

Consultation on National Policy Statements

Electricity Networks



What is Planning Aid?

Planning Aid offers people the opportunity to get involved in the development of their local areas. We provide free and independent professional planning advice to community groups and individuals who cannot afford to pay professional fees. We work with communities to help them understand and play a role in the planning process. We are an independent source of advice and information on planning issues, not part of central or local government.

The new planning process for nationally significant infrastructure

The 2008 Planning Act introduced a new planning system for applications to build nationally significant infrastructure facilities in England and Wales. The new system covers applications for major energy generation, railways, ports, major roads, airports and water and waste infrastructure. Under the new system, national policy on infrastructure will be set out in a series of new National Policy Statements (NPS) which can be reviewed by the Secretary of State if there is a change in circumstances. A new independent body, the Infrastructure Planning Commission (IPC), will examine and decide applications for new infrastructure development, using the criteria on national need, benefits and impacts set out in the NPS, and consideration of evidence put forward on potential local effects.

Why should I get involved in the debate on National Policy Statements?

In autumn 2009 the Government published the first set of draft National Policy Statements (NPS) for public consultation. It is important to make your views known because once finalised the NPS will provide the framework for future decisions by the IPC on individual applications. Issues relating to the need for a specific type of infrastructure will not be debated again. Each NPS will be accompanied by an Appraisal of Sustainability on which comments are also invited. Except for the NPS on nuclear power stations and airports, specific locations for infrastructure are not identified although criteria may guide developers to appropriate types of area.

Electricity Networks

This NPS covers above ground electricity power lines for the long distance transfer of electricity (275kV and 400kV, usually on pylons) and distribution systems (lower voltage power lines (132kV and above, usually on towers / poles) and associated infrastructure eg sub stations. Lines below 132kV are only included if they are associated with a Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project which will be determined by the IPC and is applied for at the same time.

Electricity network projects are usually located to connect, or reinforce existing connections, between generating stations (existing or anticipated) and the rest of the network. They do not have to use the most direct route between points and there is some flexibility around the location of sub stations.

The Overarching Infrastructure Energy Policy NPS (see separate leaflet) sets out the national need for the different types of energy infrastructure required over the next 10 – 15 years if the nation is to be able to reduce emissions, ensure

security of energy supply, expand grid capacity, keep costs down and contribute to sustainable development. A 'smarter' electricity grid will be needed to support a more complex system of electricity supply and demand, where generation takes place in a wide range of locations across the country. It also sets out five key principles which will guide the IPC when deciding applications, these are:

- If the development contributes to meeting the need and is in accordance with the NPS, then consent should be given;
- Regard should be had to local impact reports (produced by local authorities) and other matters considered relevant and important;
- National, regional and local benefits (environmental, social and economic) should be taken account of;
- Adverse impacts should be considered, longer term and cumulative impacts and proposed mitigation; and
- If the IPC considers that the adverse impacts (after mitigation) outweigh the benefits, then consent should be refused.

In the event of a conflict with existing planning policy, the NPS will be followed. The Overarching Energy Policy NPS must be read together with this technology specific NPS.

The NPS recognises that whilst desirable, it is not always possible for applications for electricity networks to be submitted at the same time as the related generating plant. In such cases the NPS sets out criteria to help the IPC decide whether it can consider an application in isolation.

The NPS also sets out some specific criteria for the IPC when considering applications, these include:

- Climate Change Adaptation – resilience to flooding (especially sub-stations), wind and storms, higher temperatures and increased earth movement or subsidence as a result of flooding or drought need.
- Good design principles.
- Landscape and visual impacts – routes should avoid areas of high amenity or scientific interest (even if this increases



the mileage) and deviations (provided this can be done without too many large angled towers). Otherwise the most direct route should be followed, avoiding skylines and ridges, maximising tree screening, avoiding concentrations of lines, and in urban areas approaching through industrial zones and considering running routes underground in residential and recreational land areas.

- Noise – weather conditions affect noise levels. Transmission lines emit an audible 'hum' or 'crackle' which should be minimised, but this is unlikely to lead to a refusal by the IPC. Sub-station noise should be mitigated.
- Electric and magnetic fields – these occur around power lines, electric cables and equipment which uses electricity. Applications for overhead lines 275kV – 400kV will have to satisfy the IPC that international safety standards are not exceeded for residential accommodation along the route. Other regulations cover power lines at or below 132kV, and the IPC will need to be satisfied that they are complied with.

Further information on the consultation process, the questions on which comments are sought, related events, the draft NPS and the supporting documentation is available on the Department for Energy and Climate Change website www.energy-nps-consultation.decc.gov.uk. Welsh language, Braille and large print copies are available on request. Responses can be submitted online, by letter, fax or email. The consultation will close on 22 February 2010.



Contact Details

You can call the Planning Aid NPS advice line for independent advice. Initially advice will be given to all. If your enquiry is more complex and meets our eligibility criteria, you will be assisted by a qualified planning advisor or volunteer. If you can afford to pay, you will be referred to a planning consultant.

Planning Aid on 0121 214 2915 or www.planningaid.rtpi.org.uk

Planning Aid for London on 020 7247 4900 or www.planningaidforlondon.org.uk

Planning Aid for Wales on 02920 485765 or www.planningaidwales.org.uk

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Planning Aid Wales is the independent charity providing Planning Aid services in Wales, with core funding from the Welsh Assembly Government.