



Inception Meeting note

Project name	Project Union: East Coast
Case reference	EN0710007
Status	Final
Author	The Planning Inspectorate
Date of meeting	29 January 2026
Meeting with	Meeting with National Gas Transmission
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.

The proposed development

Detailed description of the proposed development

National Gas Transmission (the applicant) explained to the Planning Inspectorate that Project Union: East Coast is the first nationally significant infrastructure project of a wider programme that will create a 2,600 kilometre hydrogen transmission network.

The project involves repurposing approximately 200 kilometres of existing methane pipelines to be able to transport hydrogen gas. The applicant also intends to construct approximately 420 kilometres of new pipeline to carry hydrogen gas. The applicant stated this project was the first part of a larger network and the Inspectorate asked how the network will be split and how many development consent orders (DCOs) could be related to this project. The applicant confirmed that further DCOs will be reliant on future government funding. Ofgem is currently funding Project Union: East Coast, the first section of the project, and two further sections (St Fergus to Teesside and North-West). The applicant anticipates that if further funding is secured there will be ideally 6 similar projects.

The applicant demonstrated that the project will also operate with above ground installations (AGIs). It showed that the project will use hub AGIs as terminal points

for the spur pipeline network to connect to. These new spur pipelines will be used to feed into customer connection points (CCP). The applicant also confirmed that there would be additional AGIs included in the construction for the project, such as block valves and a compressor station, which would be used to control the flow and pressure of the transmitted hydrogen. The location and number of these AGIs is yet to be determined.

The Inspectorate questioned what type of work the applicant envisaged for the use of the existing pipeline, for example digging. Additionally, the Inspectorate inquired about the appearance of the AGIs, querying the height and the amount of land they would typically take up.

The applicant confirmed that the current methane pipelines that would be repurposed will require inspection in case they have defects that the transmitted hydrogen will worsen. Depending on the level of defects, some localised digging for repairs may be needed. However, if the defects are inaccessible, the applicant stated it might need to create localised diversion for a replacement pipeline. The applicant confirmed that they are aware of the issues to public safety with this procedure and assured the Inspectorate that public safety was their priority. However, the applicant added that it currently assumed that works needed to the existing methane pipelines would be minimal.

In terms of the size of the AGIs, the applicant confirmed that the average site is likely to be 30 meters by 30 meters, with the average pipelines being no taller than average shoulder height. The compressor stations will likely have a larger footprint. The Inspectorate questioned the level of security that will be required to contain these sites and the applicant confirmed that some compressor stations in the national transmission system (NTS) already have some security classification and cyber security protection around them, and they envisaged that the compressor stations for this project will require similar levels of security with CCTV and lights. It added that the level of security required will be dependent on the scale of the AGI.

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

The applicant noted the importance of building and maintaining positive relationships through local engagement. It identified an engagement framework which will group stakeholders by focus area. The intention of this grouping is to guide briefings and workshops that could be adapted throughout the pre-application phase. Furthermore, the applicant intended to use planning performance agreements and service level agreements to manage resources and ensure effective with stakeholders. The applicant is also aware of the removal of statutory consultation under the Planning and Infrastructure Act 2025 but reassured the Inspectorate it will keep stakeholders informed throughout the process.

The Inspectorate asked how many local authorities the applicant envisages being impacted by the project. The applicant anticipates around 20 local authorities will be involved with the project.

Environmental constraints and issues

The applicant highlighted a number of environmental constraints and issues.

The project location mainly covers agricultural land and is away from large urban areas. The applicant explained that the pipelines will be largely underground and the construction of the new sets of pipelines will involve a combination of open-trench installation and trenchless crossings. The applicant confirmed that once construction had been carried out, the land would be reinstated to its former use.

Noting environmental constraints surrounding the permanent structures, the routing and siting of the pipelines and AGIs will be carefully considered to minimise any community and natural impacts. The applicant will use strategic optioneering and corridor preliminary routing and siting studies to carry this out.

EIA scoping

The applicant confirmed that its EIA scoping report will be informed by the strategic options report, corridor preliminary routing and siting study (CPRSS), and design freeze 1. In addition to this, the applicant highlighted that the EIA scoping boundary will be set upon the completion of the CPRSS, and the scoping report will be delivered alongside the HRA screening report.

The applicant confirmed that the scoping is scheduled for November 2026. The Inspectorate asked if the applicant could schedule this for early in November due to the holiday period over December. The applicant noted this request and would aim for an earlier November submission if possible. The Inspectorate also requested that the GIS shapefile be submitted to the Inspectorate 10 working days prior to the scoping request. The applicant agreed to this.

Environmental surveys

The applicant demonstrated the high number of surveys it was intending to carry out throughout 2026 and 2027. Of the highlighted surveys, the Inspectorate questioned if the applicant was intending to carry out fresh water or aquatic surveys, as these were not presented as surveys to be carried out. The applicant assured the Inspectorate it would look at these again and confirmed the requirement of these surveys would be down to what type of watercourses/bodies would be crossed, depending on the routing.

Further to this, the Inspectorate asked the applicant whether it had an approach in progress to achieve Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG). The applicant stated that most works would be temporary and reinstated following completion of construction. The applicant also stated that it had learned lessons from other linear projects and that a broad approach to BNG was under development.

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

The Inspectorate and the applicant discussed how the project does not currently meet the NSIP thresholds of the Planning Act 2008. The applicant will make a

request for a Section 35 Direction to the Secretary of State to be treated as a development of national significance. The applicant is confident that the project will meet the requirements, having comparable criteria to other similar projects and will keep the Inspectorate informed of the progress of this matter.

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

The applicant confirmed that it will seek compulsory acquisition powers for the project but would focus on attaining voluntary agreements from land owners.

Consultation (statutory and non-statutory)

The applicant told the Inspectorate that it would continue to closely monitor the upcoming guidance and secondary legislation on this subject.

Submission date

The applicant confirmed that they intend to submit their application in December 2028.

The pre-application service offer

The service tier requested by the applicant

The applicant requested the project proceed under the standard pre-application service tier.

The applicant confirmed that it did not wish to use the fast track procedure for this project. The applicant highlighted it would like to include the use of supplementary components, as well as the draft document review service.

Risks, including change requests

The applicant confirmed that the main risks at this point are any change to network demands and change to government policy.

The Inspectorate agreed that the standard tier would be an appropriate level of service for this project currently.

Practical Arrangements

The Inspectorate advised the applicant that the publication of the inception meeting note and Section 51 advice could be delayed by up to 6 months, or until a formal scoping request had been submitted, and to remain in contact with the project case manager.

Annex A

Meeting attendees

Organisation	Role
Planning Inspectorate	Operations Manager
Planning Inspectorate	Operations Lead
Planning Inspectorate	Operations Lead – Environmental Services
Planning Inspectorate	Case Manager
Planning Inspectorate	Case Officer
Planning Inspectorate	Senior Environmental Advisor
National Gas	Consents Manager
National Gas	Senior Project Manager
WSP	Project Director
WSP	Consents and Environmental Director
WSP	Environmental Lead