Planning Inspectorate

Inception Meeting note

Project name	**Salinae Hydrogen Storage project**
Case reference	**EN0310002**
Status	**Final**
Author	**The Planning Inspectorate**
Date of meeting	**5 November 2025**
Meeting with	**Uniper**
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 (PA2008). Any advice given under section 51 would not constitute legal advice upon which applicants (or others) could rely.

1. The proposed development

Background of the Organisation and Hydrogen Storage

The applicant provided an overview of the Salinae Hydrogen Storage project and Uniper as a company. The applicant owns and operates 4.4 GW of flexible capacity and a fast cycle gas storage facility, has long-term LNG regasification capacity bookings at Grain Terminal and are currently advancing CCS and hydrogen projects, expanding their renewable portfolio. The applicant stated that the project would strengthen UK energy security, contribute towards decarbonisation and deliver grid stability services.

The applicant provided an overview of hydrogen storage. Large volumes of hydrogen can be safely stored underground in the same way as natural gas, in natural geological formations such as salt caverns. This approach utilises the UK's existing natural resources and provides a scalable, secure, and cost-effective method to help decarbonise the energy system. The applicant further explained the salt cavern hydrogen storage process, stating the salt caverns would be created by a process known as solution mining, which involves injecting water into the salt beds to create a brine solution. The applicant highlighted that British Salt had carried out such operations on the same brinefield for over fifty years, using the brine to manufacture salt products. If the Salinae Hydrogen Storage project is consented and developed, the salt cavity would be fitted with a gas tight completion and hydrogen gas would be injected into the caverns, forcing out the brine and leaving the

hydrogen in the cavern ready for storage. Storage capacity is managed by varying the Hydrogen gas pressure between maximum and minimum allowable limits.

The applicant advised that hydrogen storage is needed to facilitate intermittent renewable energy supply, provide clean energy for *inter alia* vehicles and whole industries that currently rely on carbon-intensive fuels helping decarbonise industry by acting as a key fuel for industries that are difficult to electrify such as chemical production.

Description of the proposed development

The applicant explained that the potential development, Salinae Hydrogen Storage project is a salt cavern hydrogen storage facility, near Warmingham, Cheshire. The project could have the capacity to store up to 400GWh of hydrogen across a potential of thirteen salt caverns.

The applicant confirmed the Salinae Hydrogen Storage project qualifies as a Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project (NSIP) as defined by the Planning Act 2008 (PA2008), under Section 17 (Underground Gas Storage Facilities). In this regard the proposed development comprises the creation of an underground gas storage facility in England, where the working capacity of the facilities is expected to exceed 43 million standard cubic metres (Sm3) and the maximum flow rate is expected to exceed 4.5 million Sm3 per day, therefore qualifying as an NSIP. The applicant confirmed the proposed development would be EIA development.

The site is 204 hectares, located 5 kilometres (km) south of Middlewich within the administrative area of Cheshire East Borough Council, and is comprised of two adjacent plots (east and west). British Salt own the mineral rights to the wider site and have previously mined many caverns. The applicant proposes to seek permission to utilise four new caverns (east), for which British Salt already have planning permission, for hydrogen storage and, seek planning permission for the creation of a further 9 new caverns (west) including utilisation for hydrogen storage.

The applicant explained that the proposed development would also include a hydrogen gas processing plant, earthworks, pipelines, access road, utilities and diversion of a public right of way. Dehydration process equipment would be required on site to allow for removal of moisture from hydrogen being withdrawn from the caverns. British Salt would continue its typical solution mining operations on this site and upon completion of leaching a cavern the applicant would provide hydrogen at pressure into the caverns to allow the remaining brine to be taken back and used for salt production, allowing the caverns to be used for hydrogen storage.

The applicant explained that British Salt will support the applicant in gathering data by adding steps to its existing solution mining plans in the area with the aim of evaluating the site's potential for hydrogen storage. The two companies will collaborate on developing designs for the drilling of two wells, to ensure they are suitable for the storage of hydrogen. The applicant explained it has a Feasibility Development Agreement with British Salt which gives the applicant the sole rights to explore the site's potential for hydrogen storage. The agreement between the applicant and British Salt does not currently provide for any hydrogen to be utilised or stored on site. This would be dealt with under future agreements, should the project progress. The applicant illustrated the partnership would ensure the brine displaced in the creation of the proposed hydrogen storage caverns

would not be wasted but transported via an existing pipeline to British Salt's Middlewich plant to be used in the production of salt.

