

DECISION ITEM

REPORT OF	MEETING	DATE	ITEM NO
HEAD OF PLANNING	PLANNING COMMITTEE	6 SEPTEMBER 2023	5
MORGAN AND MORECAMBE OFFSHORE WIND FARMS: TRANSMISSION ASSETS			

PUBLIC ITEM

This item is for consideration in the public part of the meeting.

RELEVANT LEAD MEMBER

This item is within the remit of Lead Member for Corporate and Economic Development (Councillor K Buckley).

PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

Towards the end of 2023 the developers of the Morgan and Morecambe Offshore Windfarm projects are proposing to commence their statutory pre-application consultation process ahead of submitting their application for a Development Consent Order (DCO) to the Planning Inspectorate in line with the Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects (NSIP) provisions. This report sets out details of the proposed development, considers the process for representations to that consultation to be made on behalf of Fylde Council and seeks to establish a small group of members with whom the Head of Planning may consult in exercising his delegated authority to comment on the proposal during the determination process.

RECOVERABILITY

This decision is recoverable under section 5 of part 3 of the constitution.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That members of the Planning Committee note the details of the proposed offshore windfarms and associated onshore connection infrastructure.
2. That the Committee nominate up to four members with who the Head of Planning can consult prior to exercising delegated powers to make representations regarding any future pre-application and application submitted under the National Significant Infrastructure Projects procedure.

REPORT

1. Three offshore wind projects are currently planned in the Irish Sea: The Morgan Offshore Wind Project; The Morecambe Offshore Windfarm and The Mona Offshore Wind Project. It is proposed that the Morgan and Morecambe Projects, which combined will generate almost 2GW of energy, will be connected to the National Grid via a substation at Penwortham near Preston. This element of the proposal is referred to as The Morgan

and Morecambe Offshore Wind Farms: Transmission Assets project. Figure 1 below shows the location of the various proposals and full details of the proposals are available via the developer's [information hub](#).

