



## Inception Meeting note

<b>Project name</b>	<b>Cross Border Connection (England)</b>
<b>Case reference</b>	<b>EN0210011</b>
<b>Status</b>	<b>Final</b>
<b>Author</b>	<b>The Planning Inspectorate</b>
<b>Date of meeting</b>	<b>20 November 2025</b>
<b>Meeting with</b>	<b>Meeting with applicant name</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 (the Planning Act). Any advice given under section 51 would not constitute legal advice upon which applicants (or others) could rely.

### The proposed development

A Development Consent Order (DCO) will be sought by National Grid Electricity Transmission (NGET) (the applicant) for the proposed Cross Border Connection (England) project (the proposed development). The proposed development is considered to be a nationally significant infrastructure project (NSIP) as defined by section 16 of the Planning Act and the Planning Act 2008 (Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects) (Electric Lines) Order 2013, as it involves the installation of an electricity line above ground of more than 2 kilometres (km), which will operate at 400kV in England.

The proposed development would form part of the applicant's strategic upgrade of the grid network in the North of England and the overarching Cross Border Connection between England and Scotland as a joint project by NGET and Scottish Power Energy Networks (SPEN). NGET is developing the section of the project located in England, which would extend from the England-Scotland border to a substation in the Carlisle area and then connect to the existing network. SPEN is developing the section of the project in Scotland, extending from the proposed Gala North Substation near Lauder to the Scotland-England border, which will require separate consent under section 37 of the 1989 Electricity Act in Scotland. The proposed development in England will be located wholly within the County of Cumbria, within the administrative area of Cumberland Council.

The proposed development includes:

- a new 400 kV substation in the Carlisle area
- a new double-circuit 400 kV overhead line between the new Carlisle substation and the England–Scotland border
- a connection from the new Carlisle substation to the existing network.

Two options for where the substation could be located are currently being considered:

- Option A - a substation in an area north of Carlisle which would include approximately 28 kilometre (km) of proposed overhead line between the proposed substation and the England-Scotland border, and between the proposed substation and existing Harker substation
- Option B - a substation located in the area south of Carlisle, which would include approximately 47 km of proposed overhead line, including the line between the proposed substation and England-Scotland border, and between the proposed substation and existing Harker-Hutton overhead line.

Only one option will be taken forward in the DCO application.

The Applicant noted that other projects, may connect into the new Carlisle substation, although these projects are less developed and therefore the applicant does not yet have full clarity on these interactions. Further information is anticipated from NESO's forthcoming report.

## **Consenting programme**

The applicant shared its draft consenting programme, namely:

- Introductory meetings with statutory consultees – May to September 2025
- Non-statutory consultation (Stage 1) – 15 October to 10 December 2025
- EIA Scoping Request – Q2 2026
- EIA Scoping Opinion – Q2 2026
- Statement of Community Consultation – Q3 2026
- Statutory Consultation (Stage 2) – Q3/Q4 2026/27
- Further targeted consultation - to be confirmed if needed
- Environmental Impact Assessment Surveys – Q4 2025 to Q4 2027
- Review of draft documents by the Inspectorate – Q1 to Q2 2028
- Adequacy of Consultation Milestone statement – Q1 to Q2 2028
- DCO application submission – September 2028
- DCO examination and decision – Q3 2028 to Q1 2030
- Discharge requirements – Q1 to Q3 2030
- Construction – Q3 2030 to Q4 2032
- Connection - Q1 2023

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

The applicant commenced its non-statutory consultation on 15 October 2025, which will run until 10 December 2025. It has held six in-person events and four public webinars to introduce the proposed development and its early design phase with stakeholders and to obtain initial feedback. The applicant said that its events to date had been well attended by local communities, who have asked questions about the need for the two substation options and the justification for Option B, which would involve a route that crosses the Hadrian's Wall World Heritage Site. The applicant

expects to provide stakeholders with greater clarity on its proposals and rationale for its preferred option as the pre-application stage progresses and as it refines its design following assessments and non-statutory and statutory consultation feedback.

The applicant added that its proposed development is also expected to be informed by network recommendations in the National Energy System Operator's (NESO)'s 'Beyond 2030 Report', which seek to enable low carbon infrastructure development, offshore and onshore network upgrades, and associate investment by 2035 under targets set in the sixth Carbon Budget and the actions in the Transmission Acceleration Action Plan. In answer to a question from the Inspectorate, the applicant said that it would also be assessing further information from NESO expected to be released in autumn 2026 about grid reinforcement requirements beyond 2035, which would further inform the need case for the proposed development at the statutory consultation stage.

The applicant also held briefings with statutory consultees before consultation took place, based on an indicative study area. Attendees have included to date, Cumberland Council, Historic England, Natural England, the Environment Agency, the Ministry of Defence (in relation to potential low-flying zone matters), and National Highways.

The applicant explained that SPEN has completed its Round 1 consultation and plans to commence Round 2 at the beginning of 2027. Both projects aim to align their Stage 2 consultations, and in answer to a question from the Inspectorate, the applicant said it was working with SPEN on ways to coordinate and communicate the timescales for obtaining the separate consents under the different planning regimes in England and Scotland.

