

MINUTES OF THE PLANNING AND ENVIRONMENTAL COMMITTEE HELD ON 6TH JULY, 2021

Present: Councillors R Whitehead (Chair) and R Arthur, Mrs J A Bell, Mrs G Bleasdale, Mrs K Brace, Mrs S Forster, D Harding, R Lowery, J MacVeigh, Miss S Morrison, J Purvis, K Routledge, K Shaw, C J Thompson, Miss J Watson, S Wayman.

Apologies: Councillors Mrs L Kennedy, Mrs S Lingard.

Observers: Councillors Mrs H Cahill, Mrs R Charlton-Lainé, Mrs G M Fuller.

Officers: P Fletcher (Deputy Town Clerk), C Halliday (Minute Taker).

Prior to commencement of the meeting the Chair advised members of this Committee and members of the public that in line with the amendment to 'the public bodies (admission to meetings) act 1960', which came into force in August, 2014, parts of this meeting may be recorded by photographic, video and audio means.

PL38/21 DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS

Members were reminded prior to the start of the meeting of the need to disclose any interests, prejudicial or personal, in accordance with the Code of Conduct. Such interests must be submitted to the Town Clerk prior to the meeting.

PL39/21 MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING HELD ON 8TH JUNE, 2021

RECOMMENDED the Minutes of these meetings, copies of which had been previously printed and circulated to each Member, were approved at the last Full Council meeting and signed as a correct record by the Chairman.

PL40/21 NATIONAL GRID SEGL1 BRIEFING

Representatives were in attendance to provide Members with a presentation and briefing outlining the project.

Thomas Hall – Public Consultation Team
Emma Bennett – External Affairs Officer
Glyn Sibson – Project Manager
Stephen Knight – National Grid

The Government has a target of net zero by 2050 for England and Wales, 2045 for Scotland. These targets are now enshrined in law. With a targeted 40 gigawatts of offshore wind to be delivered by the end of the decade. This is a four-fold increase in what is currently produced today.

Great progress is being made by the Country 2020 was the greenest year on record but there is a lot more to be done to reach the targets. As a Country we have the largest offshore capacity in the world with around 10 gigawatts currently. It has taken twenty years to reach the 10 gigawatts and there has been a ramp up in the scale of windfarms.

Reinforcement of the network is carried out firstly by a connection application from a wind farm to the System Operator and the Transmission Owners (National Grid) when they wish to connect to the system. They must work together to ensure proposals for systems are co-ordinated, efficient, economical and the view of minimising environmental impacts.

The System Operator lead an annual process on a repeating cycle to look at how much energy is connected today and how much energy is likely to connect. Discussions are held to establish how fast as a Country the change to cleaner, greener sources of energy is being made. The current system requirements are reviewed and a ten year vision of what the system requirements will be is outlined to cater for what is coming.

The ten year statement is published every November identifying where the network is going to be under strain. The Transmission Owners respond with suggestions on these can be overcome. The System Operator reviews the suggestions and sets out areas to be reinforced and the works to be carried out in January to present best value for consumers.

The Torness windfarms will feed AC current into the converter station. In order to get enough energy into a cable for the distances required with disturbing communities high voltage direct current (HVDC) connection will be best. Yet to be confirmed it is intended to run two or four DC cables through the sea which would connect north of Seaham near Seaham Hall. The cabling would then track parallel to the Sustrans route before going round the old Hawthorn Colliery Pit complex then heading to Jade Park where the convertor station would be. The HVDC would then be converted back to AC at the new substation.

Many sites were looked at to establish where the maximum benefit would be achieved at a reasonable cost. Hawthorn Pit was identified as the optimum connection point. Connection can be made with minimal further works onshore into the connecting system.

Sites at Tyneside were considered but these did not provide enough benefit to the system as a whole or the ability to provide enough energy to where it was required. Sites at Teesside were also considered however ongoing future projects in this area would raise costs.

We did consider about five or six different landing sites including the south of Nose's Point. Environmental considerations were made, the engineering solutions were considered and the impact on communities coming away from the sea. After consideration the proposed north site was recommended due to it being environmentally beneficial to the marine environment, the route avoided the harbour mouth which could present difficulties and the ability to make landfall.

