



Inception Meeting note

Project name	Solent Gateway 2
Case reference	TR0310002
Status	Final
Author	The Planning Inspectorate
Date of meeting	21 August 2025
Meeting with	Meeting with Associated British Ports
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 Inspectorate explained that the publication of the inception meeting note could be delayed by up to 6 months, or until a formal scoping request had been submitted. The applicant requested that publication of the note be delayed until after the public launch of the project – due to take place mid-September 2025.

1. The proposed development

Detailed description of the proposed development

A Development Consent Order (DCO) will be sought by Associated British Ports (the applicant) for the Solent Gateway 2 project. The project, as currently envisaged, consists of a new marine facility that includes a single two-berth Jetty for the handling of automotive roll-on and roll-off (Ro-Ro) cargo. The project will also include a dredged pocket at the new jetty to enable Ro-Ro vessels to be suitably accommodated. The existing port is nearing its capacity, and the project is being designed in order to, in summary, meet future growth demands, amongst other things.

The applicant indicated that the proposed development would include a new access road for the facility that will connect to the A326. Alongside this, the applicant indicated that the project may include modifications to the existing rail facilities at Solent Gateway – a neighbouring port facility operated by the applicant.

The applicant explained that the project will include environmental enhancements and landscape improvements. These will happen on and off the project site. This includes the provisions for a development of a new country park and improved connections between the settlements of Hythe and Marchwood that are located close to the site of the project.

In addition to its marine elements, the project will also include the construction of landside vehicle storage and handling facilities to the south-east of the already existing Solent Gateway facility. This will be used for storing and handling automotive vehicles and other wheeled cargo.

Detailed description of the project location

The applicant explained that the project was located on the northern part of its landholding that is known as the Port of Southampton's Strategic Land Reserve (SLR), located on the western side of the tidal River Test to the south-east of the existing port facility (Solent Gateway) at Marchwood, which is located within New Forest District. The project site for Solent Gateway 2 is situated directly adjacent to the already existing Solent Gateway facility that is operated by the applicant. Land in the western areas of the SLR and likely to be included in the project boundary for the purposes of the new country park and related environmental improvements is located within the New Forest National Park (and therefore, within the New Forest National Park Authority area). The City of Southampton is situated to the northwest of the site, across the River Test. The village of Marchwood is situated to the north of the project site, beyond the existing Solent Gateway facility

Consenting programme and introduction to the pre-application programme document

The applicant requested comments from the Inspectorate regarding its programme document. The Inspectorate advised that it would provide written comments following the meeting, however upon initial review the main issues section would be expected to be expanded to include specific mention of the ecological designations and issues arising from those areas. The Inspectorate also emphasised the importance of the programme document for resource planning purposes and that it should contain future expectations of meeting timings with the Inspectorate around project milestones.

The Inspectorate explained that it appreciates the proposals are at an early stage and therefore expects the programme document to evolve over time. The Inspectorate queried whether it would be beneficial for the applicant to submit an updated programme document following non-statutory consultation, allowing matters coming out of the consultation to be discussed at the next project update meeting.

Post-meeting written comments

In addition to the comments provided at the meeting, the Inspectorate notes there is broad compliance with the Planning Act 2008: Pre-application stage for Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects Guidance.

The Inspectorate confirms that the Applicant must ensure that the programme document 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, draft document review, and the application submission, could be narrowed in due course and provided in the programme document to enable the Inspectorate to deploy resources effectively. It would also be helpful to list any future meetings with key stakeholders to enable those parties with their own resourcing.

The Applicant will be aware that one of the mandatory components of the pre-application service as set out in the Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects: 2024 Pre-application Prospectus, is demonstrating regard to advice. As such this should be clearly reflected in the application documents.

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

The applicant confirmed that it had been in regular contact with multiple statutory bodies including Natural England, the Environment Agency, the Marine Management Organisation, relevant local authorities and Historic England.

