

ENERGY PROJECTS REPORT – 11 November 2024

Report from the Fromus Energy Project Team (formerly the Energy Projects Working Group) meeting held at the Fromus Centre, 24 October 2024

With the addition of Councillors from Benhall and Sternfield and Kelsale cum Carlton it was agreed that the group name be changed to reflect the increased demographic. Acknowledgement was made of both the shared and differing concerns of the three parishes to the proposed Sea Link project. Therefore, responses agreed to the forthcoming Sea Link Development Consent Order (DCO) by the group would be submitted to their individual councils for endorsement. This could either be joint, severally or a mix of both. The DCO was the principal agenda item, and the meeting welcomed Paul Collins, Co-Director of Stop Sizewell C, to discuss his experience of the NSIP DCO process. Paul's excellent advice will undoubtedly assist the group in responding to the Planning Inspector's examination.

Delivering the Shared Offshore Network – Offshore Wind Industry Council

Another report on the offshore wind power was published in October. The Offshore Wind Industry Council is a body chaired by the Secretary of State for DESNEZ and they were not reticent in portraying problems within the industry. Unfortunately, these problems have a direct impact on our area as they highlight the technical issues in developing offshore grids and why Saxmundham is proposed to be the site for multiple converter stations. Whereas the technology is available, it seemingly is several years away from implementation due to a plethora of reasons.

The lengthy treatise bemoans the fact that offshore wind development is stagnated and that a fundamental change is required to deliver the offshore grid. Generally it is more concerned with the transmission from offshore to onshore, than onshore infrastructure.

The report identifies that UK developments do not have common design and operation standards.

Whilst UK generators have extensive experience in HVAC technologies they have far less experience in implementing HVDC projects. Furthermore, far more coordination of technical compatibility between components is required. In other words standardisation, that will prove to be a major technical and commercial challenge. Another problem is that all companies are competing in the supply chain and that lead time for some equipment is up to seven years. Therefore some projects for delivery dates in 2030 have already commenced procurement. Moreover coordination is another problem.

Coordination offshore reduces the number of connection locations offshore, but not the number of cables that come ashore. Currently whilst North Falls and Five Estuaries are coordinating, there is little appetite for competing companies to do likewise. This is aggravated by the distance from shore. Increasing distance from shore means that HVDC technology is due to play a larger role. OWIC identify that more attention by the industry is required. However, HVDC systems from different suppliers are not interoperable.

'A converter station of vendor A cannot be connected to a converter station of vendor B as they use different proprietary specifications and standards. Consequently it will be impossible to connect currently planned and built HVDC connections to a more and more interconnected and meshed offshore grid'.

OWIC argue that the single vendor approach must evolve towards a multi-vendor with multi-purpose capabilities for HVDC technologies.

The report concludes that the UK should 'maximise the benefits of research being conducted by other parties'. The European Commission has set up a 90m euro, five year research project, InterOPERA to addresses interoperability in offshore grids. Ideally they would like a joint standard in Europe to ensure interoperability of converter stations. In Germany the three grid operators have decided to collaborate and link up the offshore converter stations to 10 GWs of offshore wind farms. A consortium of Dutch and Danish energy companies are working towards a HVDC coordinated offshore grid under the auspices of North Sea Wind Power Hub.

Energy Projects Exhibition

Regrettably, it was decided to cancel the Energy Projects Exhibition scheduled for Saturday 23 November in the Market Hall. National Grid Electricity Transmission (Sealink), National Grid Ventures (Lionlink and Nautilus) and EDF Energy (Sizewell C) all declined our invitation to attend as they had either held public exhibitions, have planned public exhibitions, or offer other ways to engage with the public. We had also not received a reply from Suffolk County Council. It was therefore concluded that we would not be able to meet our aim to present a balanced view of the energy projects proposed for the area. A public meeting will be considered in the New Year, perhaps when the Sealink Development Consent Order application is submitted.

Finally

You will recall that during the last full council meeting, Councillor Elizabeth Clark noted that the best form of reaching members of government is to write. Whilst Secretaries of State are unlikely to read the communications, they are advised that members of staff will report if there are numerous e-mails regarding one particular subject. Councillor Tim Lock duly submitted a letter to the Rt.Hon. Edward Miliband, M.P. Perhaps we all should do so?

Saxmundham Against Needless Destruction (SAND) organised a very successful march with extensive local media coverage on 2 November 2024. Together with the council's media coverage in respect of excessive development, Significant Infrastructure Zones (SIZEs), Saxmundham is well and truly on the map.

Stop Press

See separate report on the National Energy System Operator (NESO), Clean Power 2030.