

Date: 11 December 2020

Mr Michael Hewitt
Projects Manager
SONI

Michael.hewitt@soni.ltd.uk

Re: Consultation from SONI on the Draft Transmission Development Plan 2020-2029

Dear Michael,

Derry City and Strabane District Council (DC&SDC) welcomes this opportunity to engage with SONI on the current consultation of your Draft Transmission Development Plan 2020-2029, responding to your notification email of 10th November 2020, to both the Head of Planning and to the Chief Executive.

This Council welcomes the positive and proactive approach of SONI in planning ahead to meet the electricity transmission needs of this District and Region over the next decade and beyond. Such investment in this important infrastructure will undoubtedly support our development, prosperity and well-being, so it is particularly welcome, subject to the essential environmental safeguards that protect the area and our people. The Council's Vision for the District is set out in our Community Plan – the Strategic Inclusive Growth Plan for Derry City and Strabane District (SIGP), namely to be a:

thriving, prosperous and sustainable City and District with equality of opportunity for all.

It is apparent that SONI is proposing to invest and develop a lot of new and upgraded network in or through the District over the next 10 years. This investment is in order to achieve 'security of supply' and to accommodate the very significant amount of 'Renewable Energy installations', especially wind turbines.

Generally, this necessary electricity transmission infrastructure is very much to be welcomed to support the ongoing growth of this District and Region, but strong environmental safeguards, including Planning, do need to be in place and respected at all stages of the decision-making processes.

The Council does have relevant Planning policy proposals in the recent Local Development Plan (LDP) draft Plan Strategy. It seeks generally to have the infrastructure to facilitate growth of population, homes and jobs, as well as others to protect the Sperrin AONB and other sensitive locations, with limited electricity undergrounding expected and for all renewables applications to be accompanied and assessed together with their required electricity network. There have been relevant LDP Representations received from SONI, as well as NIE Networks, several renewable energy bodies and multiple environmental groups or individuals.

It is not immediately clear what the visual impact would be – of these new lines or poles or pylons and equipment and upgrades or re-fits. It is appreciated that this is a forward-planning, strategic document and is not intended to be a Planning submission. Ultimately, it is anticipated that most of these projects would be assessed as Planning applications, where applicable, by the Council or possibly by DfI. However, there will inevitably be Planning implications and concerns, especially visually, due to the impact of an increased number of electricity pylons/lines/equipment across the District. (Given the large scale of the projects, there is also likely to be a dis-proportionate impact on the rural parts of the District.) Any such Planning applications will be subject to public consultation at that time – which will be important.

Therefore, in principle, the Council would be supportive of the development and upgrading of the electricity infrastructure to meet the future business and development needs of the District, as well as its social progress. Additionally, the Council is in support of green energy, with its declaration of a Climate Emergency, the new NW Regional Energy Strategy and Climate Adaptation Plan all seeking sustainable energy and self-sufficiency. Indeed, the Council has a Climate officer and an Energy officer and we would like to be kept abreast of any specific developments relating to SONI's plans for the expansion and strengthening of the electricity grid to ensure that Planning inputs at an early stage of the project feasibility/design and also to ensure that they are integrated into any future reviews of the Regional Energy Strategy and the Climate Adaptation Plan. Overall, subject to the Planning comments above, the draft Transmission Development Plan 2020-2029 is welcomed by this Council.

I trust that you find these comments useful. The Council's Planning Committee considered this matter at its meeting on 2nd December 2020 and the resolution will then go forward to full Council for ratification. Should there be any change after this date, we will write to you. This Council looks forward to continuing liaison with SONI.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Maura Fox', written in a cursive style.

Maura Fox
Head of Planning