The assessment of construction effects

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<th>The Regulations</th>
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<td>Whilst the need for an Environmental Statement (ES) to describe ‘construction impacts’ specifically is a preference, but not a minimum requirements of the EIA Regs (2011), the assessment of construction activities is heavily promoted in EIA best practice guidance documents, and is an area often probed into by decision-makers and examining PINS’ Inspectors down the line. While adverse construction effects are unlikely to be materially significant in decision making, it is nevertheless an important component in the consideration of the environmental impact of a scheme as a whole.</td>
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<td>With a long history in managing schemes through the EIA process, Nexus Planning are experienced in coordinating disciplines to produce ESs that are structured so as to transparently identify the individual, cumulative and in-combination effects arising from the construction period, as far as possible. The catch-22 is that such information is often unavailable, and the paucity of information makes meaningful assessment challenging. It may be truly unreasonable to know such details at the time, there may be a conscious desire on behalf of the developers to keep their cards to their chest, to retain flexibility, or possibly simply a tendency for such information to be perceived as details to be decided far later in the process, after the first hurdle of gaining consent is overcome. Speculation as to the reasons aside, at the conference in September it was interesting to note that this experience appears</td>
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Following the annual Quality Mark Forum Conference in September 2013, Anna Chew, Consultant Planner with Nexus Planning, reflects on the challenge of meaningfully assessing the effects of construction activities within EIA.

The subject of the Quality Mark Forum Conference in September 2013 ‘Delivering Proportionate EIA’ appeared to be very timely, reflecting the feeling amongst practitioners on the ground. The overarching question in debate: are established practices meaningful and efficient? One of the elements thrown into the spotlight was the assessment of construction activities. The following paragraphs reflect briefly on the challenges faced by practitioners, and the merits of the assessment of construction activities in the EIA process.
to be common to many practitioners, across project types. Therefore, this begs the question, where there is incomplete information, what value can the assessment bring?

- Where details are sparse and likely to change, an assessment of the ‘worst case’ scenario may provide a satisfactory means to assure decision-makers as to the likely major and significant environmental effects.

- Information set out in the ES (even when incomplete) can assist planning officers who may find great comfort in having as many details as possible before them, as ammunition and a means to respond to challenges in a possible political minefield. Furthermore, less project specific information (such as hours of work, length of construction period) may go some way to appease general queries in this respect.

- Where there are gaps in information, it is beneficial to be upfront and provide reasons for this. In the case of outline schemes, where detailed information would be part of the course at reserved matters stage, there is the potential to make good use of the scoping process, to present justification for scoping out of the ES a lot of the construction related evidence early on. This can save time and costs at a later stage.

- Glossing over details, for example, by reasoning construction phase effects will be less than the identified operational effects by virtue simply of their temporary nature, makes the opportunity for consideration of any cumulative (additive) and in-combination effects on particular receptors (for example noise and light on human and ecological receptors) challenging, and in turn the need for any unusual project-specific mitigation measures hard to identify.

- Often construction effects can be mitigated with relatively straightforward measures. Where appropriate standards measures are known it can be useful to provide a universally accepted “Schedule of Environmental Commitments”, with standard clauses and caveats to provide reassurance as to the likely residual effects of the scheme.

The above notes provide a very brief summary of possible approaches to the problem of incomplete knowledge with respect of construction activities. This article forms part of Nexus Planning’s contribution to the EIA Quality Mark Forum which aims to encourage conversations between EIA practitioners. Should anyone wish to discuss the matters above, please contact either myself or one of my colleagues on the details below.

Anna Chew
Nexus Planning
a.chew@nexusplanning.co.uk
01932 837 850

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