



## Inception Meeting note

<b>Project name</b>	<b>Weston Marsh to East Leicestershire</b>
<b>Case reference</b>	<b>EN0210007</b>
<b>Status</b>	<b>Final</b>
<b>Author</b>	<b>The Planning Inspectorate</b>
<b>Date of meeting</b>	<b>13 June 2025</b>
<b>Meeting with</b>	<b>Meeting with National Grid Electricity Transmission</b>
<b>Venue</b>	<b>Microsoft Teams</b>
<b>Circulation</b>	<b>All attendees</b>

### 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 (PA2008). Any advice given under section 51 would not constitute legal advice upon which applicants (or others) could rely.

### 1. The proposed development

#### Regional Overview

The applicant explained that the Weston Marsh to East Leicestershire Project forms part of 'The Great Grid Upgrade', a wider strategic overhaul of the electricity grid, aiming to secure a more resilient energy network in the UK.

The applicant detailed that there are five key upgrades in the region that are being planned and stressed the importance of having a consistent consultation approach across projects where possible to reduce consultation fatigue and confusion. As such, the applicant is taking measures with the nearby Grimsby to Walpole nationally significant infrastructure project (NSIP) to launch consultations on the same day and hold concurrent consultation events where applicable.

The Inspectorate asked if the approach to co-ordination with other projects would continue through the assessment and construction phases of the proposed development, with a view to minimising impacts where there is overlap in activity. The applicant stated that project teams and consultants in the region are aligned in their approach, taking all opportunities to reduce cumulative impacts where possible.

#### Detailed description of the proposed development

The proposed development would comprise of circa 60km of new 400 kilovolt (kV) electricity transmission line between Weston Marsh and East Leicestershire to strengthen the east to west electricity capabilities. It would connect into the Weston Marsh refined substation siting area, which is proposed under the Grimsby to Walpole NSIP. The proposed development will include 2 new substations, the first known as WMEL-A will likely be situated near Corby Glen in Lincolnshire to the north of the A151 alongside an existing overhead line (OHL); and the second known as WMEL-B will be likely located near Wartnaby in Leicestershire where the new OHL meets the existing 400kV line. The applicant identified emerging site preferences for the substations; regarding technology type, its starting point is to use air-insulated switchgear. As part of the Development Consent Order (DCO), approximately 55km of reconductoring of the existing OHL between the new WMEL-B and an existing substation in Grendon was being proposed. The reconductoring work would consist of the replacement of pylon fittings, as well as replacing and upgrading the conductors.

The applicant explained that the reconductoring works would form associated development and that the reconductoring of that section of the existing overhead line is important in realising the benefits of the new OHL.

The Inspectorate stressed the importance of clearly outlining in the applicants' documents why any associated development is necessary and how it relates to the NSIP itself. The Inspectorate advised further to clearly outline in the consultation material what the reconductoring works consist of, making full use of the diagrams and visual aids as used in previous grid projects. The Inspectorate stressed the importance of including the key considerations for landowners affected by the reconductoring work in the consultation materials, such as the timings of work that will be carried out, access to land required, and the effects of the works on the land.

The applicant identified the emerging preferred corridor following initial technical and environmental assessments. Information regarding the emerging preferred corridor, including the methodology and identification of a graduated swathe could be found in the Corridor Preliminary Routeing and Siting Study (CPRSS), available on the applicant's webpage for Stage 1 (non-statutory) consultation. The Applicant provided an overview of the options identification and selection process, including an overview of the methodology used.

## **Consenting programme**

The applicant provided the following high-level programme for the consenting regime:

Non-statutory Consultation - June to August 2025  
EIA Scoping Request - Q4 2025  
EIA Scoping Opinion - Q4 2025  
Statutory Consultation - Q3 2026 (Anticipated)  
DCO Submission - Q1 2028 (Anticipated)

The Inspectorate advised that anticipated dates would now be entered as months on the project webpage, to create consistency which will allow for better planning of resource and that the applicant should keep the inspectorate informed of any updates to anticipated dates.

## **The pre-application programme document**

The Inspectorate commented that the programme document was a good demonstration of the content expected according to government advice notes.

The Inspectorate advised the applicant to include approximate timescales for future meetings to allow consultation bodies to plan and resource their input to the proposed development.