Horizontal directional drilling will be utilised boring a hole 500-800m out to sea. Concerns were highlighted at the last meeting in relation to existing faults in the areas. It was advised it is currently believed this not be a concern, due to it being a shallow hole, which is then filled with a liner which the cable is then pulled through, providing stability however geotechnical investigations will still be carried out.

Due to the higher cliffs at Nose's Point and the land rising quickly this makes for a challenging drill profile possibly beyond what could be achieved. The railway line runs nearby which could cause complications and this has been reviewed by civil engineers.

The required haul road will be done in sections with materials reused with a view of minimising roadstone. Ground stabilisation is an environmentally friendly alternative which decomposes after use.

The cable route land can be returned to its former use there may be limits on what can be done. An easement will be sought for the cable to remain, so landowners would be unable to build houses over the route but it could be used for agricultural, grazing or normal use.

Depending on ground solutions it may be necessary to have two ground trenches in places. The trench itself is narrow however the working area for the spoil, fencing or drainage could be up to 40 metres wide.

National Grid takes its biodiversity responsibility seriously and aims at a minimum to return land to the standard it was found and where possible achieve a net gain. It can take one or two years for the land to recover after installation.

A full traffic impact assessment will be carried out prior to the planning stage.

A converter station is required at each end of the SEGL1 route. A contractor is yet to be assigned the number which specialise in these global are limited. Once the contractor is assigned, they will be able to finalise an electrical design which would set the final design of the convertor station.

As requested at the last meeting the sizes of the Jade Park buildings were gathered and the tallest building is around 14m which would be roughly half the size of the worst case convertor station. Most buildings in the park vary between 11-14m.

Ecological surveys are being carried out for all forms of flora and wildlife. This will provide a true understanding of what is there to enable the impact to be assessed for them to be managed and mitigated appropriately.

One reason why the building needs to be close to an existing substation is the cost of AC cabling is much higher than DC cabling, so it needs to be built as close as possible for value to the consumer.

The public consultation ran from 24th May until 18th June. Over 700 people visited the website, sessions have been held online and briefings have been held for local Councils.

The next stage is looking at the feedback and in 2022 it is hoped public information events can be held for people to view physical plans and see how the feedback has contributed towards the project.

If construction is approved, then National Grid has a number of projects for helping the community. One of the main projects is the Community Grant Programme which local organisations with charity status can apply for funding of up to £20,000 towards community projects. Volunteering is also provided to local organisations.

A Councillor asked you say this cabling is expensive, so any cost saving suggestions we can offer you would be of interest? We could possibly half the length of this route by using two old mineral lines but the only take on that is you would have to land south near Nose's Point. There are two former mineral lines which run directly to Hawthorn it would be about 4.5-5km possibly half the suggested distance. The cost savings would be significant.

It was suggested previously we did have a cursory look at it and we have not yet finished our work on it. One of the real challenges is the size of the swath that would be needed to construct the cable in. The ground must be stable for thermal reasons and protection. The cables are very heavy and a km drum length is 60 tonnes. We will certainly recheck this again, but the two key issues are getting out from that side of town and the clash with marine activities. Thank you for the suggestion we will look at it again and feedback the findings.

A Councillor asked how high will the building be in feet? I hear it is as high as the Angel of the North.

90ft it is higher than the Angel of the North there is no doubt in that. Whoever mentioned it last time was correct. The Angel of the North is about 70ft.

The Councillor stated so this is going to be very noticeable.

There are two things about that, it is taller and I would say it is a significant building. The big difference is the Angel of the North is positioned in a way that everyone can absolutely see it in full view. If you think of the valley and the vale as you go up the A1 past it. It was placed there for a reason. We are much more confident in this particular site that is it is more tucked away with good established screening particularly south. The view from Murton will be visible, it will be behind Jade Park. We do not anticipate it being a significant standout in context of where it is.

The architect can do two thing they can either merge the building in the surroundings or add value to the area by creating a statement building. I believe this project would likely be the former. We will work with the landscape architects on the planting of trees which in the long term will provide some screening.

