



Planning Inspectorate

Meeting note

Project name	Sea Link
File reference	EN020026
Status	Final
Author	The Planning Inspectorate
Date	20 June 2024
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 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 and Timelines

National Grid Electricity Transmission (the Applicant) confirmed that the Development Consent Order (DCO) will now be submitted early 2025 with the project needing to be completed by 2030.

The Applicant is reviewing the feedback from statutory consultation and continuing to update the design. The Applicant is therefore undertaking a targeted engagement commencing on 9 July 2024.

The Applicant has been preparing draft versions of the DCO, plans and Consultation Report as well as other application documents and are aiming to issue these to the Inspectorate for review in early July 2024, and to Local Authorities for engagement purposes only.

The Applicant has been having ongoing discussions with National Grid Ventures (NGV) regarding the Nautilus and LionLink projects and will be submitting an illustrative master plan document with their submission for the land required for the converter station on land outside Saxmundham. The aim is to show how the site could be developed in the future by NGV subject to the consenting work required.

The Applicant has undertaken meetings in Suffolk about a potential need for a bridge crossing the River Fromus in Suffolk. The bridge would potentially be in a flood risk area but sited in a lower flood risk zone. The channel itself is in flood zone 3 but the embankments extend out of flood zone 2 and 3.

The Applicant stated that the bridge is to be used as an access track for all vehicles. The Applicant confirmed that it is back checking the alternative accesses and previous routes, but each route has its own challenges. The Applicant confirmed that the bridge, if constructed, would be permanent and when the project is complete the bridge will allow vehicles on to the site and could potentially be modified for use by the other projects (Nautilus and LionLink) subject to assessment and design work undertaken by those projects.

The Applicant is aiming to issue draft Statement of Common Grounds (SoCGs) soon, which they have been discussing with the Local Authorities. It is looking at submitting some of these with their DCO application, although the SoCG discussions will still continue.

The Applicant's surveys are ongoing during peak ecology season, and it is looking to commence their intrusive trial trenching work at the end of June/early July. It has agreed a 4% coverage with the county archaeologist if/where NGET consider this to be feasible, necessary and deliverable.

Enhanced Pre-Application Service

The Applicant confirmed that it has received the Inspectorate's Expression of Interest (EoI) email and have been told that National Grid are responding at a strategic level on all projects.

Targeted Engagement

The Applicant stated that the targeted engagement will run from 8 July to 11 August 2024 and will primarily focus on four areas due to minor changes that have been made following the statutory consultation.

Coordination

The Applicant spoke about the masterplan work it is doing with NGV which shows the converters for this project, Nautilus and LionLink. The Applicant is only seeking consent for the Sea Link elements.

The Inspectorate asked if the masterplan, as discussed in previous meetings, would aim to give optionality in the DCO for scenarios or options for a number of different projects to co-locate. The Applicant confirmed that the application would be for the SEA Link project alone and will not preclude NGV's projects. For the Environmental Statement (ES), they will be basing the assessment on the available information at the time, in terms of how they will be considering the other projects.

The Inspectorate queried whether there needs to be options within the DCO to take into account the different timescales and scenarios if all the schemes were to receive consent. The Applicant stated it had considered whether they could be positioned in any of the three

locations but as Sea Link will be first to site the option they are going for is their preferred location due to landscaping perspective.

The Inspectorate asked where the other projects are timewise in relation to the Applicant's project. The Applicant replied that LionLink will be starting statutory consultation in March/April 2025 and Nautilus remains very early on in the process.

In respect of Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG), the Applicant stated that this was being considered in the design phase. The Applicant said that the River Fromus bridge area has potential for watercourse units. There is a strategy to undertake BNG within the red line whilst considering the surrounding area.

The Inspectorate reminded the Applicant that good design should be demonstrated in applications. The Applicant replied that it has architects involved and with them they have promoted six options at statutory consultation, from which they have received feedback. The Applicant said that they have got a draft design principles document which will be submitted with submission. It is working on the configuration internally such as where is best place for noisier equipment and where cables enter and exit the site.

The Inspectorate asked if the Applicant was aware that the National Infrastructure Commission Design Group had published their design principles guidance in May. The Applicant confirmed that it is aware.

The Inspectorate advised that the Applicant consider how to include in the application the alternatives in choosing the bridge option in their ES. The Inspectorate further added that with any crossing of a river it may need to demonstrate why this is the only viable option.

File Sharing and Draft Documents

The Applicant is currently in ongoing discussions with the Inspectorate on which file-sharing method would be used when submitting the application documents at the Acceptance stage.

The Inspectorate gave examples of file sharing sites which have been used effectively on other projects. The Applicant confirmed that it will look into the viability of these options internally.

The Applicant confirmed that it will submit draft versions of some of the application documents in July 2024 to the Inspectorate for review via email.

Specific decisions/follow-up required?

- The Applicant will contact the Inspectorate with a suitable date in likely early September 2024 for a project update meeting following the Inspectorate's review of the Applicant's draft application documents.