## **Environmental constraints and issues**

As the Option B overhead line would cross the Hadrian's Wall WHS, early engagement has taken place with Historic England to discuss the methodology for assessing potential impacts. The Inspectorate advised the applicant that specific requirements may be issued by the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) on how applicants should assess impacts arising from proposed developments on World Heritage Sites and the methodology to be used. The applicant was advised to seek early engagement with ICOMOS, in addition to Historic England, if required. The Inspectorate referred to ICOMOS' Technical Reviews submitted during the recent examination of the Botley West Solar Farm application (which, for example, ICOMOS specified a need to carry out a Landscape Character Assessment to understand the setting of the asset and broader landscape setting and the precise impacts on the asset's Outstanding Universal Value in that case). The applicant was also advised to review the Secretary of State's decision for the Stonehenge NSIP in relation to the assessments undertaken on heritage assets in that case.

The applicant added that Option B would also require a crossing of the River Eden Special Areas of Conservation (SAC), and that both options A and B overhead lines would fall within the Solway Firth Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) impact zone and overwintering bird surveys will be undertaken. Both options would cross multiple minor watercourses, the applicant said. Additionally, the applicant said that there could be loss of commercial forestry because of the proposed development, including Kershope Forest, but that no protected landscapes fall within the draft Order Limits.

## **EIA scoping**

The applicant confirmed its intention to scope in Q2 2026. It confirmed that both Options A and B would be presented for scoping, with a decision on the option to be taken forward to application made later in 2026 (prior to Stage 2 consultation). The Inspectorate advised that presenting fewer options at scoping generally results in more focused opinions; however, the applicant intends to seek scoping on both options before determining the preferred route. Statutory consultation and the Preliminary Environmental Information Report (PEIR) will only be undertaken on the favoured option.

## **Land rights**

The applicant stated that early engagement with landowners was ongoing, with an intention to secure land acquisition options via voluntary agreements where feasible. However, compulsory acquisition powers would be sought in the DCO.

## **Submission date**

The applicant intends to submit its DCO application for the proposed development in September 2028, which will be subject to review.

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

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

The applicant has initially requested a preference for the 'standard' pre-application service tier, based on NGET's experience of DCO applications and the knowledge of its consultants and staff. However, it was also considering the option of using the enhanced tier if any novel transboundary issues are likely to arise. The Inspectorate said it would confirm the service tier shortly following the meeting, and referred the applicant to the Inspectorate's 2024 Pre-application Prospectus, which expects applicants to provide the Inspectorate at least 3 months' notice of a request to change tier and the likelihood and timing of such a request which should be set out in the Programme Document.

## **Feedback on the applicant's initial Programme Document (post-meeting advice)**

The applicant supplied the Inspectorate with its initial Programme Document before the inception meeting, in line with the 2024 Pre-application Prospectus. Having reviewed the document, the Inspectorate considers that it mostly covers the expected content as set out in the government's pre-application guidance at paragraph 10. For example, it is considered that the applicant has provided enough detail about the proposed development, its timetable and activities necessary for the pre-application process, the applicant's approach to early engagement with statutory consultees and other parties, and the risks identified and how these will be managed.

However, we advise, even at this early stage, that the applicant should set out a summary of the main issues it has identified arising from the proposed development and the actions it means to take to resolve or mitigate them, rather than a list of topics. It is beneficial to the Inspectorate and

others to understand the main environmental or built heritage constraints in or near the Order Limits, and any other significant landscape features and / or infrastructure, the applicant may need to assess and mitigate. It is also helpful if high level information is included as to the progress made on the applicant's surveys and the methodology used for assessments, and any agreements reached with relevant statutory parties on these matters, in future iterations. It is expected that these issues will be developed through the Issues Tracker during pre-application stage.

It would also be helpful if the Programme Document could: indicate whether any non-DCO licences or consents might be needed; include a simple plan of the proposed development; add a date for the publication of the PEIR in its programme table; and add any likely dates for multiparty meetings, if these are likely to be pursued. Additionally, it would also be helpful to obtain an indication as to whether the applicant intends to submit a Design Approach Document and a Policy and Compliance Document with its application, as well as how the Local Authorities will input on the Adequacy of Consultation Milestone statement.

The Inspectorate refers the applicant to the Programme Document template in the updated 2024 Pre-application Prospectus, which should be used for proposed developments entering the DCO planning system from 1 November 2025.

## Annex A

### Meeting attendees

Organisation	Role
Planning Inspectorate	Operations Lead
Planning Inspectorate	Operations Manager
Planning Inspectorate	Case Manager
Planning Inspectorate	Case Officer (Student)
Planning Inspectorate	Senior Environmental Advisor
Applicant	National Senior Consents Manager – National Grid
Applicant	Consents Lead – National Grid
Applicant	Project Director – National Grid
Applicant	Senior DCO Project manager
Applicant	Lead Environmental Consultation - AECOM