



## Inception Meeting note

<b>Project name</b>	<b>East Coast Hydrogen Pipeline – Humber East Coast Hydrogen Pipeline - Teesside</b>
<b>Case reference</b>	<b>EN0710008 EN0710010</b>
<b>Status</b>	<b>Final</b>
<b>Author</b>	<b>The Planning Inspectorate</b>
<b>Date of meeting</b>	<b>15 April 2026</b>
<b>Meeting with</b>	<b>Meeting with Northern Gas Network</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.

### The proposed development

Development Consent Orders (DCO) will be sought by Northern Gas Networks (the applicant) for two nationally significant infrastructure project (NSIP) applications, named 'East Coast Hydrogen Teesside Pipeline' and 'East Coast Hydrogen Humber Pipeline' (the proposed developments). These proposed developments will comprise the partial repurposing and expansion of an existing >2bar gas network for hydrogen delivery across the North-East and Yorkshire, by converting existing built assets and constructing new infrastructure to support a reliable hydrogen network in the region and to meet the Government's ambitions for achieving net zero emissions by 2050.

These proposed developments will include:

- approximately 63km of new build and repurposed High Pressure (HP) >7bar and Intermediate Pressure (IP) 2>bar linear underground hydrogen pipeline for transporting hydrogen from energy distributors to end users between Newton Aycliffe and Skinningrove, east of Middlesbrough, within the administrative areas of Redcar and Cleveland Borough Council, Stockton Borough Council, Hartlepool Borough Council, Durham County Council and Darlington Borough Council ('East Coast Hydrogen Teesside Pipeline')
- up to 110km of new build and repurposed High Pressure (HP) 7>bar and Intermediate Pressure (IP) 2>7bar linear hydrogen pipeline between Knottingley and Saltend for the same purpose of hydrogen energy distribution, within the administrative areas of East

Riding of Yorkshire Council, Hull City Council, North Yorkshire Council, and Wakefield Council ('East Coast Hydrogen Humber Pipeline').

Associated infrastructure for both proposed developments will include a range of above ground installations required to facilitate the control of hydrogen on the network, including Pressure Reduction Installations, Block Valve Stations.

The applicant stated that the hydrogen storage and production clusters in the Tees Valley and Humber area, together with the existing 37,000 km of pipelines operated by the applicant for transporting gas to homes and businesses, has informed the route selection and its engagement with potential hydrogen off takers.

In answer to questions from the Inspectorate, the applicant explained that some specific sections of the proposed developments may involve Intermediate Pressure below the >7bar gauge (i.e. between 2 and 7 bar), which would fall outside of the threshold for gas transporter pipelines under section 20(4) of the Planning Act 2008. These types of schemes must have a design operating pressure of more than 7 bar gauge to qualify as an NSIP under the Planning Act 2008, amongst other requirements. While most of the Teesside pipeline would be above 7 bar, the applicant was considering the need to seek a section 35 Direction from the Secretary of State to treat the developments as NSIPs.

The applicant further explained that the proposed developments required separate DCOs as they connect different sites and cross different geographical boundaries (as there is no continuous pipeline connecting the developments) and would be following separate consenting timescales. Furthermore, the applicant said that there was no competition for the same land between the proposed developments and other NSIP developments in the area (either proposed, consented or constructed), but there is likely to be an interrelationship with other energy projects such as 'Project Union'. 'East Coast Hydrogen Teesside Pipeline' is looking to potentially reuse some of the survey data produced for 'H2Teesside', including the use of existing tunnels and an alternative tunnel previously considered under the 'H2 North East' project, subject to necessary agreements. The reuse of tunnels and existing pipelines may reduce the need for Horizontal Directional Drilling (HDD) across the route.

Moreover, the applicant said that the siting of above ground infrastructure locations and compound sites were being factored into the Front-End Engineering Design (FEED), which commenced in 2025. The applicant would seek to minimise visual and other impacts where feasible or required, including consideration of alternative access arrangements and additional spurs and offtakes.

