



The Planning Inspectorate
Yr Arolygiaeth Gynllunio

North Wales Wind Farms Connection - Meeting note

File reference	EN020014
Status	Final
Author	Steffan Jones
Date	20 September 2017
Meeting with	SP Energy Networks
Venue	Grant Room, The Planning Inspectorate, Temple Quay House
Attendees	Chris White – The Planning Inspectorate Steffan Jones – The Planning Inspectorate Steven Edwards – SP Energy Networks Huw Thomas – SP Energy Networks
Meeting objectives	To discuss and provide feedback from the Examination of the application for the North Wales Wind Farms Connection project.
Circulation	All

Summary of key points discussed and advice given:

The participants introduced each other and their roles. SP Energy Networks (the developer) were made aware of the Planning Inspectorate's openness policy, that any advice given will be recorded and placed on the Planning Inspectorate's website under s51 of the Planning Act 2008 (PA2008) (as amended). Any advice does not constitute legal advice on which the applicant or others can rely.

The developer requested clarification from the Planning Inspectorate on the process of appointing an Examining Authority in examining an application for development consent, which is done in accordance with the criteria for appointing an Examining Authority as identified in the Department for Communities and Local Government's 'Planning Act 2008: Guidance for the examination of applications for development consent'.

The developer would like it noted on record that it remains unclear to them how the criteria were applied and why an Examining Authority (panel of 3) was appointed to examine this application when it was decided in a very similar application to have a panel of 1. The Planning Inspectorate acknowledged it would reflect on this aspect. The developer also noted that a large number of interested party responses repeated issues already made at the start of the Examination. The developer's experience was that this increased the number of written questions and, therefore, the developer's responses, and in turn, further follow up responses from interested parties. The developer contrasted this with a parallel s78 planning inquiry that was taking place during the Examination in connection with a different aspect of the same scheme

where responses were closed down. The Planning Inspectorate suggested a more comprehensive Planning Statement with reference to how issues raised do or do not conform with National Policy Statements may reduce the complexity of the questions asked by the Examining Authority during examination.

To avoid issues being repeated, the developer was advised that internal reviews of all application documents prior to submission to the Planning Inspectorate can improve consistency across application documents which allows the reader to navigate and understand the vast amount of information provided. Moving forward, the Planning Inspectorate will be requesting that all applicants for development consent projects provide a 'Guide to Application' document at examination deadlines to highlight key documents and help address issues in relation to document navigation and version control of submissions.

The Planning Inspectorate highlighted the importance of developers' engagement with landowners during the pre-application stage; this engagement is extremely important in a front-loaded process. Further engagement with landowners at the pre-application stage on design is achievable without necessarily predetermining risks. In this project, this may well have resulted in the developer not having to submit an alternative 'Option B' into the examination. The developer noted this point and would adopt a different approach in future DCOs.

In closing, a number of observations by the Planning Inspectorate on the developer's application were passed on to the developer such as:

- The production of the developer's Costing Report should have been considered earlier as this would have reduced the amount of questions and saved time during the hearings;
- Clearer information on landscaping to hedgerow planting was required within the written documentation and on the relevant plans. There was confusion amongst parties regarding what was replacement, reinstatement, mitigation and enhancement planting;
- Information on decommissioning was not included within application documents.
- The information provided on the consideration of alternative technologies, route options and the costs of these solutions compared to the application presented could have been more comprehensive within the Environmental Statement, therefore leading to fewer questions from the Examining Authority during the examination.
- Obtaining Crown Land Consent from the relevant crown authority was a challenge for the developer during the examination stage, leading to discussion during hearings and further questions from the Examining Authority.
- The Planning Inspectorate highlighted the importance of Statements of Common Ground to the examination of an application. Due to the inquisitorial nature of the PA2008 process, an Examining Authority will wish to clearly identify those areas of agreement and disagreement between parties.