



Inception Meeting note

Project name	Hinkley Point C Connection Project Material Change Application
Case reference	EN0210004
Status	Final
Author	The Planning Inspectorate
Date of meeting	23 October 2024
Meeting with	Meeting with National Grid Electricity Transmission Transmission (NGET)
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 Inception Meeting note could be delayed by up to 6 months (if requested by the Applicant for commercial reasons), or until a formal scoping request had been submitted.

The Applicant outlined proposals to submit an application for a material change to the Hinkley Point C Connection Development Consent Order in order to ensure that access to the transmission assets in future for maintenance and emergency works is suitable.

NGET was granted the Hinkley Point C Connection 2016 Order by the then Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change on 19 January 2016. Work on the construction of the project, a new high voltage electricity connection between Bridgwater and Seabank near Avonmouth, commenced in 2018 and is expected to be completed by the end of 2025. Reinstatement has commenced and is expected to be completed in 2026.

The Applicant outlined that the core elements of the change application will seek to provide permanent bellmouths, gates and access tracks, permanent culvert crossings, permanent workpads, any other works to install the permanent infrastructure for example landscaping and planting and amendments to powers and land rights set out in the Development Consent Order.

An overview of the need for the application was provided to the Inspectorate. The Applicant explained that there have been instances where the means of maintenance access to the transmission line authorised by the 2016 Order are no longer considered

suitable. The main reason for this is due to the nature of plant and equipment needed to maintain the T-Pylons.

The Applicant advised that alternative means of maintenance access have been identified however they cannot currently be utilised because the 2016 Order does not grant development consent for the works (if any) which would need to be carried out to facilitate maintenance access and NGET does not currently have sufficient rights over land to enable that alternative to be constructed, used and/or maintained.

The Applicant provided an overview of the Host Local Planning Authorities relevant to the project. The Applicant confirmed that the project falls within the administrative boundaries of Bristol City Council, North Somerset, Somerset Council and South Gloucestershire Council. The Applicant confirmed that in 2023 the relevant district councils of Sedgemoor, Somerset West and Taunton Council and Somerset County Council merged to form the new unitary authority 'Somerset Council'.

The Applicant provided an overview to the consideration of the guidance and advised that the proposed changes to the 2016 DCO are considered material due to the need to compulsorily acquire additional land rights for maintenance access and operational use and the need for an updated Environmental Statement and Habitats Regulations Assessment. The Inspectorate reminded the Applicant that the application documents should clearly state why the Applicant considers a material change application, rather than a new Development Consent Order application, to be appropriate. The Inspectorate further reminded the Applicant that this should also be made clear in consultation material provided to stakeholders ensuring that those engaging in the process are aware of how the processes differ.

The Applicant provided the Inspectorate with an outline of the Pre-Application activities undertaken to date. The Applicant confirmed that early surveys, monitoring and licence compliance and the preliminary design work remain ongoing along with consultation preparation and pre-application engagement with key stakeholders having commenced in April 2024. The Applicant advised that Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Scoping Report preparation had commenced and that technical advisors had begun the drafting.

The Applicant informed the Inspectorate that the purpose of the updated Environmental Statement (ES) is to facilitate a comparison to the original ES. The Inspectorate advised that where the Scoping Report includes any reference to information contained in the original ES it should ideally be included in the updated statement to ensure that all interested parties are able to access any required information without having to gain access to the original documentation. The Inspectorate also suggested that the Applicant would find it helpful to look at the approach taken for previous material change applications such as the Able Marine Energy Park Material Change 2.

The Applicant outlined the stakeholder engagement that had been undertaken to date providing summaries of key discussions undertaken with Local Planning Authorities, Landowners, Internal Drainage Boards, Natural England, Environment Agency and Highway Authorities. The Applicant provided an overview of the engagement and consultation phases anticipated to be undertaken up until the submission of the application. The Applicant provided the Inspectorate with an overview of the proposed methods of consultation and engagement including dedicated project pages, mailouts along with online webinars and face-to-face consultation events.

The Applicant confirmed that it is undertaking stakeholder mapping exercises to identify the appropriate consultees who must be consulted under Regulation 10 of the Infrastructure Planning (Change to, and Revocation of, Development Consent Orders) Regulations 2011 (as amended) and confirmed that a proportionate consultee list will be agreed with the relevant Secretary of State in accordance with Regulation 10.

The Applicant provided the Inspectorate with an overview of the potential scope of compulsory acquisition in addition to the potential constraints and issues associated with the powers. The Applicant advised that the application would seek amendments to the DCO Order Limits and seek compulsory powers of acquisition over new land areas outside 2016 DCO. The application would also include proposed changes to upgrade land rights in some areas where previously only temporary acquisition was sought.

The Applicant confirmed that it is their intention to enter into approximately 295 target agreements of which 40 are new landowners to the project. The Applicant advised that the process of contacting and negotiating voluntary option agreement with the landowners has commenced as the intention is to minimise compulsory acquisition powers.

The Applicant provided the Inspectorate with an overview to the current project programme and confirmed that the EIA Scoping Opinion request is currently programmed for Quarter 1 (Q1) 2025 with an intention to submit the application for a material change to the 2016 Order in Q1 2026.