The applicant also confirmed that work is underway to identify statutory undertakers and understood the need to engage on draft protective provisions as early as possible in the DCO process, to avoid such matters affecting the examination and consenting process. The identification of relevant parties would continue to evolve at the design freeze and once land referencing had completed.

The refining of the route of the proposed developments was needing to await the publication of the government's hydrogen strategy, which is currently delayed.

## **Consenting programme**

The applicant provided an outline of its pre-application programme:

Activity	Expected Timeframe
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(Humber and Teesside)	
Consenting pathway commences	Q1 2026
PINS Inception meeting	Q2 2026
EIA Scoping	Q2 2026
Early Engagement with key statutory bodies (inc. LPAs)	Q2 2026
Environmental surveys	Q2/Q3 2026
Applicant's first stage of consultation	Q3 2026
Anticipated timescale for progression to tier 2 pre-application service	Q2/Q3 2027
Engagement with LPA's prior to second stage of consultation	Q2 2027
Applicant's second stage of consultation	Q3 2027
Adequacy of Consultation or equivalent milestone	Q1 2028
Submission of application	Q4 2028

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

The applicant said that separate meetings with the host local authorities were being scheduled from 16 April 2026 to provide an overview of the project, programme for submission and to formalise engagement and cost recovery arrangements. Engagement was also starting with statutory parties such as the Environment Agency, Natural England, National Highways, Mining Remediation Authority, Historic England, the Health and Safety Executive Agency for both proposed developments, and the Marine Management Office for the East Coast Hydrogen Teesside Pipeline, with meetings to be scheduled, where requested, for the same purpose. Other early engagement with relevant parties to introduce the proposed developments is scheduled to commence from April 2026, which will include:

- launching the project websites for each route (anticipated mid-May 2026)
- establishing dedicated communication channels and mailboxes for consultee questions and feedback
- employing a mix of engagement methods, including webinars, in-person public events and stakeholder meetings
- ongoing dialogue with local authorities, parish councils and statutory consultees on its consultation and development plans.

The applicant was aware of the changes to statutory consultation under the provisions in the Planning and Infrastructure Act 2025 and would respond to any updated guidance issued by the government (which is expected in June 2026). The Inspectorate emphasised the importance of clearly explaining to local communities and statutory parties as to why engagement is taking place at each stage and providing clear information differentiating the proposed developments and the main issues or impacts arising from them, including changes in design, technical features and / or the Order Limits. It is important for applicants to explain when consultee input is needed on its proposals, and how feedback may influence the final design and any proposed mitigation.

The Inspectorate also highlighted the value of utilising the knowledge of Parish Councils, in identifying appropriate venues / locations for in-person events, in reaching seldom-heard groups, and adopting appropriate and accessible methods for engagement within the local community, which the applicant was already considering as part of its consultation strategy.

## **Environmental constraints**

In respect of 'East Coast Hydrogen Humber Pipeline', the main constraints and issues include navigating around or through urban developments, above and below ground archaeology, Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs), Ramsar sites, Special Protection Areas (SPAs), as well as Local Nature Reserves, National Nature Reserves, and Special Areas of Conservation (SACs), across or within the vicinity of the route. There are also major roads (such as the M62 and A645) which cross the route. The applicant was also considering Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) mitigation areas, noting the absence of a single national dataset for BNG-designated land, which therefore requires local-level analysis.

In respect of 'East Coast Hydrogen Teesside Pipeline', there are also SSSIs, Ramsar sites, Local Nature Reserve, National Nature Reserves, SPAs and SACs within the study area and Order Limits, together with main roads and railway lines. Coastal and other statutory environmental designations have significantly influenced the corridor selection, the applicant stated, with route options being selected to avoid or minimise impacts.