The Inspectorate suggested the applicant should indicate if any crown land or special category land would be involved or what statutory undertaker assets interact with the project, and to outline how securing agreements were developing to maximise the usefulness of the programme document. The Inspectorate advised that it would be beneficial to include more detail about key environmental issues in future iterations of the programme document, as these develop through engagement with the consultation bodies. The Applicant explained that key environmental issues would be built on within the programme document following the close of non-statutory consultation and when EIA Scoping activities are underway later in 2025.

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

The applicant noted that they had carried out several meetings with the relevant local planning authorities since November/December 2024, and engagement was underway in negotiating Planning Performance Agreements.

The Inspectorate mentioned the local planning authority network had been beneficial for Councils who are less experienced in the DCO process. Suffolk County Council had made available various resources to aid in guiding local authority officers.

### [Local authorities, including Suffolk's NSIP Centre of Excellence - Suffolk County Council](#)

Currently, key environmental stakeholders had received notification of Stage 1 (non-statutory) consultation for feedback, and further contact would be made in due course. The applicant confirmed that this would include Natural England, the Environment Agency (EA) and Historic England, amongst others.

## **Environmental constraints and issues**

The applicant presented the key environmental constraints for the proposed development, which had been identified within the emerging preferred corridor. It explained that these features will be avoided or mitigated as the OHL is further refined:

- Two Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) had been identified within (and partially within) the emerging preferred corridor, Cribbs Lodge SSSI and Holwell Mouth SSSI, as well as ancient woodland, seven main watercourses and other

priority habitats. The applicant added that it would aim to avoid direct impacts to these features through design of the proposed development.

- Several designated heritage assets had been identified within the emerging preferred corridor. Grimsthorpe Castle Registered Park and Garden is outside but adjacent to the emerging preferred corridor, for which there are no direct impacts, but potentially setting impacts dependent on final routeing and siting. There was high potential for buried archaeological remains in the eastern fenland portion.
- The applicant explained that there was a varied landscape, with flat open fenland to the east, transitioning to undulating farmland further west. It explained that there was potential for localised indirect effects on Grimsthorpe Castle RPG and Stapleford Park RPG as well as potential for effects on residential receptors.
- Water Framework Directive (WFD) waterbodies and source protection zones (SPZ) were present within the emerging preferred corridor. Areas of Flood Zone 2 and 3 have been identified on the eastern edge as well as smaller areas throughout the corridor.
- There was likely to be best and most versatile (BMV) agricultural land present. The Inspectorate queried the applicant's approach to survey, and the applicant stated it would update on this at a later date.
- The applicant stated that the proposed development was not located in a nationally designated landscape, but it has potential to affect three National Landscape Character Areas, various public rights of way (including a national cycle network route and the E2 long-distance path) as well as open greenspace.

The applicant reported that there were no European sites in the vicinity of the emerging preferred corridor, with the nearest being 2.5km away. It was proposing to prepare and submit a no significant effects report (NSER) as part of the DCO application.

The proposed development would interact with two NSIPs, Grimsby to Walpole (which is a separate project promoted by National Grid) and Lincolnshire Reservoir and Pipeline. There were some potential aviation and defence receptors in the emerging preferred corridor, but the applicant considered that any identified risks could be managed. The proposed development would intersect with the Peterborough to Lincoln rail line, East Coast Mainline, as well as several A and B roads across the route.

The Inspectorate reminded the applicant that early engagement with Network Rail is important in developing any required protective provisions.

The Inspectorate advised the applicant that the EA has recently updated its flood risk data, and guidance on the approach to flood risk assessment. The Inspectorate would expect this information to be considered in the applicant's assessment work.

## **EIA scoping**

The applicant was at an early stage of preparations for its scoping request and was targeting submission in November 2025 with adoption of a scoping opinion by the end of 2025. It stated that the scoping boundary would be wider than the graduated swathe to provide flexibility to accommodate future design evolution. It planned to hold engagement meetings with key statutory consultation bodies prior to submission of its scoping request. The Inspectorate asked the applicant to consider the timing and programme for its scoping given the potential to interact with typical holiday periods in December.

The Inspectorate flagged that its Advice Note Seven: Environmental Impact Assessment: process, preliminary environmental information and environmental statements sets out practical and technical information that may be of use to the applicant in preparation of its scoping request.

### **Environmental surveys**

The applicant currently proposed a three-year survey strategy based on its pre-application timeline, addressing a range of baseline conditions including ecology. The Inspectorate commented that from initial review the proposed survey approach appeared comprehensive and advised the applicant to engage with the relevant statutory consultation bodies around the scope and timing of the surveys.

