

Meeting note

Project name	Stanlow Hydrogen Ready Modular Combined Heat and Power Project
File reference	EN0110007
Status	Final
Author	The Planning Inspectorate
Date	12 September 2024
Meeting with	EET Fuels (“The Applicant”)
Venue	Microsoft Teams
Meeting objectives	Objectives
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.

Proposed Development

The Applicant summarised the proposals. The site is part of the existing Stanlow Refinery site, between Chester and Liverpool alongside the River Mersey, bounded by motorways and the Liverpool-Manchester Ship Canal. It is a heavily industrialised area. In addition to the refinery, which has operated on site for over 100 years, multiple companies under the Applicant’s umbrella operate on site, including storage/transport, e-fuel production, and Thornton Science Park. Low-carbon hydrogen production projects HPP1 and HPP2 are part of carbon capture from the refinery, producing hydrogen for commercial use and to fuel the proposed power station. HPP1 is expected to be operational by 2028.

The Proposed Development is a flexi-fuelled power station incorporating combined heat and power (CHP) technology. The Applicant explained that intention is for this to be 100% hydrogen fuelled the majority of the time, so no carbon capture and storage is proposed. However, if the HPP plants were to shut down for any reason, the refinery off-gas would have to be diverted to the power station. The Development Consent Order (DCO) application will seek optionality for both fuels. The Applicant explained that there would be significant energy efficiency improvements from the CHP process even when using natural gas. The overall aim is to cut refinery emissions by 95%. Electrification work due in 2027 would result in an increase in electricity requirement but overall increase in efficiency, and CHP would need to be online for this stage, providing heat and power to the refinery and other local businesses.

The proposal is to be delivered in 2 phases. Some infrastructure, such as pipelines, is common to both, ensuring they remain deliverable separately. Total expected power generation would be up to 170MW. Phase 1 comprises the initial CHP plant and consent will be sought under the Town and Country Planning Act (TCPA) 1990, with delivery late 2026/early 2027. Phase 2 comprises up to 5 gas turbines plus steam turbines, cooling tower, electrical switch gear area and associated development. The existing 1950/60s CHP plant would be decommissioned once the new plant is fully operational; this is not currently proposed to be included in the DCO application.

The Inspectorate advised that the Applicant will need to consider how the two consent regimes relate and which consent certain elements fall under, including approval of future details by condition or requirement and enforcement responsibilities. It suggested the Applicant review recent DCO applications that have dealt with regime overlap, e.g. Slough Multifuel. The Applicant acknowledged it was aware of the issue and noted that it hoped the TCPA application will have consent by the time the DCO application is submitted.

The Applicant confirmed that there is an existing grid connection for import and export, and an agreement to increase to 45MW export capacity in 2030. This requires no physical changes at the substation, only for capacity to be available in wider system. EET Hydrogen has its own 100MW grid connection which will also be linking to this.

Consenting programme and activities to date

The target DCO application submission date is early 2026. Environmental surveys and design development have already begun in conjunction with Phase 1. Statutory consultation is programmed for March to May 2025. The programme document has more information about the details and timescales for the various related but separate projects on site. Cheshire West and Chester Council (CWC) is the consenting authority for the TCPA schemes. CWC have recent NSIP experience from the Hynet CO₂ Pipeline Project.

The Inspectorate asked whether the Applicant was aware of any key risks to timescales. The Applicant considered that apart from any delay to Phase 1, which is considered low risk, engagement with stakeholders is the main potential issue. It is trying to frontload this as far as possible. It noted that there are existing relationships with some statutory bodies such as CWC and the Environment Agency (EA) from other developments and processes on site, although there has been minimal engagement in terms of Phase 2 specifically.

The Inspectorate advised early engagement with the Health and Safety Executive. It reminded the Applicant to be aware of the new charging powers for engagement with statutory bodies and that agreements for this may need to be in place prior to scoping. The Applicant will also need to consider how it can address the complexity of the project for consultation phases so that statutory bodies and others are clear on what feedback is sought, and on which parts of the overall project.

EIA Scoping

The Applicant advised that scoping for Phase 1 is shortly to be submitted to CWC and Phase 2 scoping is programmed for early Q1 2025. Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) is currently ongoing for Phase 1, and advice currently is that an Appropriate Assessment will be required. The ongoing discussions with Natural England will also inform HRA for Phase 2. The Applicant confirmed it is also mindful of potential cumulative effects.

Because of the site overlap with Phase 1, and the combined design progression, a lot of the surveys carried out for Phase 1 will also cover Phase 2. Some of these surveys have already commenced. Flood Risk and Water Framework Directive assessments will follow with later stages of design progress.

The Inspectorate advised that given the complexity of the project and the number of phases and related developments, it would be important to be clear in the ES which projects form the baseline and future baseline, and which are part of the cumulative effects assessment.

Consultation and engagement

To date this is at an early stage with CWC and an initial meeting with the EA has taken place. Statutory consultation is planned for spring 2025 and the applicant intends to engage with statutory bodies well in advance of this. It is starting work on an engagement and communication strategy to inform this process.

The Inspectorate advised that early engagement and ensuring the programme document is kept up to date will be key for statutory bodies to be able to resource the process at the required times.

Compulsory Acquisition (CA)

The Applicant confirmed that the whole site is within its ownership, so no CA powers are likely to be sought in the DCO.

Practical Arrangements

The Inspectorate noted that basic pre-application tier service had been requested. The Inspectorate advised that it would confirm the tier within 28 days of the inception meeting (**Post Meeting note:** this has been done). It advised that there is scope, as set out in the Pre-Application Prospectus, to increase to the standard tier at a later date if more risks arise, such as around environmental issues, or if the Applicant wants feedback on detailed DCO drafting given the potentially complex overlap between consenting regimes. Twelve weeks' notice is required to change tier, so the Inspectorate advised that the Applicant build this into the Programme Document if it thinks this is likely to be needed.

The Inspectorate requested the Applicant send through invoicing information. Invoices are sent twice yearly during the Pre-Application stage.

Specific decisions/ follow-up required?

The following actions were agreed:

- Applicant to confirm when project web page can go live.
- Applicant to provide invoicing information