

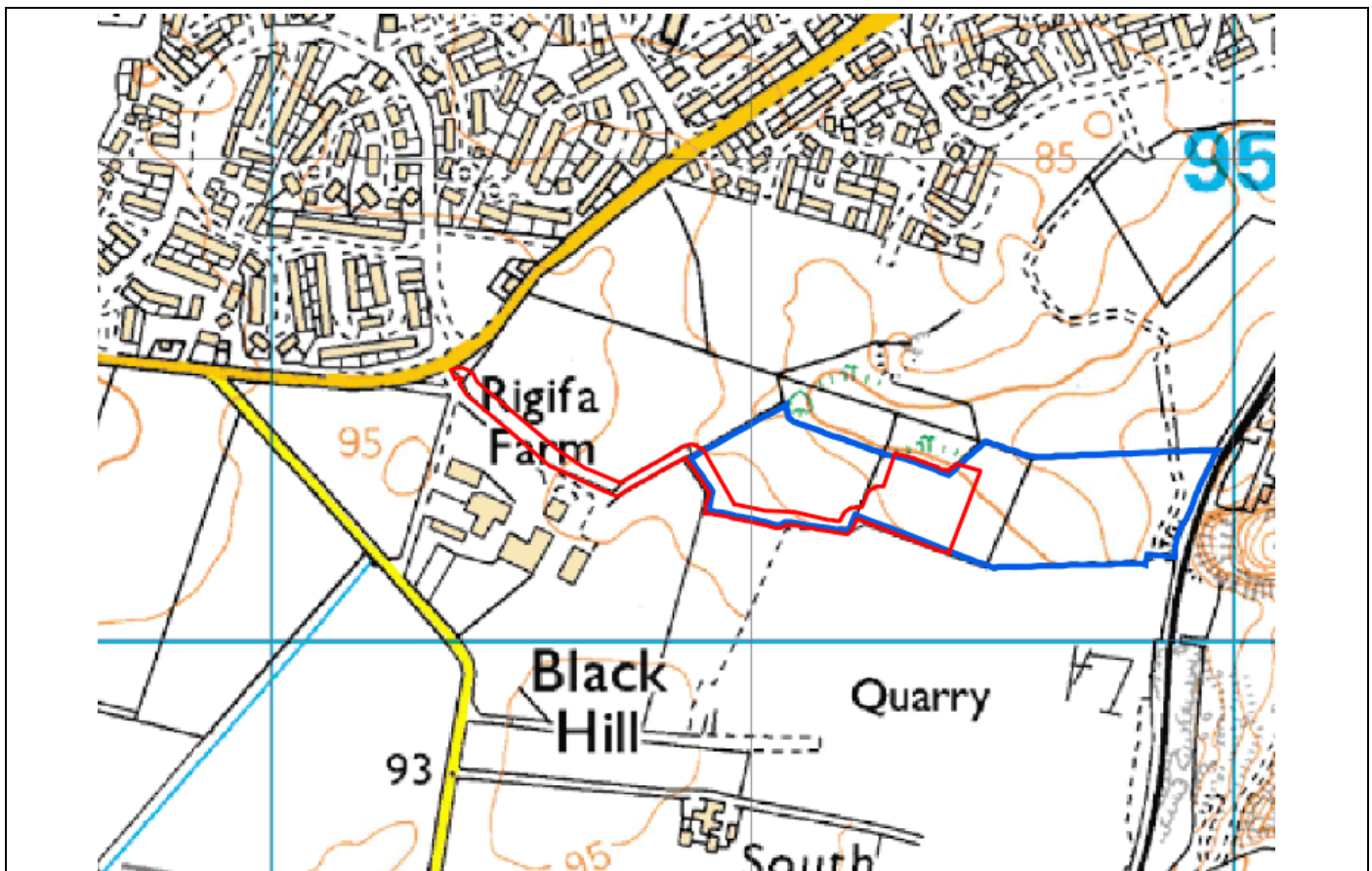


Planning Development Management Committee

Report by Development Management Manager

Committee Date: 7th November 2024

Site Address:	Land at Rigifa Farm, Cove Road, Aberdeen AB12 3LR
Application Description:	Erection of battery storage units with associated infrastructure, control building, switch room, inverter containers, lighting, fencing and associated works including access road
Application Ref:	231336/DPP
Application Type	Detailed Planning Permission
Application Date:	25 October 2023
Applicant:	Source Galileo Limited
Ward:	Kincorth/Nigg/Cove
Community Council:	Cove and Altens



