Utility Regulator

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Date: 14 September 2026

Our Ref: NET/E/BM/1526

Dear Eimear,

Request for Authority's consent to further extend the Connection Offer timeline for the Magherafelt BES Project (195 MW).

Thank you for your letter dated 21 July 2026 ("**the Letter**") setting out an application ("**the Second Application"**) made under Condition 25(5) of SONI's Transmission Licence ("**the Licence**") seeking the Authority's[1] consent for the further extension of the period specified under Condition 25(7) of the Licence ("**the Longstop Connection Offer Date**") for the making of a connection offer ("**the Connection Offer**") by SONI to Magherafelt BES Ltd ("**the Connection Applicant / MBL**").

The Second Application relates to the making of the Connection Offer for connection of a BESS project with 195 MW MEC and 195 MW MIC at North and East of no.122A Moneymore Rd, and approximately 40m to the west and south of Magherafelt Substation, Magherafelt (the "**Magherafelt BESS Project**"). The Second Application follows a previous application ("**the First Application**") for consent to an extension of the Longstop Connection Offer Date (out to 15 September 2026 from 15 September 2024), approved by the Authority on 23 September 2024.[2]

[1] 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.
[2] 2024.09.23 C25 Magherafelt BES DL_1.pdf

SONI is now seeking the Authority's consent to further extend the Longstop Connection Offer Date (for the making of the Connection Offer) from **15 September 2026** to **3 March 2028.**

We start by setting out the relevant terms of Condition 25 of the Licence. We then move to the Second Application.

1. Condition 25 of the Licence.

Condition 25(5) provides, so far as relevant, as follows (our underlining added): *"[SONI] shall offer terms for [connection agreements] . . . as soon as practicable and (save where the Authority consents to a longer period, which consent may be given on the application of [SONI] following consultation by [SONI] with the person making the application and such other persons as [SONI] considers may be affected or interested) in any event not more than the period specified in paragraph 7 after receipt by [SONI] of an application containing all such information as [SONI] may reasonably require for the purpose of formulating the terms of the offer …"*

Condition 25(7) provides that the *"period specified"* in this case is three months, unless the Authority has consented to a longer period. The period specified explains the identification of the Longstop Connection Offer Date.

2. Background

The Connection Applicant's application ("**the Connection Application**") for the Connection Offer was deemed effective on 13 June 2024, with SONI stating that it had until 15 September 2024 to make the Connection Offer.

As already mentioned, the approval of the First Application extended the (original) Longstop Connection Offer Date from 15 September 2024 to 15 September 2026 (c. 24 months). The basis of the First Application was as listed below:

> "1. *Location allows for connection at Magherafelt substation only.*
>
> *2. There is currently no space within the substation boundary to provide a bay for the battery connection.*
>
> *3. Magherafelt 275 kV substation requires a re-build to replace concrete A frames and catenaries to provide fault level capacity. There are a number of options for the re build.*

4. SONI requires time to study, determine and design the final arrangement for the new substation (i.e. full offline re-build, in-situ replacement etc.)

5. This process will involve an external consultant

6. SONI will appraise the options against need, and this will include whether any spare bays are provided, however the scope would not include technical appraisals of the connection of the Magherafelt BES.

7. One option for the re-build of the substation is to commence re-build offline in the area to the south and transfer over circuits.

8. Connection of the battery by building out a bay at the south would reduce available space between the battery and current substation boundary for the re-build option.

9. If this was the preferred option, it would hamper the re-build, reducing the space availability for bays and restricting the potential to re-build offline, which is always safer than re-building within a live substation.

10. For these reasons, the Connection Offer can only be issued after the final arrangements for Magherafelt is determined and associated TNPP submitted."

3. The Second Application

Again, the Second Application requests a further extension of the Longstop Connection Offer Date from **15 September 2026** to **3 March 2028** (an additional c. 18 months). This is an overall extension of around 42 months from the original Longstop Connection Offer Date.

