



SLS worked with Ridham Dock to manage large silos. It was the size of the silos, rather than their weight, that made it a challenging shipment, with SLS's tasks including the coordination of cranes and specialist trucks, as well as personnel

Where there's a will, there's a way

The winner of last year's BIFA Project Forwarding Award was Specialist Logistics Services, which describes the movement of abnormal loads and heavy equipment as the backbone of its business

The movement of project cargo requires coordination of stakeholders in multiple locations to ensure smooth and timely delivery of vital equipment. It is a complex business, involving much more than simply moving an item from A to B – though that, in itself, is a challenging task when it comes to heavy or outsize shipments.

In July last year, for instance, Specialist Logistics Services (SLS) transported seven large silos and associated equipment from Sfax in Tunisia to the new Wheelabrator Kemsley (K3) waste-to-energy plant in Kent, which is expected to be fully operational this year.

Move planning

It took two years to plan the move down to the smallest detail, in cooperation with the client and manufacturer as well as a forwarder in Tunisia who loaded the silos onto the chartered ship.

SLS also worked with landowners, government authorities, other transport companies and crane hire providers to ensure the delivery took place on time and on budget.

The support of Ridham Dock at Sittingbourne in the UK was also crucial. Martin Burgess, director of Bedfordshire-based SLS, remembered: "The innovation [in this project] came from finding a small port that was willing to work with us, and make many infrastructure changes (levelling yards, allowing us to make a new exit gate, etc) to accommodate the size of the pieces."

Other notable features at the port included overhead power lines and a transformer located near the exit point. The trucks carrying the huge silos had to comply with safety clearances specified by the National Grid.

"There are so many elements that have to be brought together with this sort of work," Burgess said. "The timing was crucial. We had to receive and unload the silos over a weekend to avoid disrupting local businesses, optimise the size of the vessel and exact timing of its arrival bearing in mind both the limitations at Ridham Dock and the tide heights, make sure the dock was empty and the cranes were there on time, get the specialist trucks down from Barton in Yorkshire

on time, and make sure all the right people were available that weekend (including marine surveyors and Customs clearance agents)."

On top of that, it is perhaps fitting that environmental considerations were of great importance in the logistics supporting this renewable energy project.

"It was imperative that the largest silos – 7.2 m in diameter, 16 m long and weighing 30 tonnes each – could be shipped to the jobsite in one piece without using public roads in order to minimise the amount of truck movements that would have been required if the cargo had been delivered as smaller units," Burgess said.

Successful cooperation

Therefore, in another example of successful cooperation, SLS obtained permission to use a privately owned road for the final, short leg of the silos' journey – removing street furniture such as bollards and signage in order to pass, and replacing it by the Monday morning after the move.

This minimised the carbon footprint of the job, as well as sparing other road users delays or complications.

"This is a fantastic example of how you can lessen the impact on an area or environment by working very closely with all suppliers, stakeholders and the client on an inclusive and open basis in order to achieve the desired result," Burgess said, adding: "In the end, if we had not found a way to complete this project, it would not have been possible. It was this way – or no way.

"We are currently working on the biggest project we have ever attempted, to move the constituent parts of an 8 m diameter test chamber from the Adriatic coast of Italy to Oxfordshire," Burgess added.