© Crown Copyright. Aberdeen City Council. Licence Number: 100023401 – 2024

RECOMMENDATION

Approve Conditionally

APPLICATION BACKGROUND

Site Description

The site relates to an area of agricultural land extending to approximately 1.58 hectares within an area designated as Green Belt. The site is located to the immediate north of the operational Blackhills Quarry and associated business uses. The site is approximately 130m south of the settlement edge of the residential area of Cove. A community woodland and reservoir is located to the north of the application site, providing a buffer between housing and commercial uses. The site slopes from west to east, where the land eventually meets the east coast railway line, which itself is located approximately 190m to the east.

Relevant Planning History

- A Proposal of Application Notice (Ref: 230397/PAN) was submitted in March 2023 for proposed battery storage units with associated infrastructure, control and switch building containers and associated works including access.
- A Screening Opinion (Ref: 221556/ESC) was issued in January 2023 in for the erection of containerised battery storage units, control building, switch room, inverter containers, lighting and associated works. This opinion advised that an Environmental Impact Assessment was not required.
- There have also been various planning applications associated with the adjacent Blackhills Quarry, with the most recent (Ref: 191056/S42) granting planning permission for the continued use of the quarry until November 2050.

APPLICATION DESCRIPTION

Description of Proposal

The proposal seeks detailed planning permission of the construction of a grid scale battery energy storage system (BESS) with a capacity of up to 49.9 megawatts. The facility would consist of the siting of containers which would each house batteries together with inverters and electrical transformers, substation buildings, fencing and new planting. The development would be served by an access track from the existing junction off Cove Road that serves Blackhills Quarry and its associated business uses. The equipment would comprise:

- 28x battery energy storage containers (8.5m x 4m)
- 14x battery unit panels (1.9m x 0.8m)
- 14x power conversion system kiosk units (3m x 2.2m)
- 7 x ring main unit containers (6m x 3m)
- 1x customer compound (14m x 14m)
- 1x district network operator compound (16m x 14m)

The BESS facility would be enclosed by 3m high acoustic fencing around the northern, eastern and part of the western boundaries and 2.4m high security fencing around the southern boundary of the site. It is the applicant's intention to incorporate living walls to the fencing around and there would be six 4m high pole mounted CCTV cameras with associated infrared lighting provided within the compound. The lighting would only be activated if someone were in the compound.

A new access road would also be provided, which would connect the site to the existing access to the Leith's Quarry office building and associated facilities on Cove Road, with finalised details to be controlled via condition. This access road would be approximately 660m in length and would run along the southern boundary of the existing agricultural field to the immediate north of the Blackhills Quarry site (predominantly abutting areas of car parking and office building and associated facilities rather than the operational areas of the quarry itself). The northern boundary of the quarry site is defined by grassed bunding.

Landscaping is also proposed along the boundaries of the site and would predominantly be located around the northern, western and eastern boundaries of the site. Finalised details of the planting and species would be controlled via planning condition.

The proposed development would be used to store excess electricity from the national grid and then release this energy in periods of high demand. Therefore, the development must be connected to the grid and in this instance, it is understood that the development's grid connection would be via the existing substation at Redmoss approximately 1.7km north of the application site at the A956 roundabout. It is anticipated that the connection would be via buried cables within roadside verges, potentially along Cove Road, Old Wellington Road and Wellington Road, however this information has not been formally submitted as part of the planning application. It should be noted that if the cable were to be located underground it may be deemed permitted development under the provisions of the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (Scotland) Order 1992 if installed by a statutory undertaker (such as Scottish and Southern Electricity Networks).

