

# NSIP / DCO Process – Stage-by-Stage Guide



The DCO process is set out in the **Planning Act 2008** and managed by the **Planning Inspectorate (PINS)**. It has six formal stages:

## 1. Pre-application Stage

### What happens

- The developer refines plans, carries out assessments (EIA, ecology, noise, transport, heritage, etc.).
- **Statutory consultation** with communities, local authorities, landowners, and statutory bodies.
- The developer must demonstrate they have considered consultation feedback.
- Preliminary Environmental Information Report (PEIR) is usually published.

### Role of Interested Parties

At this point, people are *not yet* official Interested Parties.

However, this is the **best time** for communities to influence the proposal because:

- The developer legally must consider feedback.
- Objections here can shape the project before it becomes formally fixed.

Local groups (like KSCA) can:

- Submit robust, evidenced consultation responses.
  - Organise public meetings and liaise with parish councils.
  - Engage experts early (planning, archaeology, ecology, landscape).
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## 2. Acceptance Stage (28 days)

### What happens

- The developer submits the DCO application to PINS.
- PINS has 28 days to decide whether the application is adequate to proceed.
- They assess whether the developer carried out proper consultation.

### Role of Interested Parties

- Still not official IPs yet.
  - Community groups can write to PINS raising concerns about inadequate consultation.
  - If the application is accepted, PINS publishes:
    - Application documents
    - Relevant representations process
    - Key deadlines
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## 3. Pre-examination Stage

### What happens

- The project is now live on the PINS website.
- People can register as **Interested Parties** by submitting a **Relevant Representation (RR)**—a short summary of your views, concerns, or objections.
- The Examining Authority (ExA) is appointed.
- The Preliminary Meeting sets the examination timetable.

### Role of Interested Parties

Becoming an IP gives:

- Legal status in the process
- The right to submit written evidence
- The right to speak at hearings (optional)
- The right to receive formal notifications

You must:

- Submit a Relevant Representation by the deadline.
- Decide whether you want to speak at hearings or just submit written evidence.

Community groups often help residents draft their RRs.

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## 4. Examination Stage (up to 6 months)

### What happens

- The Examining Authority examines evidence from all parties.
- Written questions, hearings (issue-specific, compulsory acquisition, open floor).

- Deadlines for written submissions, responses to questions, and comment rounds.
- Inspectors test the developer's case against national policy and local impacts.

## **Role of Interested Parties**

This is the most active stage for IPs. IPs can:

- Submit written evidence (Detailed Written Representations)
- Comment on others' submissions
- Submit expert reports (ecology, landscape, archaeology, etc.)
- Attend and/or speak at hearings
- Challenge or scrutinise the developer's claims

Groups like KSCA often coordinate:

- Technical submissions
  - Community statements
  - Representation at hearings
  - Cross-referencing evidence from consultants
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## **5. Recommendation Stage (up to 3 months)**

### **What happens**

- The Examining Authority prepares a report with recommendations.
- Sent to the Secretary of State (SoS) for the relevant department.

### **Role of Interested Parties**

- No further submissions unless explicitly invited.
- IPs simply wait for the recommendation and SoS decision.

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## 6. Decision Stage (up to 3 months)

### What happens

- The Secretary of State decides whether to grant or refuse development consent.
- Conditions (Requirements) may be attached.
- Decision and reasons are published.

### Role of Interested Parties

IPs can:

- Review the final decision.
- Consider whether to challenge via **judicial review** (within 6 weeks).
- Continue to monitor post-consent obligations if the project is approved.

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## Summary Table – Role of Interested Parties

Stage	Status of Community / IPs	Main Influence
Pre-application	Not official IPs	Strongest influence on project design & consultation challenges
Acceptance	Not yet IPs	Raise adequacy concerns
Pre-examination	Register as IPs via RRs	Gain legal rights to participate
Examination	Full IP rights	Provide evidence, attend hearings, challenge developer
Recommendation	No active role	Await report

Decision

No active role

Can consider judicial review