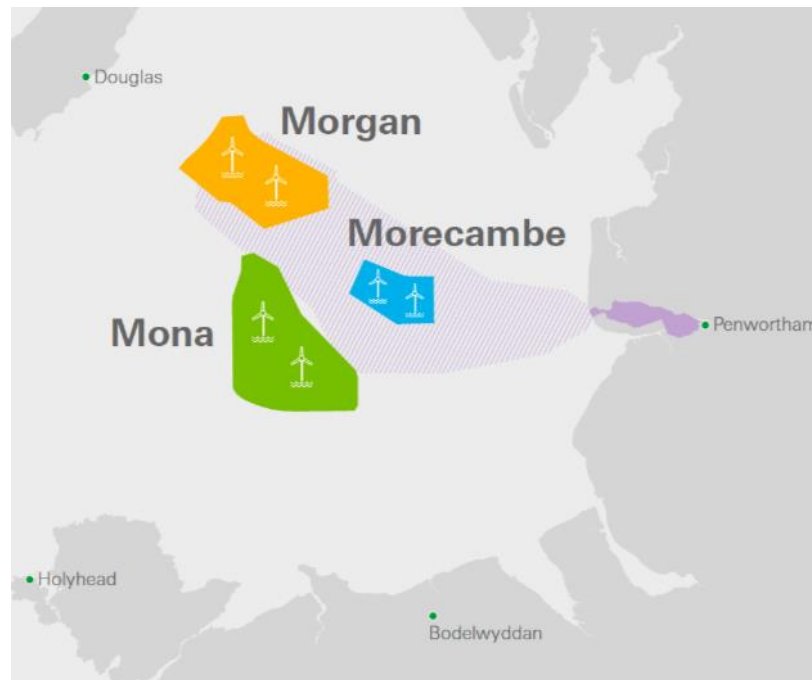


Figure 1: Location of Irish Sea windfarm proposals and transmission route

2. The wind farm projects, which will be located approximately 30km (19 miles) off the coast of northwest England and expected to generate power for 60 years, were awarded licences during The Crown Estates' Offshore Wind Leasing Round 4 bidding process.
3. The Government classifies major energy projects as Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects (NSIPs). Instead of submitting separate applications for the various consents and licences required in order to allow major projects of this nature to go ahead, consent to construct, operate and maintain, and decommission is given via a Development Consent Order. Accordingly, rather than a planning application being submitted to the local planning authority for consideration, an application will be submitted directly to the Planning Inspectorate with the final decision being made by the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero.
4. Whilst the impacts of the offshore windfarms themselves are likely to be limited to distant views, the onshore element of the link to Penwortham is proposed to run through the borough of Fylde, with the initial consultation proposal indicating that the cables would come ashore in the vicinity of Squires Gate, run across the borough before crossing the River Ribble at a point between Freckleton and Clifton.
5. The proposal would see a series of cables routed alongside one another to provide a connection of the capacity required. Above ground infrastructure would be required at (or close to) the landing point with the cables themselves being buried at a depth of around 1 metre with periodic inspection chambers along the route. The current search parameters indicate that a temporary construction corridor of up to 120m in width would be required to undertake that work to provide for the storage of spoil, haul roads, contractor compounds, etc. Along the length of the proposed route there is existing infrastructure (roads, rail line, airport, Liggard Brook and other drainage routes, etc.), sensitive landscapes (ecological designations at the beach and estuary, green belt, etc) and people's homes, so there is potential for significant impacts from this element of the project.
6. In addition to the transmission route, the consultation also refers to 4 indicative onshore substation search areas. Search area 1 is an area south east of Kirkham, north east of Freckleton and west of Newton-with-Scales, but excluding Hall Cross and Kirkham Prison. Search area 2 is an area south of Newton-with-Scales bordered by the Preston New Road (A584) and the Blackpool Road (A583) to the north east. It does not include Newton Bluecoat Primary School. Search areas 3 and 4, are located outside the borough of Fylde on the south side of the River Ribble and to the north of Longton and Hutton. The areas of search are shown in Figure 2.

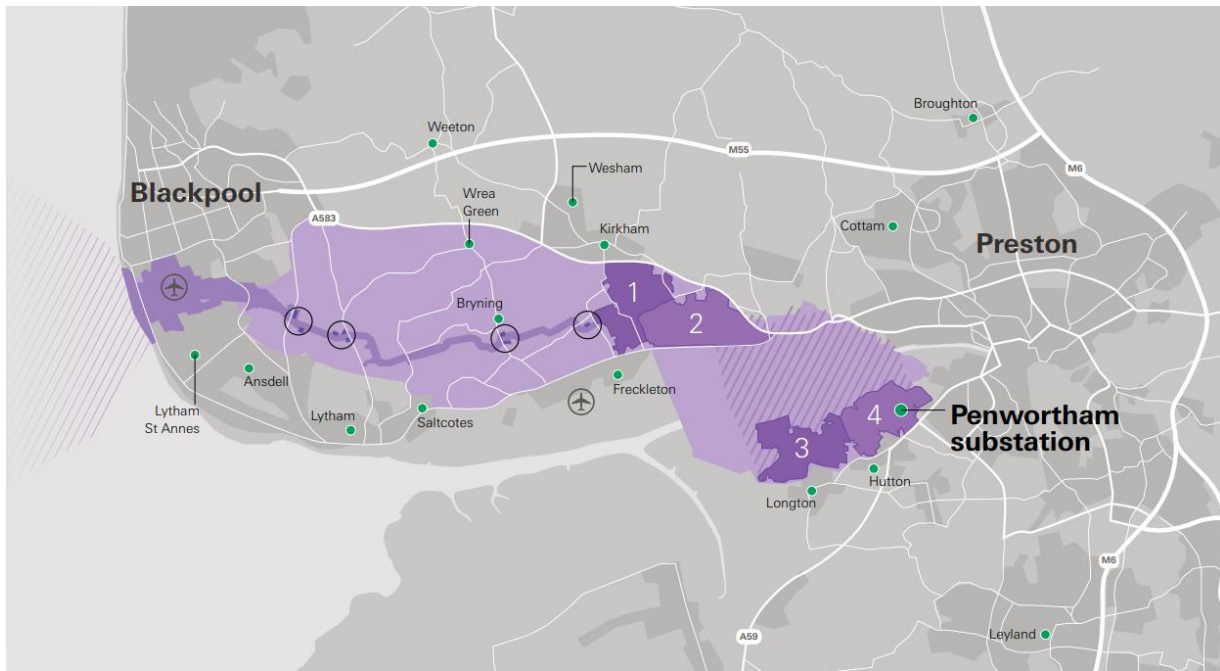


Figure 2: Area of Search for proposed transmission assets and onshore substation search areas

