



Meeting note

Project name	Sea Link
File reference	EN020026
Status	Final
Author	The Planning Inspectorate
Date	31 January 2023
Meeting with	National Grid Electricity Transmission (NGET)
Venue	MS Teams
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 update

The Applicant provided an overview of the Sea Link Proposed Development and described potential spatial interactions with a number of other projects. The Applicant confirmed that the Proposed Development would comprise a subsea marine High Voltage Direct Cable (HVDC) between Suffolk and Kent, over a distance of approximately 130km. From the landfall location in Suffolk, the cable would also be underground to a converter station in the Friston area, connecting to the Friston Substation. Following landfall in Kent, the cable would be partially underground and partially overhead line, connecting to the existing Richborough to Canterbury overhead line.

The Applicant also summarised their programme, confirming that non-statutory consultation commenced and closed at the end of 2022. Furthermore, a scoping opinion request had been sought in October 2022, and the Secretary of State's Scoping Opinion was issued in December 2022. The Applicant confirmed further consultation and environmental surveys are planned for 2023, with a DCO application submission anticipated in 2024. The Applicant anticipates that with these timeframes and subject to consent, construction would commence in 2026 or 2027.

The purpose of this meeting, the Applicant explained, was to focus on the Applicant's approach to the DCO application and the potential for coordination of Sea Link with other projects in Suffolk, potentially including Nautilus and Eurolink (promoted by National Grid Ventures).

Approach to Coordination

The Applicant updated the Inspectorate on their potential approaches to the DCO application, including the consideration of co-ordination with other projects in the Suffolk onshore area, where possible, particularly in terms of construction and design. The Applicant explained that one option being considered was to include additional ducts within the Sea Link DCO application between the proposed landfall and Converter Station to accommodate cables associated with other projects to be pulled through at a later date. Consideration included the potential for the cable corridor to accommodate up to 8 ducts for HVDC cables.

The Applicant has been considering implications for land rights and Compulsory Acquisition and explained that land rights would only be sought in the DCO for works necessary to the delivery of the Sea Link project, and one option is that land rights for cable ducts for other projects would be sought by voluntary agreements.

The Applicant also explained that there may be options for coordination of the Converter Station Site, to accommodate up to three converter stations at one site. Should converter stations be coordinated in the same location, the design of Sea Link would include for coordination of the following :

- Draft Order Limits,
- Mitigation Strategy,
- Drainage Strategy,
- Access arrangement; and
- 3 x Converter Station footprints and Parameters.

Taking these potential approaches into account, the Applicant set out their considerations for the Preliminary Environmental Information Report (PEIR) (which would be available during statutory consultation) and the Environmental Statement (ES). The Applicant explained how they propose to assess two scenarios, the first being 'Sea Link only' and the second is 'Sea Link co-ordinating with other projects'. The Applicant explained that consultation would make clear that the two scenarios were needed as Sea Link would require a DCO for their own project, but it is taking the opportunity to include additional worst case scenario for other projects. Presenting the worst-case scenario in a Rochdale Envelope approach. The draft DCO would be drafted to accommodate the maximum scenario but to allow the delivery of solely SEA Link. The Applicant explained that only assessing a co-ordinated scenario would bring risk that there would be no assessment of Sea Link on its own, and should the coordination be removed/not take place, the Applicant may have to revise the impact assessment.

Section 51 Advice

Discussion was held between the Inspectorate and the Applicant on matters to consider when deciding on the approach to take with the Applicant's assessments and DCO drafting. The Inspectorate advised the Applicant that whilst they recognised the benefits and need for flexibility, they should seek to refine design options as much as possible, and to limit the options being assessed. Furthermore, the Inspectorate asked them to clearly define the 'worst case scenario' (Rochdale envelope) in the ES. Noting this could be from either scenario, with or without co-ordination.

When considering the inclusion of ducts for future projects, the Inspectorate directed the Applicant to the East Anglia offshore wind farm projects, such as East Anglia One North and Two, and East Anglia One and East Anglia Three, which adopted a similar approach.

The Inspectorate identified two areas for the Applicant to consider. Firstly, to include in the ES a worst-case assessment of the likely significant effects for Sea Link independently and also with other projects proposed for co-ordination (where this is proposed). Where they are to be co-ordinated, the ES should include assessment of the other projects within the cumulative impact assessment, as relevant. The second is to consider the representation and explanation of co-ordination in the drafting of the DCO and the wider application. The Inspectorate advised that the draft DCO should be clear on what is being sought, and that attention should be paid to consistency with the description of the land rights powers being sought within the application.

The Inspectorate suggested that the Applicant also consider the delivery of any proposed mitigation, and how the relevant authority could enforce responsibilities if a number of developers were working at the same site. In terms of a co-ordinated converter station site, the Inspectorate queried design, and whether there would be a joined-up approach between potential developers. The Applicant confirmed that they had appointed an architect and they are working on a design code, in particular in relation to the proposed converter station design. The Inspectorate advised the Applicant that in addition to creating a clear 'worst case' scenario, they should also set out a framework of commitments or aims that could be adhered to with regards to design, to enable understanding of any objectives and limitations of the co-ordination work.

The Inspectorate highlighted that the Applicant should draft the DCO with the consideration of practical implementation from the start. Specifically considering the description of the Proposed Development, any powers being sought, the delivery of mitigation, and the discharge of requirements to ensure clarity of responsibilities and delivery with respect to coordinating projects.

Next Steps / AOB

A general project update meeting is proposed for 27 February 2023.