



Inception Meeting note

Project name	Hope Moor Wind Farm
Case reference	EN0110038
Status	Final
Author	The Planning Inspectorate
Date of meeting	15 May 2026
Meeting with	Meeting with Fred. Olsen Renewables Ltd
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. Any advice given under section 51 would not constitute legal advice upon which applicants (or others) could rely.

The proposed development

Fred Olsen Renewables Ltd (the applicant) intends to apply for a Development Consent Order (DCO) for an onshore wind farm in England of up to 23 turbines, with an on-site substation and associated infrastructure (the proposed development). The site of the proposed development is on an area of moorland located approximately 8km south of Barnard Castle and 12km north of Richmond across the administrative areas of Durham County Council and North Yorkshire Council. The site will comprise of a wind farm array area and a haul route search area with access works and potential highway alterations for supporting abnormal indivisible load (AILs) deliveries.

The applicant added, however, that the proposed development does not include a grid connection, which will be sought under a separate planning application at a later date. The applicant was aware of the potential questions that might be asked at examination, such as on justification of compulsory acquisition and the extent of assessments undertaken and would be setting out its position on these matters in light of the fact this route is permitted under section 4.11 of the EN-1 (Overarching National Policy Statement for Energy), practice and made DCOs

The applicant received a section 35 Direction from the Secretary of State on 21 August 2025 confirming the proposed development to be of national significance. In answer to questions from the Inspectorate, the applicant explained that since the changes under the Infrastructure Planning (Onshore Wind and Solar Generation) Order 2025 to include onshore wind development into the Planning Act 2008 regime, the expected generating capacity of the proposed development is expected to exceed 100 megawatts (MW) to constitute a nationally significant infrastructure project (NSIP) without the need for the section 35 Direction. The applicant added that though refinement of the proposed development is likely following assessment under the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) process, redesign and engagement, which may potentially see changes to the proposed development, the project is still expected to meet the thresholds for generating stations under the Planning Act 2008.

Consenting programme

The applicant has proposed the following programme for the pre-application stage (as outlined in the applicant's initial Programme Document):

- Phase 1 Consultation Q4 2025 - Q2 2026
- EIA Scoping Report Preparation Q4 2025 - Q2 2026
- Submission of Scoping Report to PINS Q2 2026
- Publication of Statement of Community Consultation (SoCC) Q2 2026

- Preparation of ES including Environmental Surveys Q2 2026 – Q4 2026
- Phase 2 Consultation Q4 2026 – Q2 2027
- DCO Submission Q2 2027

Post-meeting note: the Inspectorate is content with the proposed programme and considers it to be similar to other generating station proposals at pre-application, but advises that the programme should be kept under review to respond to any emerging changes to policy, legislation and guidance as well as outcomes to the applicant's consultations and assessments.

Early engagement with statutory bodies, local authorities, and other stakeholders

The applicant confirmed that extensive early engagement has been undertaken with local authorities, parish councils and local organisations since early 2025. This has included introductory discussions with local Councillors in Upper Teesdale, North Richmondshire, Lower Teesdale and Upper Dales, local mayors, host parish councils such as Barningham Parish Council, Marske and New Forest Parish Council, and Newsham Parish Council, the local Members of Parliament for the Bishop Auckland and Richmond and North Allerton constituencies, and organisations such as Durham Wildlife Trust, Environmental Farmers Group, North Yorkshire Moors Association, and Durham RSPB.

Additional parishes are also being included in the applicant's consultation at the request of local authorities, to ensure a broad representation of communities. A programme of eight in-person public information events and a webinar are being held in May 2026 for these communities to find out more about the proposed development, the consultation process, and an opportunity to talk to members of the project team.

The applicant was taking account of the legislative changes to consultation under the Planning and Infrastructure Act 2025. The applicant said it will review the updated guidance when it is published but is currently proposing to undertake two stages of public consultation/engagement. The first stage of public consultation commenced on 6 May 2026 and will run until 30 June 2026, providing an opportunity for consultees and the local community to comment on its emerging proposals. A second stage of consultation is anticipated in late 2026, following further environmental surveys and assessments, and is expected to include further environmental information produced following the first phase of consultation as appropriate. The applicant emphasised its commitment to ongoing engagement with prescribed consultees, local authorities and the local community throughout the pre-application process.

The Inspectorate raised queried the overlap between the consultation period in May 2026 and the intended EIA scoping stage. The applicant noted there was no legal basis for separating out the two processes and is undertaking communications with the local community and relevant groups to explain the differences and purpose between EIA scoping and community consultation to address any confusion. The applicant stated that there was some misunderstanding shared on certain online platforms in the local area regarding the scoping process, which it was keen to address and answer any questions.

The applicant said it was seeking to make the DCO process as clear and transparent as possible for parties through its engagement strategy as well as explaining the mechanisms for consultation feedback. The applicant added that it would provide relevant information material at each stage, especially given the limited knowledge of onshore wind energy.

