

INFORMATION ITEM

REPORT BY THE HEAD OF PLANNING, REGENERATION AND REGULATORY SERVICES

**NORTH WALES WIND FARMS CONNECTIONS MAJOR
INFRASTRUCTURE PROJECT**

UPDATE REPORT

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.1 Members will recall previous reports focusing on major infrastructure projects in Denbighshire.

1.2 This report seeks to update Members on the current status of the North Wales Wind Farms Connections project, and to seek a resolution regarding the extent to which the Council should participate in the planning process for this project.

2. BACKGROUND

2.1 Major infrastructure projects are large scale developments which require a type of consent known as 'development consent' under procedures governed by the Planning Act 2008. This includes onshore windfarms with a generation capacity over 50 megawatts (MW) and new high voltage overhead electricity power lines at or above 132,000 volts (132kV).

2.2 Applications for development consent are submitted to the Planning Inspectorate, who appoint an Examining Authority (either an individual Inspector or a panel of Inspectors) to examine the application. The Examining Authority will make a recommendation to the Secretary of State, who will decide whether or not to grant development consent.

2.3 The local authority is a statutory consultee on major infrastructure projects and has an important role to play should they choose to engage in the planning process; the Council, at Communities Scrutiny Committee (July 2012), has previously committed to fully engage in the planning process for major infrastructure projects within or directly affected the County.

2.4 The Council does not receive a planning fee for engaging in the planning process for major infrastructure projects; however significant officer time and resources, include procuring external consultants, will be required to fully respond to pre-application consultation and participate in the Examination process.

2.5 The Council has entered into legal agreements (e.g. Planning Performance Agreements) to cover the cost associated with other major infrastructure projects in the County and Welsh Government funding has also been drawn down in relation to windfarm developments within the Strategic Search Area.

3. NORTH WALES WIND FARM CONNECTIONS PROJECT

3.1 The North Wales Wind Farms Connections project is for a new 132kV overhead line connection which is required to connect the new windfarm developments in the Clocaenog Forest Strategic Search Area (SSA) to the electricity network. Scottish Power Manweb (SPM), who owns the electricity distribution licence for Merseyside, Cheshire and North & Mid Wales, is the applicant.

3.2 The project affects both Denbighshire and Conwy.

3.3 The proposed overhead line will start at a new collection substation at Clocaenog Forest (which will collect the power generated by the new wind farms) and continue to a terminal pole near Sinan (to the south of Glascoed Road, in Cefn Meiriadog). From the terminal pole, the connection will then

continue underground to connect into the national transmission network at the existing St Asaph substation. Only the 132kV overhead lines will form part of the proposed application for a development consent order and be the subject of public consultation.

3.4 Early consultation materials have indicated the overhead line will mostly take the form of double wood poles, with some steel towers being required. Please see Appendix 1 for more information.

3.5 The application is currently in the pre-application stage. A consultation draft of the Statement of Community Consultation (SoCC) has been submitted to both Denbighshire County Council and Conwy County Borough Council and the Councils have until Friday 7th February to submit comments. Officers have delegated powers to comment on the draft SoCC, however a copy of the draft document has been circulated to relevant Ward Councillors for comment and a hard copy has been placed in the Members room.

3.6 SPM has previously carried out two stages of non-statutory pre-application public consultation; Stage 1 focused on the three route corridor options for the overhead power line and Stage 2 focused on the preferred route corridor for the overhead power line.

3.7 The draft SoCC specifically relates to Stage 3 of the pre-application consultation, which constitutes as the statutory pre-application public consultation in accordance with Section 42 and Section 47 of the Planning Act 2008. The statutory pre-application consultation will run from 3 March 2014 to 13 April 2014. (Please note, as part of the Council's consultation response to the draft SoCC, the Council will be requesting the timescales are altered / extended to fit with our Committee cycle as the Council's formal response to the statutory pre-application consultation will need to be reported to and endorsed by Planning Committee.)

3.8 The draft SoCC does not indicate when SPM intend to submit the application for development consent to the Planning Inspectorate; however Officers consider that SPM will be keen to progress the application in order to fulfill the grid connection agreements they have in place with the SSA windfarm developers.

4. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

4.1 Significant officer time and resources may need to be allocated to the project during the pre-application consultation and during the Examination stage in order to assess local impacts.

4.2 The landscape and visual impact of the proposal is likely to be a key planning consideration; the Council may therefore need to procure external landscape consultancy services to help assess the local impacts of the proposal.

4.3 The Council has not entered into a legal agreement with the developer in respect to this project and overhead power line projects may not be eligible for Welsh Government funding. The costs incurred by the Council in response to this project may not therefore be recoverable.

4.4 The project affects both Denbighshire and Conwy, so there may be the opportunity to work in collaboration with Conwy County Borough Council and share officer resources.

4.5 Whilst notwithstanding the resolution at Communities Scrutiny Committee in July 2012 to fully engage in the planning process for major infrastructure projects, a steer from Members is requested with regards to the level of resource the Council should dedicate to respond to the forthcoming statutory pre-application consultation.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Members are requested to note the key dates identified in Section 3 of this report.

5.2 A resolution is sought on the level of resource the Council should dedicate to response to this project.

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