

2.0 CONSULTATIONS

2.1 Introduction

The consultation phase of an Environmental Impact Assessment is of utmost importance, as it enables all concerned and interested parties to voice their opinions on the development during the initial stages of the project. This enables changes to be made during the design stage of the development, which take into account comments and ideas arising from the consultation process.

2.2 Statutory and Relevant Bodies Consultation

Consultation meetings were held with the principal statutory consultees such as the Northern Ireland Environment Agency, the Northern Ireland Planning Service, the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment Northern Ireland and the Crown Estates at the outset of the project. This consultation with statutory bodies continued throughout the Environmental Impact Assessment and particularly when potential issues were arising during the impact assessment phase.

Letters were sent out to all relevant statutory and non-statutory consultees, informing them of the extent of the proposed development and inviting their comments on the scheme. The statutory and non-statutory consultees who were contacted about the proposed development are listed below in Table 2.1. A summary of the written responses received from those consultees is included in Appendix 2.1.

Table 2.1 List of Statutory and non-statutory bodies issued with written invitation to comment

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| • Belfast Harbour Commissioners | • Northern Health and Social Services Board |
| • Carrickfergus Borough Council | • Northern Ireland Environment Agency (Natural Heritage Unit) |
| • Centre for the Protection of National Infrastructure | • Northern Ireland Environment Agency (Air and Environmental Quality Section) |
| • Civil Aviation Authority | • Northern Ireland Environment Agency (Built Heritage) |
| • Council for Nature Conservation and the Countryside | • Northern Ireland Environment Agency (Conservation Designations and Protection) |
| • Crown Estates | • Northern Ireland Environment Agency (Industrial Pollution and Radiochemical Inspectorate) |

- Department of Agriculture
- Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (Energy Branch)
- Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (Health and Safety Executive)
- Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (Principal Quarry Inspector)
- Fire Authority for Northern Ireland
- Fisheries Conservancy Board for Northern Ireland
- Geological Survey of NI
- George Best Belfast City Airport
- Larne Borough Council
- Larne Golf Club
- MCA Belfast Marine Office
- Ministry of Defence
- National Trust
- NI Chamber of Commerce and Industry
- NI Health Promotion Agency
- NI Tourist Board
- NI Water
- NIE
- Northern Ireland Environment Agency (Land and Resource Management)
- Northern Ireland Environment Agency (Maritime Archaeology)
- Northern Ireland Environment Agency (Water Management Unit)
- Northern Ireland Housing Executive
- Northern Ireland Office
- Northern Ireland Planning Service (Divisional Planning Manager)
- Northern Ireland Planning Service (Landscape Section)
- Northern Ireland Planning Service (Special Studies Section)
- Northern Ireland Roads Service
- Northern Ireland Tourist Board
- Phoenix Natural Gas
- Port of Larne
- Premier Power
- Premier Transmission
- RNLI
- Rural Community Network
- Rural Development Council for NI
- The RSPB Northern Ireland

Meetings were held with the principal statutory and relevant consultees on regular occasions through the consultation process. A list of the main meetings attended is provided below:

- 5th October 2007 - Northern Ireland Environment Agency Natural Heritage Unit
- 13th October 2008 - Agriculture, Food and Biosciences Institute
- 24th October 2008 - Northern Ireland Environment Agency Water Management Unit, Planning Service, Department of Energy, Trade and Investment
- 28th November 2008 - Northern Ireland Environment Agency (Water Management Unit, Natural Heritage Unit, Conservation Designation and Protection,)
- 4th June 2009 - Northern Ireland Electricity (NIE) and System Operators Northern Ireland (SONI)
- 25th August 2009 - Northern Ireland Electricity
- 5th October 2009 - Department of Energy, Trade and Investment
- 9th October 2009 - Health and Safety Executive Northern Ireland
- 24th November 2009 - Planning Service Landscape Architects Branch
- 24th November 2009 - Planning Service Special Studies Unit
- 14th December 2009 - Northern Ireland Environment Agency Natural Heritage Unit

2.3 Stakeholder Consultation

Consultation with local stakeholders began early in the EIA process, coinciding with planning the seismic survey in early 2007. The Islandmagee Storage Project Team were very keen that all interested parties had an opportunity to become involved from the very beginning and offer their views on the proposed development.

