



Meeting note

Project name	Mersey Tidal Power
File reference	EN0110006
Status	Final
Author	The Planning Inspectorate
Date	21 May 2024
Meeting with	Mersey Tidal Power
Venue	MS Teams
Meeting objectives	Inception meeting
Circulation	All attendees/ additional contacts to share meeting note

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.

The Inspectorate explained that the publication of the meeting note could be delayed up to six months if required by the developer for commercial confidentiality/ sensitivity reasons, or until a formal scoping request had been submitted.

Introduction to project & team

Mersey Tidal Power introduced themselves as the Applicant and explained that they are wholly owned by Liverpool City Region Combined Authority (LCRCA). The Applicant explained that the unique shape of the estuary, narrowing instead of widening, and the tidal range of up to 8-9m at spring tides (every 14 days) give potential for significant power generation. It would be the largest publicly-led renewable scheme in the UK, with potential to generate approximately 1GW of energy. The tidal range barrage will effectively create its own lagoon using the riverbanks. It is technology that has been tested in installations in other countries but is new for the UK.

The Applicant outlined details of the scheme, which, in addition to the power generating barrage, will involve:

- Sluice gates to allow water to pass during tides where there is not generating head;
- Locks to allow for continued navigation of the river;
- Substation;
- Operation, maintenance and administration buildings etc;
- New walking / active travel route using the barrage structures to help connect the two banks of the estuary; and
- Mitigation and protection measures reflecting the offshore location.

The Applicant explained that the cable connection point is not yet set; National Grid has provided several potential options. The scheme will be seeking to connect in 2036, and there may be several future works that alter the current availability. It anticipates that

existing port facilities on the River Mersey will be able to accommodate most of the construction requirements.

The Applicant summarised the background to the scheme, which came from a requirement of the 2015 devolution deal to explore tidal power. There is political ambition for net zero in the city region, and its spatial strategy is also currently being progressed, which will reflect this. The project has support from the city region's Mayor and the Chief Executives of the six local authorities that make up LCRCA (Halton Borough Council, Knowsley Council, Liverpool City Council, Sefton Council, St Helens Borough Council and Wirral Council). LCRCA has brought forward other projects upriver such as Mersey Gateway Bridge and the container port, so they have of owning and maintaining large infrastructure assets.

The Applicant explained that it has selected the specific manufacturers' turbine to allow accurate modelling of hydrology etc. and provide confidence for stakeholders. It is an asynchronous model, with 50 rpm that is then converted electronically to the higher speed. The final purchasing decision, made at a later date, may result in slight changes to size and/or capacity. However, initial feasibility (including constructability) studies suggest that there would be a limited range of flexibility. It is likely to be turbines between 7-9m diameter, with between 26 to 30 in number. The Inspectorate recommended that the Applicant consider how to build in flexibility for different turbine models at as early a stage as possible. The Applicant will need to be clear about when its decision points are and how to identify and assess the envelope of effects from this relatively new technology.

Work to date

The Applicant explained that stakeholder engagement to date has been with the main statutory parties and some other interested groups, involving quarterly meetings over last four years. While they have not yet reached complete agreement with all parties, they have been building communication routes. There has been no specific wider publicity but the process of getting authority to proceed as a publicly owned body requires a certain amount of visibility, for example, items on published council agendas. Notices for the Marine Management Organisation (MMO) licences are also coming forward shortly. The Applicant has also been holding briefings for the local councils, meeting with industry groups, and has a residents' meeting soon; it is happy to engage with anyone who requests it at this early stage.

The Applicant outlined the other work currently ongoing or to commence shortly, which mainly comprises early stage optioneering over various technology types and large-scale environmental surveys to inform this on an ongoing basis. The barrage scheme is what the Applicant will be taking forward, although a lagoon scheme could be feasible in future.

EIA scoping

The Applicant confirmed its proposed submission for EIA scoping is for the end July 2024. It has spoken to the statutory consultees about this timing. It noted that the scoping area is large due to the current uncertainty of the grid connection point. While it considered reducing the boundaries to show linear options, this did not remove much of the scoping area and could rule out options that may come forward in the future. Beyond the cable connection, it is anticipating very little terrestrial development. The marine logistics facilities (including existing port facilities) are also included in the scoping boundary.

The Applicant is proposing to accompany the EIA scoping application with a Habitats Regulation Assessment (HRA) screening report and the structure for an outline Construction and Environment Management Plan, including outline commitments, which are informed by engagement to date.

The Inspectorate advised that it can only comment on EIA scoping, not the HRA information. While it may be useful for context, there is potential for it to cause complications, for example, consultee comments where it is not clear which document has influenced the response. The Inspectorate suggested instead that the Applicant could refer to the existence of the HRA report in its scoping information but publish this separately on its website rather than submitting it. The Inspectorate will provide a link to the relevant advice pages alongside the meeting note.

The Applicant confirmed that LCRCA has both a design champion and active travel commissioner who have oversight of the project development as part of its approval process. It is aware of the work to be done in this area and, for example, is looking at how to reflect design elements and themes from existing river developments. The Inspectorate advised that the key is to ensure the story around design evolution is brought out in the application documentation showing how principles, policy and feedback have been responded to and linking to proposed community benefits.

The Inspectorate asked when the Applicant is likely to be able to confirm the barrage siting. The Applicant envisages confirming this by the end of 2024, and it will not be one single structure, when taking into account the associated locks etc. In terms of the Scoping Report, the Applicant will be looking to ensure its submission maintains consistency with what has been shown to stakeholders so far.

Programme and next steps

The Applicant outlined its next steps and broad programme:

- Land referencing; this is a large area of work given the flexibility built into the scoping boundary.
- Continuing engagement, leading to non-statutory consultation towards the end of 2024. The project is well-known in the area so the Applicant can build on that.
- Evidence plan development.
- Statutory consultation in 2025; flexible and able to respond to early comments, programme has built in opportunity for two complete consultations if needed.
- DCO application submission in 2026.
- Aware of need to produce more detailed programme document.

Specific decisions/ follow-up required?

- The Inspectorate to provide links to advice notes for EIA Scoping and HRA.
- The Inspectorate to send through project information sheet for Applicant to complete and return. [NOTE: THIS HAS NOW BEEN SENT]
- Applicant to consider implications of new pre-application prospectus and respond to expression of interest for which pre-application service level they wish to use when this is sent through from the end of May 2024.
- Inspectorate to set up project mailbox and confirm this and appointment of case team to Applicant, following receipt of the completed project information sheet.