The applicant confirmed that the brine pipeline has consent until 2042.

Uniper confirmed that it is in discussion with Cadent, the applicant for the HyNet hydrogen pipeline, regarding the means of achieving a connection to Cadent's proposed Hynet pipeline network, connecting to hydrogen production and facilities and consumers.

The Inspectorate asked the applicant what the above ground development would look like in terms of the visual element and asked how the proposed design would fit in with the surrounding landscape. The applicant advised that all above ground development would be introduced in a phased manner including:

- Up to 5 compressor buildings, being a maximum of 18 metres in height and around 20 square metres floorspace;
- Dehydration vessels, being a maximum of 15 metres in height;
- A maximum 50-metre-high ground flare;
- Single storey control administration buildings to house cabling.

The Inspectorate asked if the above ground development is typical of a gas facility, such as Holford facility, which is circa 10km from the proposed Salinae Hydrogen Storage site.

Consenting programme and introduction to the pre-application programme document

The applicant provided an anticipated application submission timeframe, which will be reviewed and updated over the following weeks and months:

- Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) surveys – November 2025 - September 2026
- Inception meeting with the Planning Inspectorate – 5 November 2025
- Early engagement with statutory consultees – November 2025 – February 2026
- EIA Scoping Report Submitted to the Planning Inspectorate – 12 December 2025
- Prepare and agree Statement of Community Consultation (SoCC) – December 2025 – April 2026
- Receipt of EIA Scoping Opinion – February 2026
- Preliminary Environmental Information Report – May 2026
- Publication of SoCC – May 2026
- Statutory Consultation – June – July 2026
- Adequacy of Consultation Milestone – October 2026
- Issue draft application documents including EIA chapters to the Planning Inspectorate for early review – April – November 2026
- DCO submission – December 2026

The Inspectorate advised the applicant against scoping over the Christmas period due to the possibility of reduced capacity of the consultation bodies which could result in a less meaningful scoping response. The Inspectorate noted that the applicant's indicative timetable anticipated receipt of a scoping opinion in February 2026. It explained that an opinion must be adopted within 42 days of receipt of a scoping report, and therefore

submission of a scoping report in early January would still result in adoption of a scoping opinion in February. The applicant highlighted it's concern about maintaining the pace of the project with the timeline which is aligned to the bid timescales for government funding and confirmed it would reconsider the timing of the scoping report submission.

The Inspectorate reminded the applicant to provide a GIS shapefile to the Inspectorate at least ten working days prior to the submission of the scoping report.

The Inspectorate queried whether the project would be solely reliant on government funding. The applicant confirmed that the project would be reliant on subsidies for its continued operation. The applicant clarified that key project milestones in the Development Consent Order (DCO) application would be driven by the timeline produced by the government.

The Inspectorate asked the applicant to provide any programme updates from DESNZ and highlighted the importance of keeping the programme document updated.

The applicant explained the submission of draft documents has been programmed over several months to enable amendments to be made as early in the process as possible. However, the Inspectorate advised the applicant that draft documents are typically reviewed by PINS over a 6-week period and, under the standard tier, only the ES project description is reviewed (not any technical aspect chapters). The Inspectorate suggested the submission of draft documents around August 2026 and requested the draft documents be submitted together rather than individually, for a fuller approach and review. The Inspectorate confirmed it is happy to answer queries and look at documents throughout the pre-application process as well as have the potential for an inspector to look over any documents, if required.

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

The applicant advised it will be seeking Statements of Common Ground, where possible, and is in the process of arranging meetings with Statutory bodies such as Cheshire East Council, EA Planning, Historic England, Natural England and the Health and Safety Executive.

Environmental constraints and issues

The applicant presented the key environmental constraints for this development:

- Grade 3 and 4 agricultural land
- River Wheelock (main river and WFD) to the east
- Partially culverted Hoggins Brook
- Flood zone 2 and 3
- Historic and current landfills - associated with Hilltop Farm Brinefields
- 13 listed buildings and 2 scheduled monuments within 1km
- Warmingham Conservation Area to the east
- Residential properties at Warmingham
- Minerals Safeguarding Area for Salt
- SSSI site within 1km and habitat for protected species

- Noise Important Area (rail) to west
- Public Rights of Way

The Inspectorate queried whether the rerouting of the public right of way would be permanent or temporary. The applicant confirmed it would be a permanent diversion.

