

Information

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for County Councillors

From:	Tessa Bond, Senior Planning Officer - Major Programmes
To:	All County Councillors
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National Grid / Hinkley Point C Connection Project Update

The Examination stage of the Hinkley C Connection Project Development Consent Order (DCO) application formally closed on 19th July 2015. This project milestone followed approximately 5 years of Pre-Application consultation and a 6 month Examination process.

Background

National Grid's Hinkley C Connection Project consists of a new electricity connection between Bridgwater and Seabank in Avonmouth. The project is in response to the higher levels of generation and demand that are forecast within the next few years (notably the new Hinkley Point C power station which would be one of the largest single generators connected to National Grid's system). Throughout the Pre-Application and Examination stages of the application, Somerset County Council has worked collaboratively with West Somerset Council, Sedgemoor District Council, North Somerset Council, South Gloucestershire Council and Bristol City Council; referred to in representations as the Joint Councils.

During the Examination process, the Joint Councils worked together in producing a Local Impact Report; Statements of Common Ground; responses to the Examining Authority; legal agreements; and preparation and attendance at Examination Hearings. The Joint Councils overarching concerns throughout the application stages related to the assessment of alternative technologies and the potential for significant adverse environmental effects that had been identified by the Joint Councils and National Grid in their assessments. Notwithstanding concerns highlighted with the adequacy of environmental impact assessment, the councils have detailed where further information is required regarding the quantum, local detail, and mechanisms for securing mitigation.

Position at close of the Examination

At the close of the examination the Joint Councils had been able to secure mitigation measures linked to the following topic areas:-

- **Transport** – Additional safety measures to be implemented at the A39 Bath Road/Woolavington Hill junction to ensure the safe operation of the highway during the construction phase of the development. Requirements (akin to planning conditions) to secure controls to ensure highway safety and minimise impacts of construction traffic; and, an agreed mechanism which sets out a clear procedure for recovery of costs for any maintenance and repair works where the highway adjoins an access to be used by National Grid, in anticipation of any damage that may be caused by construction vehicles.
- **Public Rights of Way** – A Public Rights of Way Management Plan has been secured which provides for agreed management methods in relation to short term PRoW closures. Also a contribution to compensate for the long term visual impact of the proposal has been secured to deliver local enhancements to the Public Rights of Way network most affected by the proposed development.
- **Landscape and Visual** - In addition to the onsite landscaping schemes which are included as part of the application; an obligation will be provided for the delivery of an off-site planting and enhancement scheme. Control measures linked to removal of trees and hedgerows and consideration of design objectives have also been included within the DCO Requirements;
- **Local Wildlife Sites and Biodiversity** – To off-set the impact of the proposed development on biodiversity, funds will be made available to the relevant authorities responsible for local environment matters. The contributions are to be put towards initiatives, programmes and/or works to support habitats within local wildlife sites which may otherwise have been disturbed during the construction period. In addition, the proposed project must be undertaken in accordance with an agreed biodiversity mitigation strategy.
- **Socio-Economics** – A commitment has been secured that National Grid will employ and procure that its contractors employ local people to make up at least 17% of the workforce for the project. In addition, National Grid will provide a programme of STEM (Science, Technology, English and Maths) subject support across the administrative areas of the Councils.
- **Service Level Agreement** - A procedure has been put in place that will enable National Grid to receive an enhanced level of service in relation to the timescales associated with the determination of DCO Requirement applications. The cost of the Councils providing an enhanced service will be met by National Grid.

Although agreement has been met on a number of matters, there are still outstanding issues which the Joint Councils have raised with the Planning Inspectorate for further consideration and determination by the Secretary of State. These include transport, Public Rights of Way enhancements, funding for monitoring archaeological and a Community Impact Mitigation fund to address impacts which are considered to be understated, unforeseen or poorly predicted.

Next steps

We are now in the decision period of the application. The Planning Inspectorate has three months to consider all representations made during the course of the Examination and to provide a recommendation to the Secretary of State. The Secretary of State will then have three months to make the final decision. A final decision on the application is expected by January 2016.

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