

**Place and Sustainability Overview and Scrutiny Panel – 12
September 2024**

**Response to Exxon Mobil’s non-statutory consultation on
its Solent CO₂ Pipeline Project**

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| Purpose | For Review |
| Classification | Public |
| Executive Summary | This paper provides a summary of the consultation options relating to the proposed pipeline route to transport carbon dioxide consultation and the council’s proposed response to the consultation |
| Recommendations | <p>i) The Panel is recommended to consider the contents of this report and advise the Portfolio Holder of any specific changes to the proposed response as set out in Appendix 1 to this report.</p> <p>ii) Endorses engagement with the NSIP process with this scheme and recognising the need for it to be appropriately resourced</p> |
| Reasons for recommendations | <p>The council’s involvement as a ‘host authority’ in nationally significant infrastructure projects is set out in a separate report to this agenda and provided for by the Planning Act 2008.</p> <p>The project subject of this consultation is proposed (by the promoter) to follow this process. The response set out in Appendix 1 provides an initial overview of some of the issues that the council will seek to engage with the promoter over the coming months.</p> <p>The recommendation aligns with priorities across the place, people and prosperity elements of the council’s Corporate Plan including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Place Priority 1: Shaping our place now and for future generations. • Place Priority 2: Protecting our climate, cost and natural world. • Place Priority 3: Caring for our facilities, neighbourhoods and open spaces in a modern and response way. |

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| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People Priority 2: Empowering our residents to live healthy, connected and fulfilling lives. • Prosperity Priority 2: Supporting our high-quality business base and economic centres to thrive and grow. |
| Wards | All |
| Portfolio Holder | Councillor Tipp – Planning and Economy |
| Strategic Director | James Carpenter – Strategic Director Place, Operations and Sustainability |
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Introduction and background

1. In May 2024, officers were informed by Exxon Mobil of a planned project to transport carbon dioxide from a location in the Fawley area through a new underground pipeline to proposed storage at an aquifer under the seabed off the coast of Bournemouth.
2. Some further information on this project has now been made available through the non-statutory public consultation that Exxon Mobil began on 18 July 2024, and which is due to close on 30 September 2024, having been extended from the 12 September 2024. A website presenting the consultation material that views are sought on is maintained by Exxon Mobil here:
<https://www.solentco2pipeline.co.uk/>
3. Views from the public are sought on three corridor options for the proposed pipeline described in the consultation material as:
 - a. Mainland corridor option
 - b. Isle of Wight North to South corridor option; and
 - c. Isle of Wight North to West corridor option
4. Other corridor options that appear to have been initially explored by Exxon Mobil, but discounted from progressing further, are briefly set

out for information. Whilst further information on the reasons for why they have been discounted has been requested, it is not currently available.

5. At this stage, the consultation pipeline corridors are approximately 500 metres in width, albeit it is proposed that the corridor width is refined to 50 metres in width at the next stage. When completed, the pipeline (which itself is expected to be typically 60 cm in diameter) will be located underground, with an easement that is approximately 25 metres in width. Additionally, there will be equipment constructed above ground to support this pipeline in the form of route markers, valves, pigging stations, power and communications supplies and cabinets. The amount and frequency of this will be determined only once the exact route has been confirmed.
6. It is proposed that the underground pipeline element of the project, in as far as it extends into maritime waters, is progressed as a 'Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project' (NSIP) and thus a Development Consent Order from government is likely to be sought.
7. Further details of this NSIP process, and the role of the District Council in this process, is set out in a separate agenda item. Given the location and extent of the different consultation corridors, it is likely that the Isle of Wight Council, Hampshire County Council and the New Forest National Park Authority will also be actively engaged as 'host authorities' on this project.
8. The method and form of capturing carbon dioxide to transport into the pipeline is outside of the scope of this consultation, as is the storage of the carbon under the seabed.
9. At this stage, Exxon Mobil are seeking views on the proposals as set out in the consultation material, including a request to express a preference about which pipeline corridor to take forward for further investigation.

Corporate plan priorities

10. The Corporate Plan 2024-28 was adopted by Cabinet on 3 April 2024. It outlines the vision, values, and priorities for the council over the next four years.
11. The vision of the Corporate Plan is to secure a better future by supporting opportunities for the people and communities we serve, protecting our unique and special place and securing a vibrant and prosperous New Forest. This has been organised into the thematic areas of People, Place and Prosperity. This report aligns with the following priorities:

- Place Priority 1: Shaping our place now and for future generations.
- Place Priority 2: Protecting our climate, cost and natural world
- Place Priority 3: Caring for our facilities, neighbourhoods and open spaces in a modern and response way.
- People Priority 2: Empowering our residents to live healthy, connected and fulfilling lives.
- Prosperity Priority 2: Supporting our high-quality business base and economic centres to thrive and grow