EIA scoping

The applicant presented the key EIA Scoping Topics:

- Air Quality
- Biodiversity
- Noise and vibration
- Landscape and visual
- Historic environment and archaeology
- Geology and soils, including agriculture
- Population and human health
- Socioeconomics
- Effects on climate
- Climate change (vulnerability and adaption)
- Minerals and waste
- Water resources and flood risk
- Major accidents and disasters
- Cumulative effects

The Inspectorate queried whether traffic and transport would be considered as an EIA topic. The applicant confirmed it would not be including a separate traffic and transport chapter within the ES but would assess transport impacts within a Transport Assessment, to be submitted with the DCO application. The Inspectorate advised that this should be explained within the scoping report.

Environmental surveys

The applicant detailed the environmental surveys that are expected to be carried out:

- Preliminary Ecological Walkover
- Protected species surveys
- Noise surveys
- Ground investigation and soil resource
- Archaeological evaluation
- Traffic survey
- Viewpoints survey (LVIA)
- Watercourse walkover survey

The applicant confirmed it has undertaken several environmental surveys to date.

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

The applicant explained the landownership across the site. British Salt own the mineral rights to the majority of the site however there are two other landowners and some tenant farmers within the order limits. The applicant informed the Inspectorate that discussions are taking place with other landowners. None of the drilling is situated in third party land, which would mainly be needed for pipeline connections and underground cabling. The applicant highlighted that the tenants on British Salt land have experienced several other developments in the area and are well used to the processes of solution mining.

The applicant advised that, subject to suitable agreement being reached, it does not intend to use compulsory purchase powers and that traditional lease option or purchase is preferred. The Inspectorate advised this approach is encouraged.

Consultation (statutory and non-statutory)

The applicant confirmed it will not be undertaking non-statutory consultation but will move straight to statutory consultation. The applicant has, and will continue to, engage with stakeholders and local community groups.

The Inspectorate advised the applicant to explain within the consultation documents how it carried out engagement and how it has taken into consideration comments from members of the public as well as statutory bodies. The Inspectorate suggested early engagement with Network Rail due to the railway line on the site's western boundary, as well as engaging with the Health and Safety Executive. The applicant confirmed it is currently engaging with both.

2. The pre-application service offer

The applicant stated it has selected the standard service Tier 2. The Inspectorate considered the standard tier was likely to be appropriate and would confirm this following the meeting.

3. Next steps

The Inspectorate advised that feedback on the Programme Document would be provided, which the applicant should incorporate into the new Programme Document template, as published within the Pre-application Prospectus.

Post Meeting Note:

The Inspectorate advises that the initial Programme Document broadly complies with the Planning Act 2008: Pre-application stage for Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects Guidance. It would be helpful if the Programme Document could provide approximate timescales for project update meetings with the Inspectorate, as well as any future meetings with key stakeholders, as this enables resources to be deployed effectively.

It is also useful for the Programme Document to highlight key issues for consideration, with an issues tracker provided in due course. The applicant may find it helpful to refer to the Issues Tracker template provided in the Prospectus.

The applicant is advised that a public version of the Programme Document will be hosted and maintained on the Applicant's website. The Programme Document is an iterative document that should be kept up-to-date with key milestones for the project which should be shared with Local Authorities and Statutory Consultees.

4. AOB

The applicant requested clarification on the approach to advice provided throughout the pre-application process. The Inspectorate advised the applicant that, with the Standard tier service, six meetings a year will be offered. The Inspectorate also advised that flexible and open communication between meetings is welcomed, and the Inspectorate are available to answer any questions if necessary.

Annex A

Meeting attendees

Organisation	Role
Planning Inspectorate	Operations Manager
Planning Inspectorate	Operations Lead
Planning Inspectorate	Operations Lead for Environmental Services
Planning Inspectorate	Senior EIA Advisor
Planning Inspectorate	Case Officer
Planning Inspectorate	Case Officer
Uniper	Head of Hydrogen Storage Development
Uniper	Hydrogen Storage Business Development Lead
Uniper	Environmental Associate
AtkinsRealis	Practice Director
AtkinsRealis	Associate Director of Planning
AtkinsRealis	Chief Engineer
AtkinsRealis	Principal Environmental Consultant
Grayling	Account Director