



Inception Meeting note

Project name	The Grand Union Canal Transfer
Case reference	WA0210001
Status	Final
Author	The Planning Inspectorate
Date of meeting	14 February 2025
Meeting with	Meeting with Severn Trent & Affinity Water and The Canal & River Trust
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 (the 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.

1. The proposed development

1. Detailed description of the Proposed Development

The Development Consent Order (DCO) application for the Proposed Development will in due course be made by Affinity Water (AfW) and Severn Trent Water (ST). As noted in the request for the section 35 direction, the Canal & River Trust (the Trust) may become one of the Applicants.

By virtue of a direction of the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs under section 35 of the Planning Act 2008 (issued in October 2024), the Proposed Development is to be treated as development for which development consent is required.

The Proposed Development will, in summary, transfer water from ST's supply area to areas of forecast water deficit in AfW's supply area. From a new Advanced Water Treatment Plant (AWTP) located at Severn Trent's Minworth Wastewater Recycling Centre north-east of Birmingham, a new buried pipeline will carry water to outfall into the Coventry Canal at Atherstone (two outfall locations are currently being

considered). Existing canals will then convey water to an abstraction point on the canal network south of Milton Keynes (the final location of which is still being assessed and considered) where water will then be stored and further treated prior to its entry into AfW's distribution system to the west of Luton.

2. Consenting programme and introduction to the pre-application Programme Document

The Inspectorate queried why the Adequacy of Consultation Milestone (AoCM) was missing in the Programme Document which was not reflected in the pre-application timeline, neither was draft document feedback which takes around three months. The principal points of the scheme are highlighted in the Programme Document. The Inspectorate also advised that it is a requirement to have a front-facing programme document and if there was any ambition of publishing the S35 direction on their project website. The inspectorate also confirmed that the Programme Document should include anticipated dates for any future meetings and where possible in advance on matters to be discussed.

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

The applicant conducted non-statutory consultation in 6 weeks between September and October 2024. Many events were held with all properties on the route notified raising awareness of key issues. Stakeholders were consulted on potential pipeline corridors and location of facilities. 475 responses were received to the consultation with various sessions held with high levels of engagement. The applicant presented at six Parish Council meetings as well as two council sessions with North Warwickshire including a series of presentations to both.

A high level of engagement has been continued to these councils with meetings with landowners regarding water treatment and storage sites including power companies where they are interacting with assets and various other stakeholders. An action group around Minworth is set up which looks at the ongoing works around the site location.

There has been general positive support for the scheme although concerns around management of the impacts of work and environmental issues. Alternative sites for water treatment works were sent in which has aided in deciding site selection.

Engagement has not stopped after non-statutory consultation with the applicant committed to quarterly updates to those who have responded to consultation, the first published in December 2024. Three key groups have been identified to engage with – a local authority working group, canal user group, and a public value working group which has been key in understanding key areas for concern.

The applicant summarised its engagement with statutory consultation bodies to date, which included:

4. A working group with the 10 host local authorities, which had met twice. It plans to discuss the approach to the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) scoping and preliminary environmental information report (PEIR) at future

meetings, and to establish regular working groups with technical officers from early March 2025.

5. A planning performance agreement (PPA) is in place with Historic England.
6. Engagement with the Environment Agency (EA) and Natural England (NE) through the bi-monthly National Appraisal Unit (NAU) as part of the RAPID Gate process.
7. Meetings with the National Trust and Chilterns National Landscape Conservation Board.

The Inspectorate expressed interest in the Public Value Working Group and collating Local Impact Reports with not every community wanting to be engaged in the same ways as others. The Inspectorate highlighted the very long linear scheme so getting councils to group together will aid the process substantially.

The applicant highlighted the LA workshop has gone very well. Ongoing stakeholder consultation and engagement will continue throughout the pre-app stage until submission at the end of 2026.

8. Environmental matters

The applicant provided an overview of key environmental constraints and issues. It stated that the project had sought to avoid effects where possible through optioneering and design. It highlighted the following:

9. Minworth AWTP – the site comprises redundant operational land of Severn Trent, which has ecological value and provides flood storage. The works could result in loss of habitats and impacts to protected species. Diversion of recycled water could affect aquatic habitats and species, which has been a focus of engagement with consultation bodies through the NAU.
10. Minworth to Atherstone pipeline – potential disruption to existing residential communities and / or golf course and woodland habitat in the pipeline routing options under consideration. The applicant is exploring the use of trenchless construction techniques.
11. Canal network – potential impacts due to changes in in water volume and quality from discharge to the canal, and to associated ecology. Impacts to canal users and existing heritage assets.
12. Water treatment and storage – this is likely to be located on existing agricultural land, and would require pipeline routing through the Chilterns National Landscape.

The Inspectorate queried how engagement with the relevant statutory consultation bodies was progressing and if there were any key themes emerging. It also sought an update on any Habitats Regulation Assessment (HRA) and Water Framework Directive (WFD) matters. The applicant stated that discussion with the EA had focused on impacts to the Rivers Tame and Trent and canal network and that modelling and assessment is ongoing. Potential effects to the Humber Special Area of Conservation (SAC) have been identified, relating to impacts to the Rivers Tame and Trent and fish passage, and the applicant will be producing a report to inform appropriate assessment as part of the DCO application.