7. To maintain electrical independence, one substation will be required for the Morgan Offshore Wind Project and one for the Morecambe Offshore Windfarm. It is anticipated that the substations would cover a maximum combined permanent footprint of approximately 280,000m², with a maximum height of the main structure/buildings being 25 metres. The promoters of the project indicate that landscaping and planting areas will be introduced in an attempt to minimise some of the visual impacts of these facilities.
8. As the area of search for the cabling route is extensive and the companies involved have been seeking to identify and contact landowners in that area, considerable public interest has been generated. Before carrying out their formal pre application consultation, the applicants have undertaken an informal preapplication consultation and have engaged with a number of bodies to assess the likely impacts of the proposal, including:
 - Physical processes, benthic ecology and fish and shellfish ecology.
 - Marine mammals.
 - Offshore and coastal ornithology.
 - Marine archaeology
 - Shipping and navigation.
 - Commercial fisheries.
 - Other sea users.
 - Onshore ecology.
 - Onshore historic environment.
 - Water/ground conditions (hydrology, flood risk, hydrogeology, geology, ground conditions).
 - Traffic and transport
 - Air quality, noise and health.
 - Land use, recreation and socio-economics.
 - Seascape, landscape and visual.
 - Aviation and radar.
9. In addition to the information available online, a series of public awareness events have been held by the developers across the area potentially affected by the development. It is expected that they will follow that up with other events as the project develops and matters become clearer.

The NSIP Process

10. The transmission assets will form a separate submission to the windfarms themselves. In October 2022, the Secretary of State at the time (the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy) issued a direction under Section 35 of the Planning Act 2008 that the Morgan and Morecambe Offshore Wind Farms: Transmission Assets should be treated as a development for which development consent is required. As such the submissions will be made to and examined by the Planning Inspectorate before being determined by the relevant Secretary of State, now the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero. Fylde Council will be a key participant in that process which will take the form of a public inquiry to be held at a location and timescale that is yet unknown, but the developer is expecting to submit their application in 2024 to allow construction to commence in 2028 if a DCO is granted.
11. A detailed explanation of [the NSIP process](#) is available on the Planning Inspectorate’s website, but essentially there are six stages of the development consent regime for Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects:
- 1) Pre-application
 - 2) Acceptance
 - 3) Pre-examination
 - 4) The Examination
 - 5) Recommendation and Decision
 - 6) Post Decision
12. Over recent months the applicants have been conducting a non statutory pre application consultation ahead of the statutory pre application process that forms stage 1 of the process. The non statutory and statutory pre application stages are important parts of the process as once an application is submitted there is little opportunity to amend the submission proposal.
13. If the DCO application is accepted, a pre-examination stage will begin, with opportunities for local community members to register as an interested party on the Planning Inspectorate’s website and request to take part in the examination process. The Planning Inspectorate will then examine the DCO application, with input from interested parties and statutory consultees. The examination period is expected to take a maximum of six months. Following the examination, the Planning Inspectorate will present its recommendation to the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, who will then make the final decision on whether the DCO should be granted. It is anticipated that a final decision will be made on the application in 2025.
14. As set out above, any application for the proposed works will be submitted to the Planning Inspectorate. They in turn will write to the Fylde Council as a “Host Authority”, i.e. a local authority in whose area a development proposal is situated, to ascertain the views of the council regarding proposal. The responses to these consultations are required to be made in line with statutory time limits and so it is important to put in place provisions that will allow these time constraints to be met, as the normal committee timetable will not always allow this to occur, Members are asked to nominate four members of the committee with who the Head of Planning will consult ahead of formulating his responses at the various stages of the NSIP process in line with the approved scheme of delegation.

CORPORATE PRIORITIES	
Economy – To create a vibrant and healthy economy	√
Environment – To deliver services customers expect	
Efficiency – By spending money in the most efficient way	√
Tourism – To create a great place to live and visit	

IMPLICATIONS	
Finance	The cost of making representations will be met from existing budgets.
Legal	The legal implications are set out in the body of the report.

Community Safety	None.
Human Rights and Equalities	None.
Sustainability and Environmental Impact	None.
Health & Safety and Risk Management	None.

SUMMARY OF PREVIOUS DECISIONS
None

BACKGROUND PAPERS REVELANT TO THIS ITEM		
Name of document	Date	Where available for inspection
Nationally Significant Infrastructure Process	N/A	The Planning Inspectorate
Morgan and Morecambe Offshore Wind Farms: Transmission Assets Information Hub	N/A	Morgan and Morecambe Offshore Wind Farms: Transmission Assets

LEAD AUTHOR	CONTACT DETAILS	DATE
Mark Evans	mark.evans@fylde.gov.uk & Tel 01253 658460	August 2023