## **EIA scoping and environmental surveys**

The separate Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Scoping Reports are currently being drafted by the applicant for both projects, which are anticipated to be submitted to the Inspectorate in May (for both proposed developments). The applicant confirmed that a wide range of standard EIA topics is proposed and the reports will clearly identify any matters proposed to be scoped out during construction, operation and decommissioning. The applicant was currently identifying how decommissioning effects might be minimised through the selection and reuse of materials. The pipeline decommissioning procedures would follow Northern Gas Networks standards, including stabilisation methods, the applicant said.

On receipt of the Inspectorate's Scoping Opinion, the applicant said that it would assess and undertake the extent and scope of surveys required, by its consultant and subsequent technical engagement with relevant stakeholders. The applicant stated that various environmental surveys had already begun and will be ongoing during 2026.

The applicant said that it was aware of the need to provide its GIS Shapefiles at least 10 working days to the Inspectorate before making its Scoping Request.

## **The draft Development Consent Order**

The applicant stated that it would be seeking to adopt the conventions and precedents in other made DCOs, where applicable, and comply with the policy framework under the Overarching National Policy Statement for Energy (EN-1) and the National Policy Statement for Natural Gas Supply Infrastructure and Gas and Oil Pipelines (EN-4). The applicant did not foresee a need to include any complex or novel drafting. Other consents and licences would likely be needed, the applicant added, to accompany the DCO, with the applications for the proposed developments demonstrating how they comply with the regulatory requirements and safety standards for hydrogen.

## **Land and rights**

The applicant confirmed that a land and rights consultant will be appointed in Q2 2026 and onboarded to both projects to carrying out land referencing and drafting the book of reference when necessary. The applicant said that it would be assessing the production of voluntary heads of terms with landowners for land parcels alongside drafting compulsory acquisition powers where

justified. Updates regarding the applicant's progress with identifying and securing land rights would be shared as the applications are developed.

## **Submission date**

The applicant is intending to submit the applications in November 2028, which may be subject to change depending on policy and legislative developments and progress made with the FEED and consultation activities.

## **The pre-application service**

Owing to the knowledge and experience of the consultants with the DCO process, the applicant has requested the basic tier service initially. However, owing to the factors discussed and once the totality of issues are known, the applicant may request the standard service at the midpoint of pre-application. The Inspectorate advised that the expected policy paper from government on hydrogen, the extent of cumulative effects, any emerging novel or complex DCO provisions, and the particulars of the regulations and safety standards may support an uplift in service tier. The Inspectorate reminded the applicant that they will need to provide 3-months' notice should they wish to move tiers.

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

The applicant supplied the Inspectorate with its initial Programme Document before the inception meeting in line with our request under 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. In particular, the Programme Document provides enough detail about the proposed development and its pre-application timetable of activities, the applicant's approach to early engagement with statutory consultees and other parties. It is also noted that the applicant has also included helpful location maps.

However, the applicant should provide a high-level summary of the main issues arising from the proposed development, at the outset, and the activities needed to resolve them (the applicant may wish to review the Programme Document produced for One Earth Solar as a good example), such as citing the particular environmental and / or built heritage constraints / designations within and across the draft Order Limits that may require particular assessment and agreement with statutory parties on the methodology to be used and degree of mitigation needed. Further information will be needed on the progress or plans for agreeing Planning Performance Agreements and in holding any technical workshops with relevant prescribed consultees, and the applicant should also set out its identification of the risks to achievement in addition to how those risks will be tracked and managed. It would also be helpful if the applicant could indicate whether a Design Approach Document will be submitted with the application, along with any other components it deems necessary.

## Annex A

### Meeting attendees

Organisation	Role
Planning Inspectorate	Operations Lead
Planning Inspectorate	Operations Manager
Planning Inspectorate	Case Manager
Planning Inspectorate	Case Officer
Planning Inspectorate	Environmental Services Operations Lead
Northern Gas Network	Project Lead
Northern Gas Network	Head of Environment and Sustainability
Northern Gas Network	Communications Lead
Atkins Realis	Associate Director
Arup	Director
Arup	Planner