The basis of the Second Application is set out in a list which is broadly the same as the list contained within the First Application, save for the addition of the following text at the end of point 5 on the list, "*The process to appoint such a consultant was delayed by procurement issues stemming from the SONI/Eirgrid separation.*"[3]

SONI outlines the requested extension period as detailed below:

[3] The Second Application has been considered in full and any failure to mention any part of the Second Application in this decision letter should not be read to suggest otherwise.

"c 12 months of the extension period results from protracted difficulties in the procurement of a consultant to assist with the 275 kV substation refurbishment programme.

c 6 months of the extension came from the more consistent, accurate and risk adjusted timelines delivered through the JPMO process which was not in place at the time of the initial extension request."

SONI states that it has *"considered if there are any alternative actions that could allow SONI to issue the connection offer to the Customer on or before the 15 September 2026. SONI has concluded that there are no such actions."*

SONI states that *"If no extension were granted, SONI would not be able to issue a Connection Offer on 15 September 2026. Proceeding with the Connection Offer would restrict the ability to deliver the optimum 275kV re-build of the substation. Rather than be non compliant with Condition 25(5) of the Licence, SONI would have to refuse to make the connection offer under Condition 25(6) of the Licence."*

The Second Application makes numerous references to the requested extension to the Longstop Connection Offer Date being 3 March 2028, being around 18 months after the current Longstop Connection Offer Date of 15 September 2026. There is one section within the Second Application which states that "*SONI is therefore making an application under Condition 25(5) of the SONI Licence to extend the current time period within which SONI is required to issue a Connection Offer to the Customer by 2 years*." We asked SONI to clarify this point and it confirmed, via email dated 30 July 2026, that the Second Application "*seeks to extend the issuance deadline by approximately 18 months to 03 March 2028*."

4. Consultation associated with the Second Application

Condition 25(5) of the Licence requires SONI to provide a connection offer as soon as practicable "*save where the Authority consents to a longer period, which consent may be given on the application of the Licensee* ***following consultation*** *by the Licensee with the person making the application for connection, and such other persons as [SONI] considers may be affected or interested*."

[Emphasis added]

Further, our decision paper titled 'Review of Electricity Distribution and Transmission Connections Policy'[4] published on 31 May 2017 ("**the Decision Paper Guidance**") provides that "*we expect the Licensee to consult adequately and in a timely manner with affected parties*."

Consultation with the Connection Applicant

Appendix 1 of the Second Application contains correspondence between SONI and the Connection Applicant which is referred to as being the consultation that was undertaken with the Connection Applicant in relation to the Second Application. SONI sent an email consulting with the Connection Applicant in relation to the Second Application on 11 August 2025. Following this consultation email, there was correspondence between SONI and the Connection Applicant, totalling around 15 emails and 5 letters, between 11 August 2025 and 21 July 2026.[5]

The Connection Applicant issued a list containing 19 queries to SONI on 27 August 2025, stating that, "*In order fully consider and respond to SONI's proposed request as part of this ongoing consultation period we require further information*". These queries concerned (amongst other matters) the calculation of the requested extension period, the actions taken by SONI to enable it to issue the Connection Offer and details of the additional works required to enable SONI to issue the Connection Offer. SONI provided responses to these queries on 25 November 2025.

The Connection Applicant subsequently provided a response to the consultation by email on 10 July 2026. The Connection Applicant stated that it has concerns about the requested extension but "*are not objecting to the extension request*". The Connection Applicant added that, "*While we accept that some extension may now be required, the proposed new longstop of 3 March 2028 represents an exceptional total delay of ~45 months from our effective application date (13 June 2024), far beyond the three-month default under Condition 25.*"

The consultation response provided by the Connection Applicant also stated that, "*Our concern is not with the principle of an extension, but with*

[4] Electricity Connections Decision FINAL.pdf (uregni.gov.uk).
[5] The consultation correspondence provided within the Second Application has been considered in full and any failure to mention any part of this correspondence in this decision letter should not be read to suggest otherwise.

whether a single extension to 3 March 2028 has been sufficiently justified and whether it is structured in a way that preserves SONI's continuing obligation to issue an offer as soon as practicable."

