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By Email Only: John.Heywood@nienetworks.co.uk

Date: 14 March 2024

Our Ref: NET/E/DH/872

Dear John,

Application for consent to a longer period for the issuance of a Connection Offer for 900m W of 77 Ardglass Road Downpatrick, NIE Networks Reference: 23/12516

Thank you for your letter dated 1 March 2024 (the **Letter**) setting out an application (**the Application**) made by NIE Networks Limited (**NIE Networks**) for an extension to the period within which NIE Networks is required to make a connection offer, concerning a [REDACTED] at 900m W of 77 Ardglass Road Downpatrick.

1. The Application

The Letter describes the relevant background¹ to the Application. Reference is made to Condition 30 of NIE Networks' licence authorising participation in the activity of distribution (**the Licence**).²

¹ What follows is a summary of the Application. It is not intended to be a complete rehearsal. All parts of the Application have been considered in making the decision set out in this correspondence. Failure to mention parts of the Application (or related correspondence) should not be taken as representing any failure to have regard to those parts.

² [NIE Distribution Licence](#).

Condition 30 (6) (of the Licence) provides that (barring specified exceptions)³ NIE Networks is obliged to make an offer for connection to the distribution system *as soon as practicable* and (by operation of Condition 30 (6)(b)) *in any event* within **3 months** from receipt of a valid/completed application for connection to the distribution system.

Condition 30 (7) of the Licence allows NIE Networks to make an application to the Authority⁴ for a (written) consent that the period specified in Condition 30 (6)(b) be longer than 3 months. The making of such an application does not change NIE Networks' licence obligation⁵ (under Condition 30(6)(a)) to make a connection offer *as soon as practicable*. Nor does the grant (by the Authority) of the consent sought through any such application change the position. The primary obligation (recorded in Condition 30(6) of the Licence and Article 20 the Electricity Order) - to make a connection offer *as soon as practicable* - remains.

The Letter explains that on 7 November 2023 NIE Networks received a valid application for an offer of connection for a [REDACTED]. This application was deemed compliant on 15 December 2023. We shall refer to the person making the application as the **Connection Applicant**.

It is explained that the "license standard" - at this time - for provision of the relevant Connection Offer to the Connection Applicant – was **15 March 2024**.

By the Application NIE Networks applies for consent for the relevant period under Condition 30(6) to be substituted by a longer period ending **30 October 2024**.

The Application refers to two connection policy changes which came into effect on 7

³ Recorded in Article 21 of the Electricity (NI) Order 1992 (**the Electricity Order**).

⁴ In this correspondence we use the words "us" "we" "our" "UR" "Utility Regulator" and "Authority" interchangeably to refer to the Northern Ireland Authority for Utility Regulation.

⁵ Which aligns with the statutory duties reflected in Article 19-15 of the Electricity Order.

November 2023 (the “Go-Live” date) affecting: (i) the facility for connection offers (for export) for small scale generation (which in some areas had been closed since 2016) and (ii) the ‘over-install’ limits for single technology and hybrid co-located sites. These connection policy change decisions can be found here⁶ and here.⁷

The connection policy changes triggered an unusually high volume of applications to connect made to NIE Networks on the “Go-Live” date of 7 November 2023. The volume of applications received (approximately 163 in the space of 4 hours) is explained in the Application as approximate to the volume of applications received in the six months prior to the “Go-Live” date. The Application records that NIE Networks has: assessed all these applications for compliance; validated the information received; and conducted high level studies to determine the BSP each applicant would connect to *“to allow conversations regarding transmission capacity to start with SONI.”*

NIE Networks states that *“this work has taken considerably more resource and time to complete than it would take during normal application levels.”* Accordingly, NIE Networks makes an Application for an extension of time for the making of a Condition 30 offer of connection to this particular Connection Applicant (and the batch of others also received on the Go Live date) out to 30 October 2024.

NIE Networks further explains that the extension period requested would allow for *“further liaison with SONI to determine if transmission capacity is available”* and *“where transmission capacity is available, time is required to allow NIE Networks to carry out detailed design and costing to provide the customer with a connection offer.”*

NIE Networks explains the rationale for seeking the extension sought in the Application as follows:

“Given the influx of applications it will allow

⁶ [NIE Networks Providing Distribution Generation Export Offers to Applicants less than 5MW – Decision paper.](#) ⁷ [NI Over Install Decision Paper For Final Review \(nienetworks.co.uk\).](#)

1. *SONI to determine if transmission capacity is available taking into account of the interactivity of other applicants in the queue ahead of them*
2. *NIE Networks time to accurately design and cost connections taking account of the impact of others in the queue ahead of them.*

NIE Networks also states that granting the extension would have the impact of enabling “SONI and NIE Networks to determine if capacity is available, complete connection design and production of a connection offer subject to capacity becoming available,” while not granting the extension “would result in NIE Networks not being able to meet its licence standard.”

We note that NIE Networks has also stated that “further extensions may be required if it is deemed that capacity is not available until the outcome of an applicant ahead of them in the queue is known,” or “if other complex issues arise during NIE Networks’ or SONI’s analysis.”

2. Consultation associated with the Application

Condition 30(7)(a) of the Licence provides that NIE Networks must consult with the Connection Applicant when making an Application (for extension) under Condition 30(7).

The Application sets out such consultation with the Connection Applicant and indicates that the Connection Applicant does not object to the Application.

3. The Authority’s decision

In making our decision on the Application we have regard to:

- (a) our published decision document on extension applications⁷
- (b) our principal objective (and related statutory objectives) under Art 12 of the Energy (NI) Order 2003
- (c) the contents of the Application

⁷ [Electricity Connections Review Decision Paper | Utility Regulator \(uregni.gov.uk\)](https://www.uregni.gov.uk/electricity-connections-review-decision-paper)

(d) the consultation with the Connection Applicant.

Having considered the matter fully, the Authority hereby confirms that it provides the consent sought in the Application. It follows that the period under Condition 30(6)(b) of the Licence (in respect of the application for connection made by the Connection Applicant for the [REDACTED] at 900m W of 77 Ardglass Road Downpatrick) is now extended until **30 October 2024**. We consider the Application justified for the reasons set out in the Letter.

We welcome the commitment of NIE Networks to work with SONI in progressing the relevant connection applications to include that of the Connection Applicant.

This request is being approved on the understanding that NIE Networks will not make any changes that result in additional costs borne by Northern Ireland consumers.

We would take this opportunity to confirm that the period ending 30 October 2024 is a “long stop” date. The obligation under Condition 30 of the Licence is (now), subject to applicable exceptions⁸, to make a Connection Offer to the Connection Applicant for the [REDACTED] at 900m W of 77 Ardglass Road Downpatrick “as soon as practicable” and “in any event no later than” 30 October 2024. The Licence obligation is not (now) simply to offer connection terms by 30 October 2024.

This decision will be published and placed on the Register in the normal way.

Please do return to us should you require any clarification.

Yours sincerely,

⁸ Consonant with NIE Networks’ licence obligations and its statutory duties set out in Articles 12 and 19 of the Electricity Order.



Donald Henry

Networks and Energy Futures Director Duly authorised by the Authority