The applicant also explained that the project had been introduced to a number of other statutory bodies, including the Crown Estate. The applicant confirmed the presence of Crown Land within the project's initial indicative red line boundary and that it had already begun early engagement with the Crown Estate on the matter. This included representatives from the Crown Estate attending a site visit in the upcoming weeks. The Inspectorate advised that the topic of Crown Land would be revisited later on in the project's development.

The applicant explained that the relevant host local authorities in relation to the emerging project boundary are New Forest District Council, Hampshire County Council and the New Forest National Park Authority. The applicant went on to confirm all these local authorities had been contacted and planning performance agreements were being discussed and arranged as appropriate..

The applicant also conveyed it has strong, pre-existing relationships with other stakeholders in the local area and had been in contact with them as appropriate

Environmental constraints and issues

The applicant confirmed that the project is located on or adjacent to Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs), comprising Dibden Bay SSSI and the Hythe to Calshot Marshes SSSI. The latter SSSI is a component the Solent and Southampton Water Special Protection Area (SPA) and Ramsar site and the Solent and Dorset Coast SPA. Additionally, the New Forest SSSI, SPA, Ramsar site and Special Area of Conservation (SAC) is located further to the west and south of the proposed site of the project.

The applicant indicated that its current working assumption is that adverse effect on the integrity of the Solent and Southampton Water SPA and Ramsar site cannot be excluded at this early stage, so it is intending to prepare a Habitats Regulations derogations case, which therefore requires appropriate compensatory measures to be provided.

The applicant is undertaking a likely significant effect (LSE) screening exercise as the first stage of the HRA process. This will consider the potential effect pathways of European

sites, including potential effects on the New Forest SPA, Ramsar site and SAC (e.g. air quality effects).

The applicant will propose a compensation, mitigation, and enhancement (CME) package which will address the direct and indirect effects to designated sites that lie within or adjacent to the project site. The CME package will include compensatory measures in relation to the Solent and Southampton Water SPA and Ramsar sites as necessary and appropriate. The applicant is also anticipating the forthcoming requirement to deliver biodiversity net gain (BNG) for NSIPs and is planning to account for this in the CME package.

One option for road access to the new facility may be partially routed in the New Forest National Park but there is still optionality surrounding this and the applicant is exploring the feasibility of avoiding this. The applicant is also considering the impact of new multi deck structures for vehicle storage as these could be visible from certain viewpoints within the National Park. Moreover, the applicant is reviewing the design of its new access road and the junction configuration between the access road and A326 to explore how the roads will connect and potential options for crossing the Fawley Branch line.

The Inspectorate queried the likelihood of impacts on salmon associated with the River Test. The applicant confirmed that potential effects on salmon, which is a qualifying feature of the River Itchen SAC, are being considered within the LSE screening exercise. This SAC is likely to be screened in due to potential effects on salmon, for further consideration at the appropriate assessment stage. The applicant will engage with Natural England and the Environment Agency on this matter.

EIA scoping

The applicant confirmed that the EIA scoping report was well progressed and is intended to be submitted in late 2025. The EIA scoping report will not identify solutions for the CME but will identify why the package is necessary and will set out the high-level principles of the CME package and how the measures would be further progressed. The Inspectorate advised the applicant to submit its scoping report before the beginning of December, to avoid peak seasonal holiday periods and maximise the consultation response window and effectiveness of the scoping exercise. The applicant noted that it was already in contact with key stakeholders and therefore could pre-warn them about the scoping request. The Inspectorate also explained that it needed to receive the shapefile ten days before scoping submission.

The applicant stated that any relevant feedback that was received from the non-statutory consultation will be reflected in the EIA scoping report.

Environmental surveys

The applicant demonstrated that a number of the required environmental surveys had already been carried out for this project, and others are ongoing or are being planned. The applicant explained that this survey data would provide the information to describe the baseline conditions for its EIA process. The applicant confirmed that some of the ecological surveys had been ongoing for several years at the location of the proposed project, meaning it had more than two years' worth of data to inform the EIA.