The Inspectorate asked about the applicant's approach to accessing land to carry out survey work. The applicant confirmed that s172 of The Housing and Planning Act 2016 will be used for access requirements for any survey work.

### **Preparing the draft development consent order, including any novel approaches to drafting**

The Inspectorate commented on the importance of finalising agreed protective provisions as early as possible so they can be included in the draft DCO during the pre-application stage, and encouraged the applicant to review past projects' agreed provisions to aid in this. The Applicant explained that it would expect to follow established precedents from similar NSIPs and that no novel approaches to drafting had been identified at this early stage.

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

The applicant explained that work was underway to understand what existing rights were available in aiding the reconductoring of the existing overhead line and will update the Inspectorate accordingly. The applicant provided an overview of the scope of rights required, including an overview of potential constraints.

### **Non-statutory consultation**

Stage 1 consultation began on 11 June 2025 and would close on 6 August 2025. As part of the early engagement with Local Authority's the applicant shared its Stage 1 (non-statutory) consultation strategy for review and comments. The community newsletter had been distributed to around 10,000 people and was the main method of communication to launch the consultation, with a primary consultation zone (PCZ) of around 1km either side of the cable route corridor, and 250m either side of the reconductoring route.

The Applicant was holding eight in-person consultation events, five webinar events, as well as separate parish council webinars, and noted that part of the PCZ for this project and the

Grimsby to Walpole project cross over, and as such a joint in-person event will be held for both and two community newsletters will be sent to those residents where the projects overlap.

The applicant would be reporting feedback on the consultation through an updated newsletter and then later a consultation feedback report which will be provided at Stage 2 (statutory) consultation.

The Inspectorate advised the applicant to explain to consultees what information is available at this stage of the application at the consultation events, and to clarify the timeline of when more detailed design information would become available for consultees to comment on further.

## **2. The pre-application service offer**

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

The applicant stated its preferred tier for the pre-application service was standard. The Applicant explained that the standard service tier would provide the project with an appropriate and proportionate level of pre-application engagement with PINS, reflective of the scale and nature of the project and NGET's level of experience as an applicant. The applicant also explained that there were lessons learnt and expertise in producing documentation available to the project. The applicant explained that it would engage with the primary service features when required. The inspectorate considered that the standard service was likely to be appropriate and would confirm this following the meeting. **Post Meeting Note:** The Inspectorate has confirmed that the project will follow the standard service tier.

### **Other pre-application features**

The Inspectorate advised the applicant, when discussing the draft document service, to give advance notice of the list of documents that would be required to review at the appropriate time in the pre-application programme. The applicant explained that the list of documents would be similar to what is often requested to review by the Inspectorate. The Inspectorate noted that the design approach document and policy compliance documents (supplementary components) are particularly useful to include in submission.

## **3. Comments on the Programme Document**

- Good demonstration of compliance with the Planning Act 2008: Pre-application stage for NSIP Guidance. The applicant would be aware that one of the mandatory components of the new pre-application service (for all service tiers), as set out in the NSIP: 2024 Pre-application Prospectus, is demonstrating regard to advice. As such this should be clearly reflected in the application documents.
- The applicant must ensure that the programme document (PD) is hosted and maintained on the applicant's website.

- It would be helpful if the timeframes for the submission of the adequacy of consultation milestone (AoCM), draft document review, and the application submission, could be narrowed in due course, to enable the Inspectorate to deploy resources effectively. The applicant should allow a six-week period for the Inspectorate's review of draft documents and to ensure that sufficient time is available to review the feedback ahead of the submission of the application.
- The Inspectorate strongly suggested that both the draft document review, and AoCM review, take place after all consultation has been completed. This would help ensure that the Inspectorate reviews more finalised versions of documents which in turn should enable more meaningful feedback.
- It would be helpful if the PD could provide approximate timescales for project update meetings with the Inspectorate. It would also be helpful to list any future meetings with key stakeholders to enable those parties to deploy resources effectively.
- Whilst the PD understandably provides a quarter (Q1 2028) for the submission date, the Inspectorate was adding a month to the project website in order to assist external bodies with resource planning, as well as to capture data more effectively. As such, the Inspectorate would add "March 2028" as the submission date on the project page. This of course would be kept under review throughout the pre-application stage.

