systems and two converter stations, onshore HVDC and HVAC cables, landfall infrastructure, and works to National Grid infrastructure at the point of connection to the UK grid. The proposed DCO application is to include approximately 370km offshore HVDC cables running from the UK EEZ via landfall at Cornborough Range approximately 4km west of Bideford to an onshore Transition Jointing Bay (TJB), approximately 14km of onshore HVDC cables to two new converter stations west of Alverdiscott, and 400KV AC cables from the converter stations to a new NGET substation (to be installed by National Grid) at the existing grid connection point.

The powers sought by the DCO include general powers to construct, use and maintain the authorised development, street works and traffic regulation powers, supplementary powers including drainage and discharge of water, surveys etc., Compulsory Acquisition powers, temporary works powers and deemed marine license. Other supplemental powers will be sought where required.

EIA Scoping and Consideration of project as a whole

The Applicant explained the offshore cable element of the proposals, which will not form part of the DCO application beyond the UK EEZ, and is proposed to follow a route from Morocco around the Portuguese, Spanish and French coastlines. The proposed cable corridor would be 500m wide and four cables would be laid within this corridor. The

Applicant has been engaging with the relevant authorities regarding gaining permission for survey work within the cable corridor and have gained permission for offshore surveying within UK and French waters. The Applicant has been in dialogue with the Marine Management Organisation (MMO) regarding the offshore cable installation. The Inspectorate queried whether there will be additional plans in the future to connect the scheme to the countries with control of the waters the route corridor goes through. The Applicant said this is not part of the current plan for the proposals which have been conceived to supply electricity to the UK network only.

Xlinks 1 Limited explained that the cable would connect at a new NGET substation to installed at the existing Alverdiscott substation site in Torridge District Council. This would require the cable to route through the North Devon National Landscape (formerly Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB)). The Applicant has been consulting with the local councils on route options.

The Applicant described the Environmental Surveys that have been ongoing since 2021.

The EIA Scoping process currently includes the onshore and offshore schemes with the scoping request anticipated in Q1 2024. The Scoping Report is currently being prepared. There is ongoing engagement with Torridge District Council and Parish Councils, Devon County Council and North Devon District Council as well as with landowners; approximately 71% of landowners along the cable route have negotiated voluntary agreements. Two rounds of non-statutory consultation were held in November 2022 and March 2023.

A discussion was held on how cumulative effects from the wider project and transboundary effects would be considered within the application documents, including the Environmental Statement. The Inspectorate advised that the Applicant make it clear in their documents how far the assessments have gone, providing a full rationale for the decisions taken. Focussing on the onshore elements to be captured within the DCO, the Inspectorate asked the Applicant how good design would be incorporated into the application. The Applicant stated that landscape impacts and visual amenity was being considered, in particular in relation to the converter substation location. The Applicant was advised to explain its design journey in the application and how the refined design had been reached.

The Inspectorate sought a discussion with the Applicant on any risks associated with the consenting process, noting that a number of regulatory processes and consents outside of the DCO process would have to be aligned in order for the overall project to be consented and fulfil its purpose. The Applicant acknowledged this, and that progress on these processes would be revisited with the Inspectorate as the project advances.

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Indicative consenting programme

Xlinks 1 Limited anticipate submitting a scoping request in Q1 2024, and publication of the Preliminary Environmental Information Report in Q2 and statutory consultation in summer 2024, with a view to submit an application for a Development Consent Order in Q3 2024.

Next Steps

The Applicant are looking to engage with the Inspectorate before submitting the scoping request, potentially face-to-face. The Applicant are to send over some dates for a meeting before the end of 2023.