13. EIA Scoping

The applicant stated that submission of an EIA scoping request is planned for mid-to late March 2025. The Inspectorate noted that a submission at this time could result in the scoping consultation running during the Easter holidays, which may impact responses received. The applicant acknowledged this and stated it will be meeting with the Local Authority Liaison Group ahead of the request to alert them to intended submission date. The Inspectorate queried how the engagement process through the NAU would feed into the EIA scoping. The applicant stated that it understood that the EA and NE responses to scoping would involve those already advising through the NAU.

The applicant confirmed that the scoping request would be based on optionality in some areas, and that the approach to assessment would address all options. It intends to reduce optionality prior to DCO application and assess a selected option in the EIA.

The applicant is proposing to scope all aspects into the EIA but to scope some matters within aspects out. It stated that screening reports for HRA and WFD assessment work would be appended to the EIA Scoping Report. The Inspectorate advised that it would not comment on the HRA and WFD screening reports as part of the scoping opinion but that responses from statutory consultation bodies might.

The applicant is aware of the requirement to provide a shapefile 10 working days in advance of the request and confirmed that it is ready to submit. The Inspectorate advised that the technical specification for the shapefile is set out in its advice page.

14. Environmental surveys

The applicant outlined the environmental survey work and modelling undertaken to date, which included water quality monitoring and modelling (Rivers Tame and Trent), species' surveys, overwintering bird surveys and a heritage walkover to inform the need for field evaluation. The applicant stated that further survey work is planned for 2025, including ongoing ecological survey, ground investigation, agricultural land, arboricultural and noise.

15. Preparing the draft Development Consent Order, including any novel approaches to drafting

The applicant has not started drafting but is thinking about how it will be structured – how works will be structured, how requirements will be discharged and the different undertakers involved. Drafting will not be completely novel as the applicant will be using approaches established in other NSIPs.

Biodiversity Net Gain – the applicant confirmed that an outline strategy will be put in place but guidance on BNG and NSIPs is due to come out which will help to inform this.

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

Given the scale of the scheme, Compulsory Acquisition is expected to be required with a focus on minimising interference, for example, relying on temporary possession powers for construction works. It is anticipated that a mixture of temporary possession and Compulsory Acquisition of land and rights will be required. Canal & River Trust are a partner and already own a large proportion of the infrastructure along the canal network.

17. Consultation (statutory and non-statutory)

The applicant conducted non-statutory consultation in 6 weeks between September and October. Many events were held with all properties on the route notified raising awareness of key issues. Stakeholders were consulted on potential pipeline corridors and location of facilities. 475 responses were received to the consultation with various sessions held with high levels of engagement.

The applicant presented at six Parish Council meetings as well as two council sessions with North Warwickshire including a series of presentations to both. Preparation for statutory consultation will begin towards the end of 2025 including the Statement of Community Consultation (SoCC) with the PEIR targeted for Q4 2025. Consideration of any feedback from statutory consultation would be undertaken in early 2026 in preparation for the DCO submission.

18. Submission date

The current intention is to submit at the end of Q4 2026 – the Inspectorate had reservations in avoiding December/Christmas and giving a more precise date closer to the time.

2. The pre-application service offer

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

The Applicant requested the standard tier which is the most appropriate given the nature of the project and the applicant experience – the Inspectorate agreed that this is the correct level of service.

- **The position of affected statutory bodies in relation to the requested service tier**

The applicant has not received any comments from statutory bodies in relation to the requested service level – but will be presenting the proposed service level to stakeholders in March.

- **Primary service features (and availability of templates)**

See pre-application [prospectus](#)

Use of supplementary components (and availability of templates)

The applicant noted they may not be using supplementary components, however the Inspectorate mentioned that the applicant may wish to consider components 4

and 7 (lands tracker and outline maturity requirement) which can be tracked through pre-application.

- **Draft Documents review service**

The Inspectorate advised the applicant to give a firmer date on when draft documents were being planned to be submitted

- **Risks, including change requests**

See pre-application [prospectus](#)

3. Practical Arrangements

- **Confirming the pre-application tier service and invoicing**

Tier 2: Standard - £126,050 per year of service, however as of 1st April 2025 this will increase.

- **Updates to project information for Find a National Infrastructure Project**

Project webpage expected to be published once confirmed tier is given out.

- **Project email account**

Project email address: doc@guctransfer.co.uk

- **Statutory Instrument Template access**

See pre-application [prospectus](#)

- **Contacts**

Case Officer will be Ilyas Pereira and a Case Manager will be assigned as soon as practical.

4. Next steps

5. AOB

The applicant asked about the standard tier fee and if the remaining six months after the first year was pro-rata. The Inspectorate confirmed that this was correct.

Annex A

Meeting attendees

Organisation	Role
Planning Inspectorate	Operations Lead
Planning Inspectorate	Operations Manager
Planning Inspectorate	Senior EIA Advisor
Planning Inspectorate	Senior EIA Advisor
Planning Inspectorate	Case Officer
Mott MacDonald	Deputy DCO Lead
Mott MacDonald	Principal Planner
Adams Hendry	Technical Director
Burges Salmon	External Legal Advisor
Affinity Water	GUC Project Manager
Affinity Water	GUC Project Engagement Lead
CAM Planning	EIA Lead