2.3.1 Local Interest Groups

The Larne Lough hinterland has been subject to quite extensive industrial development throughout the past 50 years. Industries such as the Port of Larne, Ballylumford Power Station, Magheramorne quarry and cement works, as well as infrastructure facilities such as the installation of the gas transmission pipeline from Scotland to Northern Ireland, the subsequent Belfast gas Transmission Pipeline and the Moyle electricity Interconnector have all planned and/or executed significant construction works since 1990. In particular, proposals in the mid 1990s to turn Magheramorne quarry into a landfill site generated a strong degree of public opposition and the local community and interest groups became much more active in lobbying for the preservation and protection of Larne Lough.

Recognising that consultation and input from local stakeholders is of key importance in designing a facility that will cause minimum disruption to the local community, Islandmagee Storage Limited have operated a policy of transparency and active consultation with all interested parties. The following meetings/presentations were held with local interest and stakeholder groups throughout the consultation process.

- 18th September 2007 - Friends of Larne Lough
- 31st March 2008 - Islandmagee Community Development Association

- 2nd May 2008 - Port of Larne
- 16th May 2008 - North Coast Lobster Fishermen Association
- 24th June 2009 - Friends of Larne Lough and Larne District Friends of the Earth
- 25th June 2009 - Islandmagee Community Development Association
- 25th June 2009 - Glynn Residents Association
- 25th June 2009 - Local Fishermen
- 29th July 2009 - North Irish Diving School

In addition to the above meetings, a representative of Islandmagee Storage Limited attended the biannual meetings organised by Larne Borough Council and the friends of Larne Lough to discuss the environmental management of Larne Lough. As well as the Friends of Larne Lough and Larne Borough Council's Environmental Department, the group includes the local shellfish producers, local boat clubs, Ballylumford Power Station, AFBI, NIEA Water Management Unit. Other bodies with interests in Larne Lough such as GSNI and the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure Fisheries Division have also been invited to present at the meetings. These meetings were attended by Islandmagee Storage Limited on: 6th May 2008, 11th November 2008, 30th April 2009 and 3rd November 2009 where the group was updated on the progress of the scheme and were able to submit feedback and share information.

On 12th November 2009 the Islandmagee Storage Project was presented to the Northern Ireland Energy Forum, an annual energy policy event which brings together all the key players from the Northern Ireland energy sector.

2.3.2 Public Consultation

The first public consultation event was held on 27th and 28th June 2009. The event involved open afternoon/evening sessions in the 2nd Presbyterian Church Hall in Islandmagee where information on the proposed development and the environmental studies being undertaken was presented on display boards. A number of options for the configuration of the intake and outfall pipelines as well as the wellpad site were displayed and visitors were invited to comment on their preferred options.



Plate 2.1 Visitors viewing displays at Public Consultation event 27th June 2009

In addition to the open sessions, several local stakeholder groups were invited to preview the public exhibition ahead of the open sessions and participate in one to one meetings with the project team. These one to one meetings enabled full attention to be given to the views of those stakeholders who would have a particular interest in or impact from the scheme.

In addition to advertising the public consultation sessions in the local press and by asking local shops to put up posters, direct invitations were sent by post to all stakeholders held on the Islandmagee Storage Project's project updates database, which includes:

- All Larne Borough Councillors and the Council's Environmental Department
- Local MLAs
- Local MPs
- Residents of Ballylumford Road, Quarterland Road and Ferris Bay Road
- Local clubs who may have an interest in the scheme, e.g. Larne Golf Club, local sailing Clubs and schools
- Aquaculture licence holders within Larne Lough and fishery interests identified to Islandmagee Storage Limited by the Fisheries Policy Division Department of DARD
- The Northern Ireland Marine Task Force

A project information leaflet, included in Appendix 2.2, was created for the public consultations, describing the proposed scheme and giving information on the project team. The leaflet also included information on the Islandmagee Storage website (see section 2.6)

2.3.2.1 Questionnaire

A questionnaire (presented in Appendix 2.3) was issued during the first public consultation as a means of stakeholders presenting their views in writing to the Islandmagee Storage Project Team. In particular, the team wished to gauge the opinion of the public on the various available options for the facility layout.