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

The applicant confirmed the project falls under the criteria of section 24 of the Planning Act 2008 and therefore should be considered a harbour facility NSIP.

The applicant advised that the DCO will likely follow a similar approach to those obtained by the applicant for harbour facility NSIPs on the Humber.

The applicant indicated that due to the early stages of the project, it would be inappropriate to share details of the draft DCO at this stage. However, it confirmed its current intentions to submit the draft DCO for review in late 2026. Alongside this, the Adequacy of Consultation Milestone (AoCM) is intended to be at a similar date.

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

The applicant identified that the majority of the land intended for the project is already owned by the applicant. It stated that the Ministry of Defence also own part of the likely project site, but the applicant has a pre-existing agreement in place to use that land that will last several decades. It does not foresee many issues with land rights for most of the land for the project. Despite this, it did confirm that there may be some limited interactions with interested parties over the land rights. In turn, this means the applicant is currently envisaging including some limited compulsory acquisition powers within their DCO but are intending to acquire the majority of land rights by agreement.

The applicant also noted some points with the land rights for the access road. The applicant indicated that whilst it controls most of the land being considered for the new access road, the road would need to cross over the Fawley branch line. The applicant indicated it was in conversation with Network Rail in regard to this matter. Further to this, it commented on the land rights involved with the A326. As this is a public highway, the applicant confirmed it was in discussions with Hampshire County Council on the matter.

Consultation (statutory and non-statutory)

The applicant indicated its intention to launch the project in September 2025, to accompany its non-statutory consultation. The applicant highlighted it will be hosting a number of non-statutory consultation opportunities in September/ October 2025. These include a series of public events to maximise opportunities for engagement. The applicant confirmed its intention to carry out statutory consultation currently envisaged for September/October 2026.

The applicant also informed the Inspectorate it plans to consult on the Statement of Community Consultation (SoCC) in Spring 2026, in advance of, but close to the launch of statutory consultation.

Submission date

The applicant confirmed that based on current understanding, it intends to submit the DCO in summer 2027.

The Inspectorate asked the applicant to provide it with a submission month, rather than a quarter or season.. However, the Inspectorate acknowledged that the project was in its early stages and therefore the submission date may be refined as the project progresses.

2. The pre-application service offer

The applicant requested the standard tier, which the Inspectorate agreed was appropriate for this project due to the applicant's previous work on harbour facility NSIPs. The applicant also expressed its intention to utilise the Inspectorate's draft document review service and is aware of the timeframes associated with using this service.

The applicant is also considering using Evidence Plan meetings with stakeholders, but the scope of this is currently being developed and therefore the relevant stakeholders to this process are not yet confirmed. The Inspectorate advised that Evidence Plan meetings would be a useful tool to collaborate with Natural England to agree compensatory measures and encourage engagement. The Inspectorate emphasised that it cannot chair meetings for a standard tier project, but its attendance may be beneficial.

Additionally, the applicant explained to the Inspectorate that it is aware of risks resulting from the reforms to the Planning and Infrastructure Bill and is seeking to mitigate these through the project's design evolution.

3. Practical arrangements

The applicant expressed that its expectation for the next meeting with the Inspectorate would be in early 2026, post-EIA scoping and before its section 42 consultation commences.

Annex A

Meeting attendees

Organisation	Role
Planning Inspectorate	Operations Lead
Planning Inspectorate	Operations Lead
Planning Inspectorate	Operations Manager
Planning Inspectorate	Case Officer
Planning Inspectorate	Case Officer
Planning Inspectorate	Senior Environmental Advisor
Associated British Ports	Project Manager
Associated British Ports Southampton	Planning and Transport Lead
Associated British Ports Consultant	Planning Lead, Adams Hendry Consulting Ltd
Associated British Ports Consultant	Environmental Team Lead, Haskoning
Associated British Ports Consultant	DCO Compliance Lead, Jacobs