

PRESS RELEASE:

Gas to the West project reaches important milestone

Gas to the West, a major natural gas infrastructure project which will extend the benefits of mains natural gas to thousands of homes and businesses in the west of Northern Ireland, took a major step forward today, with the submission of the main planning application to the Department for Infrastructure's Strategic Planning Unit.

The submission of the application, which follows an extensive public consultation exercise and important pre-application discussions with the planning authorities and other key stakeholders, is the culmination of a number of years' preparatory work by project promoters Mutual Energy and SGN.

The Gas to the West project application will be considered by planners within the Department for Infrastructure with the Minister for Infrastructure giving the ultimate sign off on the project plans. All relevant local Councils have already been key participants in the consultation process. Community consultation has been an important element throughout the development of the project and the views of local communities have been vital in informing the final design of the project including the proposed pipeline route.

On submission of the application Paddy Larkin, Chief Executive of Mutual Energy commented:

"The submission of this planning application represents an important milestone on the road to making this important energy infrastructure project a reality. People in other parts of Northern Ireland have enjoyed the benefits of natural gas for as much as two decades and we are delighted that, today, extending those same benefits to homes and businesses in the west of Northern Ireland has moved a step closer.

"The application includes a detailed Environmental Statement and is the result of a lot of hard work by many people – we have taken the time needed to ensure that a comprehensive application has been submitted, and we look forward to continuing to engage with the necessary stakeholders to ensure it makes good progress through the planning system. Subject to a positive planning decision, construction work can begin next year in line with the project schedule to allow delivery of gas to customers from 2018 onwards.

"I'd like to express our thanks to local people along the route who engaged positively with us and to all who have assisted us, particularly Government officials and staff in other statutory authorities. We look forward to continuing to work in partnership with industry, government, community and the energy regulator in future phases of the project".

Highlighting the benefits of Gas to the West, SGN's Managing Director Scotland and Northern Ireland John Lobban said:

“Gas to the West is a significant infrastructure project of major economic importance and social benefit. Access to natural gas as an alternative, cleaner fuel supply is something to benefit both existing businesses and the wider community while at the same time help attract important inward investment to the area. The project will support around 250 jobs during the construction phase and there’ll also be opportunities for local companies to provide goods and services right across the supply chain in the years to come.”

Mr Lobban added: “Our project team is fully focused on delivering Gas to the West as soon as possible and we’re looking forward to moving into the construction phase quickly following the award of planning. With any project of this scale, and particularly with an ambitious 18 month build programme, we still face a number of significant challenges, not least in relation to planning, consents and the weather. However, we’re fully committed to delivering the project to time and budget ensuring everyone can start to reap the benefits of a new natural gas network at the earliest opportunity.”

For further information, or to arrange interviews, contact:

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Notes to editors:

1. The Gas to the West project will bring natural gas to the towns of Coalisland, Cookstown, Derrylin, Dungannon, Enniskillen, Magherafelt and Omagh. The project includes the construction of around 78km of high pressure gas transmission pipeline from a point on the existing network near Portadown, County Armagh to Tullykenneye, south-west of Fivemiletown. A separate project in the northwest is already under construction with the first new customers to be connected later this year in the Strabane area.
2. The project is being developed by Mutual Energy Limited (www.mutual-energy.com) in partnership with SGN (www.sgn.co.uk). The two companies were originally successful in a competition for the transmission and distribution licences, organised by the Utility Regulator, and the project is being supported by grant assistance from the Northern Ireland Executive.
3. Further information available on the project website: www.gastothewest.com