Four proposed sites for the intake location were presented.

- Intake #1 (Castle Robin Bay)
 - Intake #2 (Barr's Point)
 - Intake #3 (Adjacent to Wellhead Option in Site B))
 - Intake #4 (Adjacent to Wellhead Option in Site C)
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- Of the respondents, 43% chose Intake 1 (Castle Robin Bay), 0% chose intake 2 (Barr's Point), 14% chose intake 3 (Adjacent to Wellpad Option in Site B) and 29% chose intake 4 (Adjacent to Wellhead Option in Site C). 14% expressed no preference.

Two options for locating the wellpad were shown, within Site B and Site C as described in Chapter 1. Of the responses received, 20% preferred Option B, located on the former power station ash pit, and 80% had no preference. No strong feelings were held against locating the wellpad further away from the main facilities within Site C and indeed after discussion with stakeholders the general feeling was that it would be best to avoid using the area formerly used to dispose of ash from the power station.

The questionnaire also asked whether the respondent felt that the suggested location of the brine outfall was appropriate. 25% of the respondents agreed with the location of the outfall, however 75% were not satisfied. The questionnaire allowed a space for written comment on the outfall position and when examined, the written comments suggested that although the consultees were happy that the outfall was located on the eastern shore of Islandmagee, it was felt that the outfall discharge point (shown in the consultation as -20m) was too shallow and close to the shore.

No alternative outfall sites were suggested by the respondents.

The questionnaire allowed the respondents to make comments on any aspect of the proposed scheme which they felt strongly about. The main issues highlighted within the questionnaires were:

1. Depth/Distance of outfall

It was felt that the location of the outfall as shown in the consultations was not sufficiently far from the shore to ensure adequate dispersion. Concern was also voiced over whether the outfall would have the potential to discharge foam which would float on the water surface, as happens on occasion at the power station.

2. Impact on Benthic Species

Concern was voiced over whether the brine discharge would have the potential to significantly impact the benthic habitats off the eastern shore of Islandmagee, thus jeopardising its status as a popular location for commercial and recreational fishing and recreational diving.

3. Construction Traffic

Comments were raised over the potential impact of construction traffic.

4. Visual Appearance

It was felt that it would be most appropriate to keep the above ground elements of the proposal as close to the existing power station buildings as possible in order to minimise the visual impact on the unspoilt sections of Islandmagee.

5. Noise

Concern was raised over the potential for unacceptable noise levels during the construction phase, particularly in relation to the proposed drilling activities.

2.3.3 Local Authorities

Larne Borough Council and local MLAs and MPs were invited to meet the project team and view a presentation followed by a question and answer session on three occasions throughout the design process. These presentations took place on

- 6th May 2008, 13:00 (Larne Leisure Centre)
- 25th June 2009, 11:00 (2nd Presbyterian Church Hall, Islandmagee)
- 29th October 2009, 12:00 (Larne Leisure Centre)

All Local Councillors, MLAs and MPs were also issued with a written invitation to view the exhibition and meet the project team at the Public Consultation events in June and October 2009.

2.4 Further Public Consultation

A second public consultation event was held, again in 2nd Islandmagee Presbyterian Church, on 30th and 31st October 2009. All those previously invited to the consultations as outlined in section 2.3.2 above were issued with another written invitation along with those who had expressed an interest in being kept updated following the previous public consultations and who had therefore been added to the project's stakeholder database.

