

Meeting note

Project name	Sea Link and Nautilus Interconnector
File reference	EN020026/ EN020023
Status	Final
Author	The Planning Inspectorate
Date	20 June 2022
Meeting with	NGET/ NGV
Venue	Microsoft Teams meeting
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.

Project Summaries

Sea Link is a project developed by National Grid Electricity Transmission (NGET) that consists of a high voltage subsea electricity link between Suffolk and Kent. The aim of the project is to create a link between East Anglia and Kent, in order to contribute to the reinforcements required to support future increases in power flows over multiple network boundaries across the UK.

The Nautilus Interconnector is a project proposed by National Grid Ventures (NGV) consisting of a 1.4 Gigawatt multi-purpose interconnector (MPI) between the UK and Belgium, with the potential to connect offshore wind farm/s to a new NGET substation in proximity to the Sizewell 400Kv network. A new NGET substation in this area has been consented through the Scottish Power Renewables (SPR) East Anglia 1 North (EA1N) and East Anglia 2 (EA2) Development Consent Orders (DCOs).

In addition to Nautilus, NGV have a second project in the same geography - the EuroLink Interconnector (an MPI between the UK and the Netherlands). Further information on proposals for EuroLink will be shared in the coming months.

The Applicant shared a schematic of the different projects being delivered in the East Anglia area and how they relate to each other. The intention is for the Sea Link, Nautilus and EuroLink projects to connect to the proposed Friston Substation, which has been consented as part of the EA1N and EA2 DCOs. The objective of the meeting is to discuss the possible strategies for onshore co-ordination between the projects.

Nautilus and EuroLink Project update

The Applicant highlighted feedback from the local community and stakeholders in response to the Nautilus non-statutory consultation (held September – October 2021). A summary of the feedback received can be found [here](#). The Applicant informed the Inspectorate of its engagement with the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) as they introduced the EuroLink project. The EuroLink project does not meet the tests in the Planning Act 2008 to be treated like an Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project. The Applicant aims to submit its Section(s) 35 Direction for EuroLink by the end of July 2022, accompanied by letters of support from East Suffolk Council (ESC) and Suffolk County Council (SCC) and it anticipates a Direction decision by Q3 2022. An update meeting with the Inspectorate will be set up if the Direction is approved.

The Applicant informed the Inspectorate that BEIS have advised that the Direction request should provide clarity as to what the project definition is and clearly state the components of such, identifying what is a Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project (NSIP) and what is associated or ancillary development. The Inspectorate queried what the programmed date for the submission of a Scoping request for the EuroLink project may be should the Direction be issued. The Applicant indicated that it aims to make a scoping request for EuroLink in Q4 2022/Q1 2023, after its non-statutory consultation around Q3 2022, with a DCO submission scheduled for the end Q2 2024. The Inspectorate queried whether the submission date for the DCOs could change and in the case they were to overlap between them, is there a plan in place. The Applicant referred to external factors that are causing changes to the project programme which may lead to submissions occurring at a similar timeframe; advising that programmes were constantly under review so as to manage resource and expectation requirements of all stakeholders.

Sea Link Project update

The Applicant provided a summary of the proposed Sea Link project. This includes an approximate 127km High Voltage Direct Current (HVDC) marine cable from proposed landfall points in the Aldeburgh/Sizewell area to the Richborough substation in Kent. The project also comprises an underground HVDC route from landfall in Suffolk to a DC/AC converter station within 5km of the proposed Friston 400kv substation, currently proposed by SPR. The Applicant indicated that it intends to seek consent for the Friston substation as part of its DCO. The Applicant clarified that its Section 35 Direction has been updated and it now constitutes a reinforcement project, as opposed to an inter-connector project. The letter can be found [here](#). The Applicant stated that their DCO submission is set for May 2024.

The Applicant updated the Inspectorate about their ongoing meetings with Local Planning Authorities (LPAs), Environment Agency, Natural England, Suffolk Wildlife Trust, Royal Society for the Protection of Birds and Suffolk AONB Partnership. The non-statutory consultation is due to commence in late summer, although dates are not yet confirmed. Three events are currently planned in both Suffolk and Kent, as well as online webinars. The relevant landowners have been contacted regarding access for surveys and arrangements are ongoing.

The Applicant indicated that the EIA Scoping opinion request for Sea Link will be issued by the end of Summer 2022, at the same time as the non-statutory consultation. The Inspectorate advised the Applicant to wait for the consultation period to close before submitting its scoping request. The reason for this is that it may cause confusion with consultation bodies as to which consultation they are

responding to and where to send their responses. The Inspectorate recommended waiting for the consultation period to close before submitting a Scoping submission.

Onshore Coordination between NGET and NGV in East Suffolk

Both Applicants indicated that coordination of both onshore and offshore elements may be possible, principally in relation to the co-location of the converter station, as well as shared cable corridors and necessary landfalls. The Applicant confirmed that each project will have its own separate converter station but it is looking at site options that could accommodate up to 3 converter stations. The Applicant shared the onshore coordination scope and initial findings with both SCC and ESC and have received feedback.

NGET confirmed it will be presenting two converter station location options for the Sea Link project at non statutory consultation, and after considering it with the LPA, the two options will include coordinated routes, where possible, for up to three HVDC projects, to ensure that, if necessary, both Nautilus and EuroLink will have access to the electric power transmission system.

The Applicants shared a map showing the sites available in the Suffolk coastal area for a converter station. NGET is proposing to take forward two of the seven identified sites as part of the Sea Link non-statutory consultation events. These sites are large enough to be able to accommodate three converter stations in one site and discussions with the LPAs have already commenced. The Applicant aims to present all seven sites to the local public and receive feedback as to which site may best accommodate the convertor station. The Inspectorate queried if NGET will express its site preferences during the consultation event. The Applicant noted that its preference will be highlighted during the consultation event.

The Applicants also confirmed that its reasoning behind preferring two of the seven sites is because they are the only sites that have the capability of taking in the necessary landfall cables. The Applicants highlighted that the projects are being delivered by different partners with different drivers and objectives; therefore, each project must be developed and consented separately, including separate buildings, but the joint coordination exercise will consider whether these buildings could be located on the same wider site. The Inspectorate queried if the Applicant would include the options for sites in its scoping opinion request. The Applicant confirmed that they will include both of their preferred sites in its Scoping Report.

Consenting approach

NGET confirmed that the Sea Link consultation will mention that the Applicant is coordinating with NGV. The Applicant queried if there were any suggestions from the Inspectorate regarding the Applicant's consenting approach after the non-statutory consultation has closed. The Inspectorate responded that considering the amount of consultation in the East Anglia region, the Applicant should be aware of what procedures can be taken forward in a combined matter to minimize resourcing pressures. Also, ensuring that parties understand the differences between projects, as well as the timelines between them is crucial for a successful consultation.

The Inspectorate commented that in order to receive meaningful feedback from statutory consultees, a management of the timelines is fundamental to allow these parties to effectively resource their availability throughout the three DCOs. Projects should be separated clearly to prevent any confusion for consultees, for example by using distinct branding, perhaps by using different colouring.

AOB

NGV informed the Inspectorate that the email for the Nautilus project will change but all of the previous emails will be transferred to the new mailbox and all further correspondence should be sent to the new project mailbox. The Inspectorate will be updating its project website shortly.

[Post meeting addition: the Applicant confirmed to the Inspectorate on 5th July 2022 that the Nautilus email address had been updated and requested for this to be updated on the PINS website].

A follow up meeting will be set up for August 2022.