

# 100th Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project decision reached

The A1 Birtley to Coalhouse Improvement Scheme is the 100th Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project (NSIP) to be decided following examination by The Planning Inspectorate. The examination completed its hearings virtually and to the original timetable.

Applications for projects considered to be of national significance are made under the Planning Act 2008. The Act was introduced to streamline the decision-making process, making it fairer and faster for communities and developers alike and to encourage investment in the country's vital infrastructure by providing certainty on decision timescales.

Prior to the introduction of the 2008 Act, it could take several years to decide major planning applications.

The Planning Act 2008 requires developers to consult with affected communities and to thoroughly prepare applications before submitting them for examination. The Planning Inspectorate examines the application and makes a recommendation to the relevant Secretary of State who makes the final decision. The regime imposes strict timescales on key stages of the process, and it typically takes 14-16 months from the day an application is submitted to a decision being made. Overall, the process increases confidence and provides the certainty of knowing when a decision will be made for developers, investors and all those with an interest in the project.

The first project to be examined and decided under the Planning Act 2008 was the Rookery South Energy from Waste Facility project in 2013. Since then, projects as diverse as the Thames Tideway Tunnel, the Hinkley Point C New Nuclear Power Station and Dogger Bank Offshore Wind Farm have been consented through this process.

Recent high-profile projects examined include the likes of A38 Derby Junctions and Norfolk Boreas Offshore Wind Farm, as the Planning Inspectorate has risen to the unique challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic with hearings currently being held virtually.

Sarah Richards, Chief Executive of The Planning Inspectorate, said:

This is the 100th application for a Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project to be decided following examination by The Planning Inspectorate – it is a significant milestone, particularly bearing in mind the challenges posed by working through three separate lockdown periods in the last 12 months. Every application has met the statutory timescales laid down in the Planning Act 2008

for examination by the Inspectorate.

This is a tremendous achievement for our Inspectors and casework staff. The Planning Act 2008 has streamlined and greatly improved the decision-making process for major infrastructure that the country needs, whilst ensuring proposals are properly and robustly examined and ensuring local people can have their say.

We have had to change how we work over the past few months, have done so with great success, and are aware that we have to keep evolving and challenging ourselves as an organisation in order to keep improving.

Of the 100 projects decided to date, 61 were energy, 36 transport, 2 waste and 1 waste water developments.

There are currently 63 Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects at Pre-Application stage, in a pipeline of projects which developers are designing and consulting on ready for examination over coming months and years. A further 13 are either awaiting Acceptance for Examination, are under Examination or in the Decision stage.

Details of these projects can be found on <http://infrastructure.planninginspectorate.gov.uk>.

NSIPs are not only significant in their importance to the country but are large applications of particular interest to many local people.

The Planning Inspectorate places great importance on being fair, open and impartial. No matter the type, size or location of a project, it ensures that local communities have the opportunity to make their views known and are able to participate in the examination process. The examinations of the projects examined to date considered thousands of written representations and examiners have heard directly from thousands of affected people at Hearings held in the locality of the projects.

Graham Stallwood, Director of Operations at The Planning Inspectorate, added:

We encourage individuals and communities to get involved in the examination of major projects when developers are consulting on their proposals before submitting an application, at the pre-application stage and when we are examining their application. We listen carefully to what all interested parties tell us about a project that affects them, and we give full consideration to their views when making a recommendation to the Secretary of State.

Notes to editors:

Journalists wanting further information should contact The Planning Inspectorate Press Office, on 0303 444 5004 or email: [pressoffice@pins.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:pressoffice@pins.gsi.gov.uk)

The decision letter, Recommendation and Development Consent Order for the A1 Birtley to Coalhouse Improvement Scheme can be viewed on the National Infrastructure Planning website.

### Planning Inspectorate role

On 1 April 2012, under the Localism Act 2011, the Planning Inspectorate became the agency responsible for operating the planning process for nationally significant infrastructure projects (NSIPs).

NSIPs are usually large-scale developments such as new harbours, power generating stations (including wind farms), and electricity transmission lines, which require a type of consent known as 'development consent' under procedures governed by the Planning Act 2008 (as amended).

The 2008 Act sets out thresholds above which certain types of infrastructure development are considered to be nationally significant and require development consent.

In England, the Planning Inspectorate examines applications for development consent from the energy, transport, waste, waste water, water and business and commercial sectors. In Wales, it examines applications for energy and harbour development, subject to detailed provisions in the Act; other matters are for Welsh Ministers.

The Planning Inspectorate recently produced a video highlighting its work.

Any developer wishing to construct an NSIP must first apply for consent to do so. For such projects, the Planning Inspectorate examines the application and will make a recommendation to the relevant Secretary of State, who will make the decision on whether to grant or to refuse development consent.