At this consultation event Islandmagee Storage Limited presented their refined final layout, which has taken on board the comments received during the initial public consultations and which showed the chosen sites for the intake, outfall and wellpad in addition to photomontages of how the facilities are expected to look.

The second public consultation allowed stakeholders the opportunity to view the final layout and enabled them to submit any further comments to Islandmagee Storage prior to the scheme being taken forward to planning. In response to the issues raised in the initial public consultations, a number of alterations were made in the final layout.

1. Depth/Distance of outfall

The outfall was lengthened and taken from the -20m contour to -27m to bring it further into the tidal current stream and enhance the ability for the brine to be dispersed.

2. Impact on Benthic Species

Remote videos taken of the proposed outfall discharge point and several other points along the alignment of the proposed outfall route were shown on a computer monitor to demonstrate that the chosen location for the outfall discharge point has lower marine biodiversity than other sites closer to the shore.

3. Construction Traffic

The construction methodology was further developed to make best use of the construction set down area for delivering materials outside of peak commuting times and included the use of a concrete batching plant to reduce the number of concrete deliveries. The site has been designed to make best use of the raw materials available within the site in order to reduce the requirement to bring in external deliveries of stone or the removal of construction waste from the site.

4. Visual Appearance

The gas plant and brine facility buildings were specified in a dark green colour to better blend in with the surrounding hillside and photomontages from viewpoints within Islandmagee and Larne were included in the display for discussion. The brine building is a particularly tall structure and consideration has been made in the design of the site to set the building in to the surrounding topography by cutting a level platform into the surrounding basalt and setting the building beneath the road level rather than filling the site which would make the building appear more conspicuous.

5. Noise

Islandmagee Storage expressed their intention to source and use a state of the art modern hydraulic drilling rig in preference to older, noisier rigs to reduce the potential for noise nuisance. Soundproofing is incorporated into the design for all noise-emitting leaching and compression plant within the brine facilities and main gas plant.

Feedback from the second public consultation event was positive and no further amendments to the proposed layout were requested.

2.5 Press and Internet

From the commencement of the seismic survey in Autumn 2007, regular updates on the progress of the Islandmagee Storage Project have been supplied to and published within the Islandmagee Community Newsletter, which is a free newsletter published by the Islandmagee Community Development Association and is distributed to all the residents throughout Islandmagee.

Regular press updates were also given to local and regional newspapers and invitations were extended to local press and media to attend all the public consultation events.

Following the seismic survey regular updates on the progress of the project have been published on the Infrastrata (formerly Portland Gas) website. In May 2009 a separate web portal and email address was created for the Islandmagee Storage project www.islandmageestorage.com. Details of this web address and contact email have been included in all published and presented material by Islandmagee Storage Limited. Information on the Islandmagee Storage Project including press releases is continuously updated on this web portal and all of the material displayed at public events, such as the project leaflets and presentations made for the June and October 2009 public consultations have been uploaded and made available to view by the public on the Islandmagee Storage website following each of the consultation events.

2.6 Conclusions

The issues raised during public and stakeholder consultation have been addressed and, where possible, mitigated for to reduce or eliminate the environmental impact of this proposed development. It will be seen in the relevant chapters of this Environmental Impact Statement that the impacts to the Larne Lough SPA have been addressed (Chapter 5, *“Terrestrial Ecology and Birds”*) as well as the impact to the marine habitats off the eastern shore of Islandmagee arising from the construction and operation of the brine outfall (Chapter 6, *“Intertidal and Underwater Ecology”* and Chapter 9, *“Coastal Processes”*). Impacts relating to construction and operational noise and traffic are discussed in Chapter 7 *“Air and Climate”* and Chapter 8 *“Material Assets”* respectively.

The various submissions and comments made in relation to the proposed gas storage development in Islandmagee have been fully considered by the consultants in the preparation of this Environmental Impact Statement and in the design of the scheme. Every effort has been made to address all the concerns raised and, where possible, mitigation measures have been implemented to minimise the environmental impact of the proposed development.

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