The Connection Applicant refers to the critical path milestones (as provided to it by SONI) and requested that, in any application for extension to the Longstop Connection Offer Date, SONI should do the following:

> "*1. Evidence and justify the full extension period requested.*
>
> *2. Identify opportunities to accelerate the programme so that lost time from procurement delays will be recovered where possible.*
>
> *3. Include a structured monitoring framework tied to SONI's own disclosed milestones (captured above)*
>
> > *a. report progress at each milestone to both the UR and Magherafelt BES Ltd.*
> >
> > *b. commitment to notify and explain any slippage, with recovery plans.*
>
> *4. Consider issuing a conditional/indicative offer at an earlier milestone.*"

Consultation with NIE Networks

SONI sent an email consulting with NIE Networks on the 2 July 2026. NIE Networks responded to confirm that it supports the extension request.

5. Correspondence received by the UR from the Connection Applicant

We have received letters from ABO Energy Northern Ireland Ltd ("**ABO**") on behalf of the Connection Applicant (ABO's subsidiary), dated 15 June 2026 (the "**First Letter**") and 24 July 2026 (the "**Second Letter**"), SONI were also copied into the correspondence between ABO and UR.

The First Letter detailed the background of the Connection Offer process and requested that the UR does not make a determination in relation to the

Second Application until the Connection Applicant has provided its representations on the matter. The Second Letter contained the Connection Applicant's representations in relation to the Second Application. The Connection Applicant states that it "*acknowledges the genuine technical complexity of the Magherafelt 275kV Redevelopment and does not suggest that SONI should be required to issue a connection offer before it has a sufficient technical basis to do so*," adding that the Connection Applicant "*is not objecting to SONI's extension application*."

[redacted]

We have detailed below some of the key points from the representations contained within the Second Letter.[6]

Scrutiny of the extension period requested within the Second Application

The Connection Applicant states that, "*The extension period should be properly scrutinised before being approved, with the Authority satisfying itself that the period sought is supported by evidence and appropriate in scope and duration, including the critical path assumptions, contingency allowances, procurement-related delay, any JPMO-derived timelines and any opportunities to recover time or accelerate the programme*."

The Second Letter adds that "*MBL submits that the Authority should have regard to… Whether SONI has provided the information needed to justify the period requested, including evidence that the proposed programme is not unduly conservative and reflects the earliest practicable offer date now available*."

Proposed milestone-linked monitoring

The Connection Applicant states that, "*If an extension is granted, it should be accompanied by milestone-linked monitoring against SONI's disclosed milestones, including periodic reporting by SONI to the Authority and to*

[6] The First Letter and Second Letter have been considered in full and any failure to mention any part of the letters in this decision letter should not be read to suggest otherwise.

MBL, prompt notification of any material slippage with corrective actions, and an express confirmation that SONI's "as soon as practicable" obligation continues throughout the extension period."

The Second Letter adds that in "*SONI's letter of 13 May 2026, SONI disclosed the following critical path milestones for the Magherafelt 275kV Redevelopment:*

[redacted]

The Connection Applicant also suggests that the proposed Milestone-linked monitoring should be structured so that "if any disclosed milestone is not met, SONI is required to notify the Authority and MBL, explain the cause and impact of the delay, and identify the steps available to recover time."

Proposal that SONI should consider issuing a conditional or indicative Connection Offer

The Connection Applicant states that, "*SONI should be required to consider, at or around the confirmation of the preferred option or submission of the TNPP, whether a conditional or indicative offer can be issued, with any MEC Bond or equivalent security obligation deferred until the relevant condition has been satisfied and the offer terms have sufficiently crystallised. If SONI maintains that no such offer is possible, it should provide the specific legal, technical and policy reasons for that position.*"

The Second Letter adds that "*The Authority should ask SONI to consider, at each material milestone, whether the remaining uncertainty has reduced sufficiently for a meaningful conditional offer to be issued.*"

6. The Authority's decision

We judge the Second Application against: (i) our principal objective and general duties set out in Article 12 of the Energy (NI) Order 2003; and (ii) the published Decision Paper Guidance.