Amendments

The proposal has not been amended, however various documents have been submitted in support of the application since the original submission. These have included the following:

- Noise Impact Assessment – including amended boundary details to include the required acoustic fencing
- Fire Risk Management Plan
- Flood Risk Assessment
- Sequential Test Assessment and Site Selection Information
- Arboricultural Impact Assessment
- Responses to Objections
- Third Party engineer's review of quarry blast assessment and mitigation proposals and Independent Check Certificate

Supporting Documents

All drawings and supporting documents listed below can be viewed on the Council's website at:

<https://publicaccess.aberdeencity.gov.uk/online-applications/applicationDetails.do?activeTab=documents&keyVal=S2ZLPEBZGX100>

- Landscape and Visual Appraisal and Appendices (October 2023)
- Cultural Heritage Impact Assessment (October 2023)
- Planning, Design and Access Statement (October 2023)
- Construction Traffic Management Plan (October 2023)
- Noise Impact Assessment (December 2023)
- Ecological Assessment (October 2023)
- Sequential Test Assessment and Site Selection Assessment Addendum/ Matrix (May, July AND September 2024)

- Arboricultural Impact Assessment (May 2024)
- Drainage Impact Assessment (October 2023)
- Fire Risk Management Plan (November 2023)
- Technical Response – Quarry Objection (May and July 2024)
- Utility Data Appendix (May 2024)
- Flood Risk Assessment (May 2024)
- Third Party Memorandum and Independent Check Certificate (September 2024)

Reason for Referral to Committee

The application has been referred to the Planning Development Management Committee because the proposal is a Major development. The proposal subsequently falls outwith the Scheme of Delegation.

Pre-Application Consultation

The applicants undertook statutory pre-application consultation, which included two public consultation events, held on 10th and 25th May 2023 and an online event on 19th May 2023. The applicants noted that approximately eight people attended the events, and provided feedback to the applicants. Various comments were received in relation to construction traffic and quarrying operations, biodiversity and habitat impacts, fire safety, noise and the benefits of the development to the local community.

The proposals were also subject to consultation with the local Cove and Altens Community Council and Ward Councillors and the above public events were advertised in locations in close proximity to the application site within Cove. The proposals were also presented to the Pre-Application Forum on 21st September 2023.

CONSULTATIONS

Health and Safety Executive (Quarries) – no response received.

Aberdeen International Airport – advise that the proposal has been examined from an aerodrome safeguarding perspective and does not conflict with safeguarding criteria. They therefore have no objection to the application. They have, however, requested the insertion of an informative in relation to the use of cranes, were planning permission to be approved.

Archaeology Service (Aberdeenshire Council) – have reviewed the submitted Cultural Heritage Impact Assessment and agree with its conclusions. Confirm that no archaeological mitigation works are required ahead of the development and have no further comments to make on the application.

ACC - Developer Obligations – advised that, given the type and scale of built floorspace proposed within the site it is not considered that infrastructure (Core Paths and Open Space) would be impacted to the extent that further mitigation is required through planning obligations.

ACC - Environmental Health – have reviewed the updated Noise Impact Assessment and consider it to be acceptable. Their response will be discussed in greater detail in the evaluation section of this report.

ACC - Structures, Flooding and Coastal Engineering – consider the Flood Risk Assessment to be acceptable and have provided comments on the submitted Drainage Impact Assessment. Their response will be discussed further in the evaluation section of this report.

ACC - Roads Development Management Team – have confirmed that they have no objection to the planning application.

Scottish Fire and Rescue Service – do not have any specific comments to make regarding the application, but have provided guidance on BESS sites from the National Fire Chiefs Council and the Fire Protection Association.

Cove and Altens Community Council – no response received.

