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“The NFU represents 55,000 members across England and Wales. In addition, we have 20,000 NFU Countryside members with an interest in farming and rural life.”

Offshore Coordination Project Consultation

Background

The NFU is very pleased to see that this research and report has been carried out. The NFU has now been involved on behalf of its members in Offshore Wind Farm Projects since 2015 and the implications of the onshore cables crossing land to the nearest National Grid substation. The NFU has been involved with the following National Significant Infrastructure Schemes (NSIPs) Triton Knoll, Norfolk Vanguard, Hornsea Project 3, Norfolk Boreas, in discussions presently regarding Hornsea Project 4 and the proposal for Sheringham and Dudgeon extension schemes.

All of these schemes except for Hornsea 4 and Triton Knoll are proposing to have underground cables crossing agricultural land in Norfolk. Including either landfall sites on the east or north coast with cables running north to south to Dunston, south of Norwich and east to west to Necton along with the implications of either a substation or a converter station being built for each development.

The cables are set to run north to south for Hornsea Project 3 and the proposed Sheringham and Dudgeon Extension projects with the cable corridors running almost parallel to each other. Some of our members are going to have two developers laying their underground cables crossing the farm at the same time. Further some landowners are going to be affected where the Hornsea 3 project route crosses the Norfolk Vanguard and Boreas route which runs east to west. The impact of the cables crossing will have a further impact on agricultural land.

This construction activity will take an estimated 2500 acres of productive agricultural land as well as causing significant disruption during the construction phase to both farm businesses and the local communities for many years to come. This comes at a time when the importance of high quality, high welfare, healthy and safe domestically produced food is greater than ever. The scale and duration of the disruption to farming businesses, local communities and the landscape across Norfolk and South East Yorkshire over the next few years is going to be very significant. This is partly due to the fact that each scheme is looked at on an individual basis when the developer applies for a Development Consent Order (DCO) to build the offshore windfarm and the associated underground cables.

The Report

The NFU believes strongly that going forward there must be a coordinated approach to connecting offshore electric infrastructure. The landscapes and agricultural businesses affected will not be able to sustain the impact that is being proposed in Norfolk to connect the proposed wind farms.

As outlined in the Executive summary if the analysis is highlighting that an integrated approach offshore has the potential to save consumers approximately £6 billion in capital and operating expenditure then the integrated approach has to be considered further and now.

The voice of British farming

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If as stated at the third bullet point in the summary and later within the main body of the report that there are potentially significant environmental and social benefits with an integrated approach because the number of onshore and offshore assets, cables and onshore landing points could be potentially reduced by 50% this has to be considered and urgently researched further. It is stated that under the integrated approach there is the potential to significantly mitigate the environmental impact and reduce the impact on the local communities. The NFU believes that this is essential because as highlighted above the local coastal landscapes and agricultural land that is going to be affected by individual projects with underground cabling is not sustainable.

It has been stated that full integration before 2030 may not be achievable where projects are already at a well advanced stage of development. The NFU would like to see further work being carried out by National Grid and the developers who have already applied for a DCO to reduce the impact of the schemes which have been highlighted at the beginning of this report. The impact of the onshore landing points and the substation/converter stations to be built and sited at the National Grid Substations is very significant. The buildings are like very large warehouse buildings and will stand out in the landscape. If the integrated approach can reduce cables and building infrastructure on land then it has to be considered further and acted upon as soon as possible.

It is stated within key messages that the integrated design will have more flexibility in the location of the landing points due to the use of HVDC connections, providing greater potential for them to be located in less environmentally and socially sensitive areas. This again is a benefit to the affect and impact on agricultural land and local landscapes. It is understood that the associated infrastructure may be larger but less is more in this instance. As with all infrastructure projects it is important that proper consultation is carried out with all relevant local stakeholders who will be impacted by any proposed development. It cannot be acceptable that under the Holistic Approach (status quo) the number of landing points would be 105 when under an integrated approach it is estimated to be 30 landing points by 2050.

The NFU can only see benefits of the Integrated Option for its members as highlighted under the overview of the integrated network it is stated that the impact on the onshore network is minimised as electricity can be more readily transported via offshore cables closer to areas of demand. The NFU also only sees benefits from the points highlighted under Table 1 for the integrated approach.

The NFU believe strongly that the agricultural businesses and the local coastal landscapes that could be affected by the current approach as highlighted on the diagrams to 2030 and 2050 is not feasible in anyway.

If a review of the 'Grid Code' is required and is essential as stated in the report then this must be carried out as soon as possible to clarify rules in relation to HVDC connected offshore windfarms. This work should not be delayed along with further changes to the SQSS if this needs to be assessed and progressed as stated.

The NFU cannot agree more with the four bullet points which are highlighted on page 34 in regard to the biggest impacts on the local community in how wind farms are being currently connected to the network.

The NFU does understand that more detailed planning, coordination and operational analysis will be required to progress the conceptual designs but sees only benefits of the 'Integrated Approach' to the impacts on agricultural land and businesses and the local communities.

The NFU would like to see further research and planning to be carried out immediately in regard to the 'Integrated Approach' and looks forward to seeing the next report to highlight progress and next steps.