

Meeting note

Project name	Bramford to Twinstead
File reference	EN020002
Status	Final
Author	The Planning Inspectorate
Date	19 February 2021
Meeting with	National Grid Electricity Transmission (NGET)
Venue	Microsoft teams
Meeting objectives	Project update meeting
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.

Update from project team

The Applicant provided a brief overview of the project. Work was broadly progressing as set out at the previous meeting and early engagement with key stakeholders and data collection was ongoing. It was preparing for non-statutory consultation at the end of March 2021. Public engagement was beginning with further briefings to local authorities and MP's being scheduled. Work had begun in relation to the scoping report. Contact with landowners for access and land referencing work had started.

Update to project page & project "relaunch"

The Applicant confirmed its intention to build on its previous work for the project, prior to its pause. This included the environmental, design and consultation activities completed before 2013. It recognised that new consultees may have arrived since this time and there were also policy and regulatory changes that would need to be taken into account. All parties agreed that the 2013 project page on the Inspectorate's website would be updated to reflect the "re-launch". The Applicant had provided a letter to be published which explained the re-start of the project.

Engagement with consultees

The Applicant had briefed relevant local authorities in August and December 2020, with further meetings scheduled for March 2021. It was in the process of issuing data requests and scheduling topic specific meetings. It was in discussions with the local authorities in regard to a Planning Performance Agreement (PPA) and the template for this. The Applicant was setting up technical meetings with Natural England (NE) to discuss the scope of ecological surveys and its approach to the Habitats Regulation Assessment (HRA). It was also setting up technical meetings with the Environment

Agency (EA) to discuss flood risk and contaminated land areas. The Applicant was developing a proposal for its heritage assessment which it intended to send to Historic England (HE) for a review. It was also meeting with Dedham Vale Area of Natural Beauty (AONB) partnership to re-introduce the AONB to the project and discuss data collection.

Scoping report and scope of topic assessments

An updated scoping report was expected to be submitted in May 2021, with the shape file submitted 10 days prior. A new scoping report had been produced, building on the 2013 report and taking into account The Infrastructure Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 20017 (EIA Regulations). Work was already in place when the project paused in 2013 for the Preliminary Environmental information Report (PEIR). The Applicant was reviewing the survey data to identify what updates were needed. It was focusing on a proportionate assessment using good practice guidance to manage the size of the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA), aid the delivery schedule and allow stakeholders to focus on likely significant effects. The Applicant acknowledged the requirement for an evidence base and justification for decisions. The Inspectorate requested that the new scoping report was clearly labelled to differentiate it from the 2013 version.

The Applicant was reviewing options for meeting its biodiversity net gain obligations and was seeking legal advice on which legal requirements would be needed to secure net gain provisions. The Inspectorate advised it deferred to NE and other statutory bodies to comment on biodiversity net gain, which is not currently mandatory for NSIPs. The Applicant was preparing in case this was made a requirement by the time the project was granted. It intended to identify the loss through impact of the project, then use the Defra calculation tool to identify net gain. The Inspectorate advised that the Applicant should make it clear in its application what mitigation/ enhancement it was proposing as part of the DCO and make a clear distinction between what constituted mitigation and what would be enhancement proposed as part of net gain. The Inspectorate highlighted the recent Defra policy paper on changes to the Habitats Regulations.

The Applicant described its approach to mitigation, using embedded and good practice measures in line with the Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment (IEMA) Delivery Quality Development approach. Current considerations included undergrounding of cables and avoidance of designated sites, using existing cable corridors. It was identifying potential securing mechanisms and was anticipating either outline or final plans such as a construction environmental management plan (including dust and waste management measures) and a landscape and ecological management plan, at the point of DCO application submission. The progress of these would be dependent on consultation outcomes.

Geophysical surveys were completed on cable areas as part of the previous project work. These were being reviewed to identify if additional work was required. A programme of trenching was being proposed. The Applicant was meeting with a local archaeologist to discuss the approach to trial trenching to inform the Environmental Statement (ES).

The Applicant described its approach to the scope of topic assessments, including matters relating to biodiversity, geology and hydrology, traffic and transport, health and wellbeing. The Inspectorate advised the following:

- It would provide a scoping opinion on the basis of the content of the scoping report.

- The importance of providing justifications for scoping out any individual topics and the use of up to date modelling.
- The Applicant should highlight any sensitive environmental information that should not be in the public domain and, where necessary, provide this as a confidential annex.
- The Applicant should consider every possible pathway impact assessment in the scoping report, particularly with reference to cabling options. It would be helpful to clearly separate overhead and underground references.

The Inspectorate also highlighted a potential issue with the A12 performance as a strategic route, and how transport and traffic are considered in the scoping report. The Applicant advised it was meeting with the local Highways Authority to discuss the remit of the transport assessment, and the potential for use of local permit schemes. The Inspectorate queried whether there could be an impact on traffic and transport data as a result of Covid-19. The Applicant advised it was using the most recently available data and also calculating an uplift on 2013 data.

The Applicant described its approach to cumulative effects. It intended to take an intra-project (more than one environmental impact on one area within the project) and inter-project (looking at the project and nearby developments) approach. It was identifying proposed developments and initial zones of influence for areas such as landscape and biodiversity.

Updates to route alignment

The Applicant described an indicative route alignment, developed on the basis of options appraisals and stakeholder engagement. It confirmed the scoping report would contain a chapter of alternative sites and set out justification for the proposed route alignments. Feasibility work was ongoing particularly in relation to drilling technology in the vicinity of Dollops Wood. Two proposed routes for this area were presented. Options included the use of a trenchless crossing beneath the woodland, or avoidance of the woodland by having an open cut route which runs north to avoid the woodland. Geotechnical work was being undertaken to inform this decision.

Progress on Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA)

Technical meetings with officers within statutory bodies and councils were being arranged as part of the non-statutory consultation. The Applicant was in the process of drafting the EIA and areas for consideration in a cumulative effects assessment. Ecological surveys were due to start in Spring 2021.

Infrastructure Planning (Publication and Notifications of Applications etc (Coronavirus) Amendments

The Inspectorate advised that the temporary regulations put in place for Coronavirus had been made permanent. This removed the requirement for physical documents to be deposited at locations in the vicinity of the proposed scheme.

AOB

The Inspectorate queried whether there was any common land or open access land expected within the scheme boundary. The Applicant confirmed it was continuing land referencing activities but had not identified any crown or special category land yet.

The Inspectorate requested that the Applicant add the Inspectorate's email to the project mailing list. It enquired about the Applicant's approach to virtual consultation and advised the Applicant should consider a range of engagement methods to make the consultation materials as accessible and engaging as possible. The Applicant confirmed live chats, webinars and videos on the website were planned. It was also planning to have hard copy documentation available on request. The Applicant confirmed it would assess the outcomes of the non-statutory consultation to assist with the development of their approach for statutory consultation.

Summary of actions/follow-up

- The Inspectorate confirmed it would be updating the project page shortly after the meeting.
- Both parties agreed the next project update meeting should take place after scoping, or after any section 53 applications (if further advice was needed).
- The Inspectorate requested the Applicant confirm when it identifies a more specific date for the submission of the scoping report (expected in May 2021).