The Inspectorate advised that, where possible, scoping and consultation activities should be clearly distinguished to avoid confusion and noted that it may issue responses to any non-statutory scoping representations received, signposting parties to its published advice. The Inspectorate noted the applicant's engagement approach and advised that the applicant should ensure to follow good practice for consultation even if this is no longer statutorily required, to ensure that appropriate levels of project information and design masterplans are made available at appropriate stages during pre-application for parties to be able to make informed responses on the proposed development and any significant changes made.

Environmental constraints and issues

The applicant highlighted several environmental considerations relevant to the site, including:

- Landscape and visual impacts, particularly given the proximity to the North Yorkshire Moors and nearby National Parks
- Ecological constraints, including protected species, ornithology (protected and red list bird species), protected habitats, and effects on designated sites including Special Areas of Conservation (SACs)
- Peatland, including disturbance and peat depth constraints, as well as areas of blanket bog
- Hydrology and water environment connectivity
- Historic mining legacy
- Cultural heritage assets and proximity to scheduled monuments.

The applicant is also undertaking relevant surveys and assessments for noise effects on nearby receptors, shadow flicker impacts, and air quality primarily during the construction phase. Climate change and greenhouse gas emissions are also being scoped in for assessment. Additionally, the applicant said that there are several public rights of way (PRoW) and areas of common land which will need to be managed during construction, but it was not considered that changes to the PRoW network or access rights will be needed.

The applicant confirmed that the current layout has been informed by its peat surveys, with an aim to locate infrastructure in areas of shallow or degraded peat to avoid higher-quality peat areas. The design of the proposed development is also taking into account known heritage assets and buffers to avoid direct impacts and taking an avoidance-first approach in accordance with applying the mitigation hierarchy.

The Inspectorate queried whether the avoidance approach extends to associated infrastructure such as access tracks. The applicant confirmed that while avoidance is the primary principle, a detailed design is still under development.

The Inspectorate also raised potential impacts on blanket bog, an irreplaceable habitat and the possibility of loss and/or degradation. The applicant confirmed that this is being considered and may influence further refinements to the design layout.

The Inspectorate confirmed that consideration should also be given to potential impacts on bats alongside ornithological receptors from collision risk, barrier effects, and barotrauma. The applicant confirmed that further bat surveys are scheduled to be undertaken to inform their environmental assessments.

EIA scoping

The applicant confirmed that all relevant EIA topics will be included within its Scoping Report, which will follow the standard format and is currently being finalised. The Scoping Report will be informed by the applicant's extensive desk-based research undertaken, the applicant added, which will be reviewed further after other assessments and surveys have been carried out. The only difference in approach to the applicant's Scoping Report will be the inclusion of material assets and waste, human health, and major accidents and disasters being collated in the 'Other Environmental Topics' chapter.

Environmental surveys

The applicant outlined its current and planned survey work, including:

- Landscape and visual assessments, with agreements on viewpoints to be reach as well as the inclusion of LVIA photography taken during suitable weather conditions
- Tree surveys to be conducted during Q3 2026
- Cultural heritage desk-based investigations and potentially archaeological desk-based assessments throughout the summer and autumn of 2026
- Ecology and biodiversity surveys (the applicant said that it had already carried NVC habitat surveys during Q3 2024 and 2025, UKHab ground truth and condition assessment during Q2 and Q3 2025, Bat surveys between Q2 and Q3 2024, protected species surveys in June 2025, Fish survey in June 2024, and White-clawed crayfish survey in July 2024)
- Ornithology surveys, to be carried out during the 2026 Breeding Season (March to August) for flight activity, scarce breeding bird, black grouse, moorland breeding bird and also nocturnal surveys (the applicant said that surveys were carried out between April 2022 to February 2024, based on the preliminary turbine layout, for flight activity, scarce breeding birds, black grouse, moorland breeding bird, breeding nightjar, and also winter walkovers)

- Geology, ground conditions and Peat to include a site walkover to support the preliminary land quality risk assessment and a desk-based Peatland Condition Assessment supported by a programme of detailed peat surveys during Q3 2026 (the applicant added that a low-resolution peat depth survey was conducted in November 2024)
- Water environment, including walkover surveys to review hydrological features and confirm findings of desk studies, to be undertaken in Q3 2026
- Traffic and transport surveys, including a transport assessment, and undertaking traffic counts (including speed survey) on the local highway network in the form of Automatic Traffic Counters on highway links during Q2 2026 (the applicant explained that a turbine and tower component delivery route feasibility assessment was undertaken in December 2025 to identify potential feasible routes to the site)
- Noise and vibration baseline surveys on sensitive receptors during 2026
- Detailed desk-based assessments for Tourism, Human Health, Air Quality, Aviation Radar and Telecommunications, Climate Change and Greenhouse Gas, and Shadow Flicker.