The Councillor stated I also heard you say "what we are going to do/what we will be doing" in your first statement. Does this mean it is cut and dry?

The proposal that we are bringing to you today is:

Do we need to be building a convertor station? Yes, we do. So, we have done a lot of work already into looking at the sites which think would be appropriate. This is our preferred solution.

Are we going to do it? There is a lot of things have got to happen before we can do anything. The planning applications is yet to be submitted.

We need to agree the funding. A balancing act to ensure we deliver value for money and that we can erect something that is consent able. This is proposed scheme which is relatively efficient from a consumer's perspective and offers a good balance between impacts on environment and communities and benefit to the wider community.

A member of the public stated. The public has only had 43 days to look at all aspects of this proposal including where is being drilled. The cliffs are eroding and are not safe for drilling.

After speaking with other residents there is opposition to this. Solar power is an easier cheaper solution for green energy. Drilling off this coast is fragile it is not safe for drilling we went through this with fracking.

There was previous a large earthquake off the coast of Seaham and we frequently have them throughout the year. The marine life is in danger due to this. We have just cleaned our sea up after the pits. I think the proposals are unfair.

The drilling technique is absolutely not fracking. Fracking is a totally different method. Horizontal directional drilling is a relatively shallow low profile drill.

The member of the public requested Seaham Town Council supports their opposition to the proposals with Durham County Council.

The Chair thanked the member of the public for providing their views.

A Councillor said the difference in cabling costs have been highlighted between DC and AC. Thinking of the convertor could this not be done at Torness and fed straight into the substation?

There will be a convertor station at both ends.

The Chair advised it is cheaper to transfer it as DC and the load requirements are a factor.

A Councillor queried what is the difference in cost between bringing it to the north of Seaham versus Nose's Point?

We do not start off as costs as the first driver. It has got to be reasonably efficient but also needs to be doable. Our big concerns are it is more challenging in the marine environment to come further south. We would need to come across the harbour mouth which may or may not be permissible.

The Councillor stated you will be passing the harbour mouths all the way down the coast such as Tyneside.

We would be further out to sea in those instances.

The Councillor stated you could still take it further out to sea. The other point is the convertor station why is this not being dropped underground like they do in Scandinavia to save the environmental looks? It's about costs isn't it. The amount of engineering going into this project I cannot believe you can build all this system but cannot get up the bank.

Ultimately, we have to build this efficient system and the balance that we have achieve. I think what we will do is take your points and the gentlemen's points and try to write up a full answer. It is not just an engineering decision it is a multitude of different factors playing into why we think the route which we have selected is the optimum route.

The Councillor queried at the last meeting a fault in the ground was mentioned you were going to go and survey the land, has this been done?

It is still ongoing, teams are out drilling currently.

A member of the public raised a question. How will the power be generated as Torness Power Station is nuclear powered?

You are right Torness is nuclear powered but various connections come in from North Sea wind come into there. We need to look to the future a little bit. Due to the location of the connections this is the reasonable point to reinforce the system and get more green energy from Scotland. In our assumptions Torness Power Station may well be closed or due for closure by the time this projects timeframe is complete.

A Councillor expressed their disappointment in what was felt the same information being provided since the last presentation. You certainly do not appear to have looked at the suggestions which we made to you. I am astonished that you are using the harbour as an obstacle given you are coming all the way down the North Sea past the estuaries of the Tyne and the Wear. I think you need to do some serious consideration about the suggestions we have provided.

The Chair thanked the representatives for their presentation and attendance.

RECOMMENDED that Members note the information provided.

PL41/21 **PLANNING ISSUES**

a) Monthly List

A Member queried application 5724 for the 18m Phase 8 Monopole. Another Member advised this application had been declined by Durham County Council.

RECOMMENDED that Members note the information provided.

PL42/21 **Transport and Highways Issues**

a) **20mph Speed Limit – Deneside and Westlea Various Streets**

RECOMMENDED that Members note the information provided.

PL43/21 **PRESS OPPORTUNITIES**

RECOMMENDED that there were no press opportunities arising from this meeting.

The meeting was then closed by the Chair.

DRAFT