



Inception Meeting note

Project name	Walpole Flexible Generation Project (FGP)
Case reference	EN0110009
Status	Final
Author	The Planning Inspectorate
Date of meeting	11 September 2024
Meeting with	Walpole Flexible Generation Limited
Venue	Microsoft Teams
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.

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.

The Proposed Development

The Applicant confirmed that the project is for a flexible generation facility made up of thermal generation and battery storage, with up to 2GWs of capacity. The Applicant confirmed that the thermal project will utilise hydrogen and will not use natural gas if hydrogen is not available. As such, there will be no carbon capture storage as part of the Proposed Development. The Applicant is engaging with National Gas on Project Union concerning the repurposing of existing infrastructure/pipelines for hydrogen use.

The Applicant stated that structure heights are not yet known but that the design and appearance of the Proposed Development would be similar to the nearby Sutton Bridge Power Station.

The Applicant confirmed that the location of its site is dictated by available land at the intersection between 400kv infrastructure, Walpole substation and the gas network. The land lies to the south of Walpole Marsh, approximately five kilometres north of Wisbech, in Norfolk.

The Applicant confirmed that a separate battery storage planning application, under the Town and Country Planning Act 1990, will be made to the Local Authority. The Applicant noted that this would provide an opportunity to start to build stakeholder relationships

including with the host local authorities. The Inspectorate asked if the Applicant was likely to include provision for the battery storage as part of the DCO as a fallback option, if consent is not granted by the Authority; the Applicant confirmed that this will be considered in due course.

The Applicant noted that there are solar farms and other battery storage schemes nearby and that the project will connect to the proposed new Walpole substation, which is being proposed by National Grid Electricity Transmission (NGET) as part of its Grimsby to Walpole overhead line scheme, which will be subject to a DCO application. The Applicant is also in touch with NGET about its Eastern Green Link (EAGL) 3 & 4 subsea cable project which intersects the site.

The Inspectorate queried the approximate length of the electrical connection corridor between the Proposed Development and proposed Walpole substation. The Applicant confirmed it would be approximately 3.8km but it was not yet determined if it would be overhead line or underground cable.

The Inspectorate asked about the project site's proximity to Wisbech. The Applicant advised that the site is approximately 5km north of Wisbech. The Inspectorate noted that the recently consented Medworth Energy from Waste Project in Wisbech should be considered in the Cumulative Impact Assessment and to ensure that communities are effectively engaged in the consultation process in due course.

DCO Submission date

The Applicant confirmed that dates have moved since the Applicant shared a previous Programme Document with the Inspectorate in July 2024. As NGET intends to submit its DCO application for the Grimsby to Walpole project in mid-2027, the Walpole FGP has now extended its initial assessment period by 8 to 10 months, with the application submission anticipated at the end of 2027.

The Inspectorate enquired whether the Proposed Development's programme would be extended again if the Grimsby to Walpole project is further delayed. The Applicant confirmed that it does not automatically follow that this project would be delayed. The Applicant could submit an application based on the information currently available at that time.

EIA Scoping

The Scoping submission is currently anticipated in mid to late Q3 2025.

Consultation (statutory and non-statutory)

The Applicant aims to consult with Local Authorities on the Statement of Community Consultation (SoCC) at end of 2026. The Applicant noted that between EIA Scoping and SoCC, it may hold non-statutory consultations locally and with interested stakeholders.

The Applicant confirmed that Statutory Consultations are scheduled for Q1 2027. The Inspectorate noted the two-year gap between EIA Scoping and anticipated submission date and advised that the Applicant needs to ensure that the information it provides is up to date on an ongoing basis and within its Environmental Statement. The Inspectorate also noted that many see EIA Scoping as the start of a project and this will make people in the local area more aware of the project so having a non-statutory consultation within this period

would be beneficial in keeping the local communities and statutory bodies engaged in the process.

Project website

The Applicant confirmed that its website is live (walpoleflexgen.co.uk) and the updated programme document will be published there shortly. The Applicant will confirm the timescales for the publication of the project page on the Inspectorate's website as soon as possible after the Inception Meeting.

Environmental surveys

The Applicant noted that it had already carried out a phase one ecology survey which showed some amphibians, reptiles and bats in nearby locations but nothing on the project site.

Environmental constraints and issues

The Inspectorate asked if the Applicant had identified any wider environmental concerns and if it had engaged with any of the key statutory consultation bodies, such as Natural England (NE) and the Environment Agency (EA) yet. The Applicant explained that it had not had any conversations with NE or the EA given the early stage of the project. The Inspectorate advised the Applicant to engage with these bodies prior to EIA Scoping and to be aware that some of the key statutory consultation bodies can now charge for pre-application services, which could have a bearing on responses to EIA Scoping if charging agreements are not in place. The Applicant confirmed that it is likely to engage with NE around 3-4 months in advance of the request for a Scoping Opinion from the Inspectorate.

The Inspectorate queried if the Applicant had considered potential Habitats' Regulations Assessment (HRA) matters, noting that there are several European sites associated with The Wash located circa 8km to the north of the Proposed Development. The Applicant stated that it has not yet considered HRA but will engage with NE prior to EIA Scoping.

The Applicant noted that the project area is in a high-risk flood zone (Flood Zone 3) with existing flood defences. The Applicant has undertaken a Flood Risk Assessment, which has identified the need for flood risk mitigation including a minimum development platform of 0.6m. The Inspectorate asked if the Applicant had undertaken any work in respect of the sequential and exception tests set out in policy. The Applicant had not considered these tests but stated that it would seek early engagement with the EA.

The Applicant confirmed that the land is agricultural arable farmland. It may be classed as best and most versatile (BMV) land. The Applicant noted that the scale of the Proposed Development was small relative to other projects in the area including solar farms. The Inspectorate advises that consideration would still need to be given to effects from loss of BMV land including cumulative effects. The Applicant also noted that it is not anticipating there to be any particular heritage concerns.

Early engagement with statutory bodies and local authorities, and other stakeholder engagement to date

The Applicant advised that it is not planning on engaging with MPs and the general public yet, given the early stages of the project; that engagement will begin in due course. The Inspectorate advised of the importance of good, early engagement with communities.

Compulsory Acquisition (CA)

The Applicant said that the DCO is unlikely to include substantial CA powers as the Applicant has an option on the land for the power station site. However, CA powers may be necessary for the connection cable route.

Pre-Application Service Tier

The Applicant is seeking the basic tier. The Inspectorate advised that it would confirm the tier within 28 days of the Inception Meeting (**Post Meeting note**: this has been completed).

Specific decisions/follow-up required?

The following actions were agreed:

- Applicant to confirm timescales for the publication of the Inspectorate's project page.
- Applicant to send updated Programme Document.

Annex A

Meeting attendees

Organisation		Role
Planning Inspectorate		Operations Lead – Energy
Planning Inspectorate		Operations Manager - Energy
Planning Inspectorate		Case Officer
Planning Inspectorate		Case Manager
Planning Inspectorate		Senior EIA Advisor
Statera Energy		Planning Lead
Statera Energy		Development Lead