Issues arising

12. This non-statutory consultation provides the first substantive opportunity for this council to engage with the project and to understand what it is seeking to deliver.
13. Whilst this engagement by Exxon Mobil is welcome, it appears to presume a level of prior engagement that this council has not been party to. Similarly, very little information has been provided in this consultation to help inform responses. In this context, it is not considered feasible to offer judgements or detailed comments on the merits of the consultation corridors as the consultation currently seeks.
14. Rather, and as set out more substantively in the proposed response in Appendix 1, officers would make the following general observations which are predominantly focussed on the proposals as they affect the New Forest District Planning Area:
 - a. **Welcome the opportunity to begin engagement with Exxon Mobil on this project.** In this context, officers are keen to engage more proactively with Exxon Mobil over the coming months and in more detail, subject to an agreement being reached to secure funding for the necessary resources to do so.
 - b. Such further engagement is expected to explore a number of potential issues arising including:
 - i. **Confirmation on the need for the project** – including the contribution to sustainability objectives, reliability and safety of technology;
 - ii. **Rationale for the selection of consultation corridors and consideration of alternative route corridors** – including those already specifically discounted by the applicant, and potentially new alternative corridors (noting that currently there are no alternative consultation corridors for the land south of Fawley, or marine routes in their entirety);
 - iii. **Air quality, emissions, noise and vibration disturbance**– including that associated with the

construction, operation and decommissioning of the pipeline;

- iv. Biodiversity and ecology** – including impact on designated sites, protected species and opportunity for environmental enhancement including biodiversity net gain;
- v. Design, landscape and visual impact** – ensuring the development is sustainable and as attractive, durable and adaptable as it can be and that functionality and aesthetics have been taken into account;
- vi. Flood risk, coastal defence and climate change** - understanding the transition from land to sea;
- vii. Historic environment** – including minimising the impact on heritage assets;
- viii. Land use and safety including future maintenance provisions** – for understanding how the connections to the existing grid will work;
- ix. Methods of construction and related work areas** – specifically the impact on noise during and post construction;
- x. Socio-economic benefits and effects including relationship to Freeport**– together with the impact on the local economy during construction;
- xi. Traffic, travel and transportation impacts** – incorporating the impacts on the local highway network during and post construction;
- xii. Water quality and resources** - including requirements for management plans to mitigate risk
- xiii. Progress in seeking agreement/consent with affected landowners; and**
- xiv. Extent to which existing powers available to local authorities are proposed to be disapplied and the envisaged future role of the LPA post-decision**

Options appraisal

15. The response as outlined above and detailed in Appendix 1 is proposed on the basis that this represents an appropriate and proportionate response to the consultation material, noting the future opportunities to engage more significantly in the coming months.
16. Whilst the council could choose to make no response to this consultation, such an option is not considered to be appropriate given the council's responsibilities (including its likely future role as a host authority) and the desirability of providing a local perspective on the proposed project. Conversely, seeking to provide more detailed comments at this juncture is not considered appropriate

either given the limited information currently available to officers and the need to secure an agreement from the applicant to resource such level of input.

Consultation undertaken

17. The council is a consultee to this consultation and therefore opportunities for further engagement with key partners prior to the end of this consultation is limited. The views of officers across relevant disciplines within the council has been sought, and there have been preliminary discussions with officers from the County Council and National Park Authority. The Portfolio Holder for Planning and Economy has been informally consulted and there was an all Member briefing held on 3 September 2024 with views expressed reflective of the issues identified above.

Financial and resource implications

18. The preparation of the councils' response to this consultation has been provided within existing council resources and budgets. The recommended response proposes future engagement with Exxon Mobil which is dependent on securing appropriate agreement to fund the resource implications.

Legal implications

19. The Planning Act 2008 provides the consenting regime for Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects and confirms the role of this Council as a host authority within this process.

Risk assessment

20. No formal risk assessment is required in relation to the recommendations as set out. The council's involvement in the NSIP process helps to ensure that a local perspective is offered on proposed projects which will ensure that the applicant and Examining Authority are provided with relevant information to minimise risks associated with proposed projects.

Environmental / Climate and nature implications

21. Following the declaration of a Climate and Nature Emergency, and the preparation of the Climate Change Action Plans, the council will want to ensure that if this project progresses it is consistent with these objectives. The project must comply with the National Planning Statements, National Planning Policy Framework and relevant local plan policies, rather than the Council's own declarations and action plans. However, planning policies relating to climate change will provide a sufficient hook to enable the council to comment in this regard.

Equalities implications

22. The approach that the council is taking to Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects is intended to benefit all communities across the New Forest and beyond. It is considered that there will be no additional impact on people with protected characteristics and therefore the strategy has been assessed as having a neutral impact overall.

Crime and disorder implications

23. None

Data protection / Information governance / ICT implications

24. None

New Forest National Park implications

25. This project has the potential to affect land within the National Park area. As such it will be important to work closely within the National Park Authority, the promoter and other key stakeholders to ensure that the project demonstrates how it furthers the interests of the National Park/National Landscape. This includes demonstrating how it would further the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage of the area.

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Proposed response to consultation

Background Papers:

All consultation materials are provided here:

<https://www.solentco2pipeline.co.uk/>