The applicant said that its traffic surveys are expected to be undertaken prior to the summer holiday period, except for the May half-term. The Inspectorate queried the applicant's approach to avoiding the holiday periods in its data gathering. The applicant confirmed that this reflects standard practice, as holiday periods can distort baseline traffic conditions, but would consider any potential outliers such as the extent of tourism in the area that may need to be addressed in its assessments and traffic management plans. The Inspectorate advised that the reasoning for the applicant's approach should be clearly explained within the relevant DCO application documents.

The draft Development Consent Order

The applicant confirmed that there are no anticipated novel or complex drafting approaches being taken in the DCO, or expected to be taken, having regard to relevant precedent and established DCO drafting practice. The applicant however will engage with the Inspectorate if any materially novel or non-standard drafting approaches emerge as the DCO is developed. The applicant's legal advisers are known to have extensive experience of the NSIP process and are continuing to track and respond to any new conventions or standard requirements for generating stations in other made DCOs, to achieve consistency and to follow approved approaches, while complying with the relevant National Policy Statements.

Land and rights

The applicant confirmed that the main site array area is within the ownership of two landowners who are engaged in the project through option agreements. At this stage, the likelihood of needing complex compulsory acquisition is not anticipated for the main site,

although it may be retained as a fall-back position. However, the route to the site for deliveries may require temporary crossing or over sail of land which is yet to be finalised.

The Inspectorate emphasised the importance of clearly justifying any compulsory acquisition powers in its DCO application and ensuring that land rights are fully understood and addressed (as far as feasible) early in the process.

As the grid connection works are not currently included within the proposed development, compulsory acquisition may be required for that element under the separate application. The Inspectorate advised that a discussion to understand more about the interrelationship between the proposed development and a separate grid connection application may need to be held at a future Project Update Meeting, when further information is available on the applicant's plans.

Submission date

The applicant anticipates submitting its DCO application in Q2 2027, but this may be subject to change.

The pre-application service offer

The service tier requested by the applicant, including justification

The applicant indicated that it intends to proceed under the basic pre-application service tier for the reasons given at the inception meeting and the level of knowledge and experience with the DCO process of the applicant's team. The Inspectorate agreed with the applicant's approach and would confirm the tier service shortly after the meeting.

The Inspectorate advised the applicant to have regard to its published advice on change requests and emphasised that potential changes should be identified and raised as early as possible. The ability to accommodate change requests, especially those that affected the compulsory acquisition regulations, can be constrained during examination and should be avoided as far as feasibly possible.

Practical Arrangements

The Inspectorate confirmed that the project page will be made live on its Find a National Infrastructure Project website on Monday 18 May 2026, ahead of receiving the applicant's scoping request. An invoice for the Inspectorate's pre-application fees would be issued soon after, with payment made before the Scoping Opinion is issued (as agreed by the Inspectorate, owing to the delay to issuing the invoice for this particular project).

The Inspectorate also advised on document submission limits and confirmed that alternative arrangements, such as SharePoint, may be required for large files.

The applicant queried whether visual materials (e.g. Zone of Theoretical Visibility and habitat maps) could be published on its website in advance of the scoping submission. The Inspectorate confirmed that it had no objection to this approach.

The applicant confirmed that the Scoping Report is in the final stages of preparation and is expected to be submitted by the end of the following week. The Inspectorate confirmed that resources are in place to receive the submission.

Feedback on the applicant’s initial Programme Document (post meeting note)

The applicant supplied the Inspectorate with its initial Programme Document before the inception meeting in line with our request under the 2024 Pre-application Prospectus. Having reviewed the document, the Inspectorate considers that it covers the expected content as set out in the government’s pre-application guidance at paragraph 10. In particular, the Programme Document provides a good summary of the proposed development, its pre-application timetable, approach to early engagement with statutory consultees and other parties, outlining a good main issues section capturing its view of the issues arising from the proposed development and the activities needed to resolve them, as well as the risks.

It would be useful, however, if the applicant could provide some detail as to the significant cultural heritage assets on or near the site in its ‘main issues section’ that may require specific assessment and mitigation, as well as any ecological designations (in the way the applicant has done so for landscape by denoting the North Yorkshire Moors National Park and North Pennines National Landscape as receptors). Further detail, including the applicant’s progress with agreeing its methodology and scope of surveys, assessments and mitigation needed, with relevant parties, should be captured in the applicant’s Issues Tracker, to record the progress made with resolving these issues during pre-application.

Annex A

Meeting attendees

Organisation	Role
Planning Inspectorate	Operations Lead
Planning Inspectorate	Operations Manager
Planning Inspectorate	Case Manager
Planning Inspectorate	Case Officer
Planning Inspectorate	Environmental Services Operations Lead

SLR Consulting	Technical Director
SLR Consulting	Technical Director
SLR Consulting	Technical Director
Fred. Olden Renewables	Senior Project Manager
Fred. Olden Renewables	Project Director
Fred. Olden Renewables	Project Manager
Fred. Olden Renewables	Assistant Project Manager
Mustafa Latif-Aramesh	Partner
Beth King	Associate
Natasha Kendal	Associate Director