Having considered the Second Application and taken all relevant matters into account, the Authority accedes to the Second Application (considering it properly founded) to the extent that it seeks our consent for a further extension of the Longstop Connection Offer Date to 15 September 2027.

In making this decision we have had proper regard to the consultation undertaken by SONI. We have considered the responses to the consultation made by the Connection Applicant and NIE Networks. We have also, in making this decision, considered the representations made to us by the Connection Applicant within the First Letter and the Second Letter.

In relation to the Connection Applicant's consultation response and its representations within the First Letter and the Second Letter, we have considered the points raised by the Connection Applicant. We acknowledge that the Connection Applicant has requested scrutiny of the requested extension period, has proposed milestone-linked monitoring, and has proposed that SONI should consider issuing a conditional or indicative connection offer.

We understand that this is a complex case, and that certain elements may be outside of SONI's control. Therefore, additional time is required to enable SONI to make a Connection Offer which would make detailed provision regarding the works required in order for the connection to be made and the connection charges to be paid by the Connection Applicant. We consider that the extension to the Longstop Connection Offer Date that we have consented to within this letter is reasonable to enable SONI to provide the detailed provisions within the Connection Offer.

As noted within our Decision Paper Guidance, we must consider each case on its merits and be satisfied that the reasons for the request justify the grant of an extension. We note that, within the Second Application, SONI states that "*c 12 months of the extension period results from protracted difficulties in the procurement of a consultant to assist with the 275 kV substation refurbishment programme*", which would take the Longstop Connection Offer Date to around September 2027. SONI also states that "*c 6 months of the extension came from the more consistent, accurate and risk adjusted timelines delivered through the JPMO process*" which would take the Longstop Connection Offer Date out to around March 2028.

It is noted that SONI has already had two years to progress the Connection Offer and is now requesting a further 18 months. We acknowledge that some risk is unknown; however, SONI has not identified what the risks involved may be, nor has SONI provided details of any risk mitigation measures that it intends to implement to manage those unidentified risks. Furthermore, SONI has not provided any advanced methods for analysing these risks.

Based upon the information provided within the Second Application, we are not fully satisfied that the "*risk adjusted timelines delivered through the JPMO process*" is proportionate to the risk associated with this project or that the additional 6-month extension (which would bring the Longstop Connection Offer Date to 3 March 2028) is justified.

We consider that the more appropriate approach is for us to disallow any contingency period of extension relating to risk and for SONI to provide us with regular progress updates which would facilitate a timely further application for a further (Condition 25(5)) extension to cover any part of the contingency period reasonably required to facilitate the making of the Connection Offer.

Therefore, having fully considered the Connection Applicant's consultation response, and its representations within the First Letter and the Second Letter, and based upon the programme information provided within the Second Application, we are content to consent (only) to an extension of the Longstop Connection Offer Date up to 15 September 2027.

We remind SONI that the grant of consent (for an extension to the Longstop Connection Offer Date) relayed in this letter does not absolve SONI of its key obligation under Condition 25 of the Licence to make a Connection Offer to the Connection Applicant as soon as practicable (subject to any Condition 25(6) exceptions).

The newly substituted Longstop Connection Offer Date does not affect the key licence obligation. SONI should particularly consider if any of the other potential options for connection would allow for the making of a Connection Offer earlier than 15 September 2027.

We encourage SONI to engage with the Connection Applicant in a meaningful manner and to update estimated timelines when more relevant information enables it to do so.

Within our decision letter relating to the First Application, we requested that "*SONI keeps the Connection Applicant and the Authority updated as the programme of work progresses*." We are not aware of SONI providing any formal updates to us regarding the programme of works prior to submission of the Second Application. We would therefore request that the Authority is kept informed of any future changes to the programme.

This decision shall be published and placed in the Electricity Register.

We trust that this is satisfactory.

If you have any queries, please contact Jody O'Boyle.

Yours sincerely,



Brian Mulhern
Director of Networks
Duly authorised by the Authority