



Inception Meeting note

Project name	Morven Offshore Wind Farm
Case reference	EN0210005
Status	Final
Author	The Planning Inspectorate
Date of meeting	14 October 2024
Meeting with	Morven Offshore Windfarm 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 (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 required by the developer for commercial confidentiality/sensitivity reasons, or until a formal scoping request had been submitted.

1. The proposed development

• Detailed description of the Proposed Development

The Applicant (Morven Offshore Windfarm Ltd) explained that the proposals are a joint venture between BP and ENBW aiming to connect the Morven Offshore Wind Farm to the National Grid to provide up to 2.9 Gigawatts of capacity. The proposal will connect the offshore wind farm via subsea HVDC cables to an existing National Grid connection at Hawthorn Pit located between Murton and South Hetton in the north east of England. The proposals will require the construction of a cable jointing bay along with onshore underground cabling to connect to a new substation which will connect to Hawthorn Pit. The Applicant explained that the offshore wind farm element is located within Scottish waters and the offshore cable route and onshore element of the project will be located within English territorial waters and land. Morven offshore wind farm will also be connected to mainland Scotland at Brankstone via a separate project outside of this DCO application.

The applicant advised that it is currently considering two potential routes for its grid connection for the offshore elements of the project and three landfall search areas and corresponding cable routes for the onshore elements of the project. The proposed

substation location search area is associated with the existing Hawthorn Pit site. There is existing infrastructure and multiple other land uses within the onshore cable route search areas and proposed substation search area.

Offshore, the subsea cable will pass either to the east or west of a Marine Protected Area. The Applicant intends to refine the options for the offshore cable route and onshore elements during pre-application, with a view to presenting a single option in the Preliminary Environmental Information Report.

- **Consenting programme and introduction to the pre-application Programme Document**

The applicant advised:

Environmental Impact Assessment Scoping Opinion request submission is planned for October 2024;

PEIR consultation is planned for Q3 of 2025;

DCO Submission is intended for Q3 of 2025.

The Planning Inspectorate Advised that the Applicant's pre-application schedule was not detailed enough at present in terms of Programme Document content and that Statutory Consultees would be looking for more information regarding the project including timescales. The Applicant's attention was drawn to the Inspectorate's Pre-Application Prospectus for guidance on the information to be included.

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

Stakeholder engagement has taken place with Durham County and Sunderland City Councils and various Parish Councils that fall within the boundary of the project.

The Applicant advised there had been limited engagement so far with Statutory bodies. The applicant intends to undertake further engagement with Parish Councils and more non statutory bodies in Q2 of 2025. The Inspectorate advised that Applicant may wish to begin work on an issues tracker for the application, to assist in identifying the main issues as consultation progresses and noted the benefits of doing so from the start of the pre-application process.

- **EIA Scoping**

The Applicant advised it was intending to request a scoping opinion in October 2024 and that the scoping opinion would influence its ultimate decision on which of the cable route options to select.

The applicant identified a number of environmental surveys are currently ongoing which will also inform the refinement of the proposals.

The Planning Inspectorate asked if the Applicant has reached agreement with the relevant consultees on any cost recovery arrangements. It noted that without such agreements

being in place, consultees may decline to respond to a scoping opinion consultation or only provide limited detail in responses.

The Inspectorate encouraged the Applicant to consider if the timing of its request for a scoping opinion would achieve the best outcome for the project, given the early stage in the refinement of the proposals. The Planning Inspectorate advised that with substantial optionality included in a scoping boundary, there can be the need to consult with very high numbers of certain consultees, in particular Parish Councils. This can dilute the value of scoping as a tool to shape the environmental assessment.

- **Preparing the draft Development Consent Order, including any novel approaches to drafting**

The Applicant explained its intention to refine the proposals in advance of and following the PEIR stage, and that it is not intending to include the breadth of optionality which is currently being explored in the DCO application. The proposals are at an early stage and it was agreed to discuss preparation of the DCO at a later meeting as things evolve.

- **Land and rights: Scope of compulsory acquisition etc powers sought and potential constraints and issues**

The Applicant advised that as the proposals stand, including the options that are being explored, the onshore works would involve approximately 120 different landowners. The Applicant's aim is to refine the proposals and would expect this number to be significantly reduced as this process matures.

- **Submission date**

The Applicant advised The Inspectorate that it intended to submit the Development Consent Order (DCO) in Q2/Q3 of 2026.

2. The pre-application service offer

- **The service tier requested by the applicant, including justification**

The Applicant advised that it would like to proceed with the standard level of service. It advised that the measures taken by the project team it did not envisage requiring any higher level of service. The applicant was advised a maximum of 6 meetings per year were permitted within this level of service after the inception meeting, including any multi-party meetings subject to their agreement. The Planning Inspectorate advised that they would confirm the tier of service to the Applicant, along with a request for invoicing details within 28 days.

The Inspectorate advised that should a change of service level be requested that 6 months notice would need to be given

3. Practical Arrangements

- **Confirming the pre-application tier service and invoicing**

The Applicant was advised that a webpage, to be hosted on the Inspectorate's 'Find a National Infrastructure Project' website needed to be set up. The publication of this meeting note could be delayed for up to 6 months after the inception meeting or until the Scoping Request was received, whichever was sooner. The Applicant confirmed that they would notify the Inspectorate of the timescale within which the project webpage could be published.

- **Draft Documents**

The Inspectorate informed the Applicant of the draft documents feedback service offered by the Inspectorate. If submitted, the Applicant would receive feedback on any submitted documents within six weeks. The Inspectorate advised the Applicant that documents submitted should be well developed and that the Applicant should allow time in pre-application to take feedback into account in the final submission.

- **Project email account**

The Inspectorate advised the Applicant that a project email account had been requested.

- **Statutory Instrument Template access**

The Inspectorate advised the Applicant to ensure that they had access to the SI checking tool. This is necessary to ensure that the Inspectorate, at Acceptance, received a draft Development Consent Order (dDCO) which had been validated.

- **Contacts**

The Applicant was advised that a Case Manager would be assigned in due course and would be its main contact for the project.