REPRESENTATIONS

A total of 10 written representations (1 objection and 9 in support) have been received. The letter of objection was received from Leith's Scotland Ltd, being the operator of the adjacent quarry with the majority of the letters of support being from businesses in the surrounding area. The matters raised can be summarised as follows:

Support

1. Note that having flexible and responsive local storage is key to supporting an energy grid powered by renewables, noting that such facilities would be beneficial to the local business community.
2. A reliable energy storage facility can contribute to a stable energy supply, which is beneficial to the local business community.
3. Note that the grid cannot cope at certain times, and having the demand needed at peak times, such infrastructure is critical to give energy security in the future.
4. Note that the facility is sited on poorer quality land and would have little effect on agricultural production.
5. Having a BESS storage site close to the Aberdeen Energy and Innovation Park strengthens the reputation of the region as a pioneer of green energy.

Objection

6. Note Policy R1 (Minerals) of the Aberdeen Local Development Plan and that Blackhills Quarry is a safeguarded site. Encroachment has been prevented to ensure that quarry operations can continue and that important reserves are not sterilised. Note that a permanent 400m wide zone has been maintained around the quarry free of development. Also note that the safeguarding of mineral resources is recognised by NPF4.
7. Concerns in relation to fire/ thermal runaway and the impact that this would have on the neighbouring uses.
8. A store used for storing explosive materials for quarry blasting adjoins the proposed BESS access road and is in operation and required in relation to quarry operations. There were concerns about the proximity of a high voltage underground cable in proximity to the store and raised concerns about the consenting scheme for this element of the proposal.

9. Key concern in relation to quarry blasting and vibration, noting that frequent blasting takes place at the quarry as part of the rock extraction, which creates ground vibration. Note that there are still reserves within the existing quarry and note that Blackhills is a “first come” development and therefore have concerns that the BESS facility may impact on quarry operations. Note that information (originally) shared by the applicant doesn’t contain any information in relation to blasting and no guarantees have been provided that the presence of the BESS facility would place no restriction or curtailment on the current and future operation of the quarry.
10. Note that minerals can only be worked where they exist in a quantity and quality which allow for economic recovery and Blackhills Quarry is such a location and should be protected.

Following neighbour re-notification, which was required due to the submission of revised supporting documents, further comments were received from the same objector raising the following matters:

11. In terms of blasting and vibration, noted that the Leith’s office building is located further from the quarry than the proposed facility, and state that blasting and extraction of rock may still take place on the northern boundary of the quarry, noting that there are still some unworked rock reserves in the north west corner of the quarry, therefore the applicants’ assumption that blasting is expected to be more than 300m from the BESS location is wrong.
12. The applicant should be prepared to mitigate and construct a facility to accept a PPV (Peak Particle Velocity) higher than 50 mm/s. Leiths cannot accept a limit of 50 mm/s at the BESS facility.
13. Note that frequent blasting may take place at the facility.
14. The applicant should be required to produce a detailed design for the BESS facility with foundation/ isolation design to accept a higher PPV limit, which may be generated by the quarry operations now, or in the future.
15. Note that if planning permission is approved, a condition should be imposed which requires the submission of a scheme for approval which provides a detailed design for the access road and includes protection measures close to the explosives store.

MATERIAL CONSIDERATIONS

Legislative Requirements

Sections 25 and 37(2) of the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997 require that where making any determination under the planning acts, regard is to be had to the provisions of the Development Plan; and, that any determination shall be made in accordance with the plan, so far as material to the application, unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

Development Plan

National Planning Framework 4

National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4) is the long-term spatial strategy for Scotland and contains a comprehensive set of national planning policies that form part of the statutory development plan.

- Policy 1 (Tackling the Climate and Nature Crises)

- Policy 2 (Climate Mitigation and Adaptation)
- Policy 3 (Biodiversity)
- Policy 4 (Natural Places)
- Policy 6 (Forestry, Woodland and Trees)
- Policy 7 (Historic Assets and Places)
- Policy 8 (Green Belts)
- Policy 11 (Energy)
- Policy 12 (Zero Waste)
- Policy 13 (Sustainable Transport)
- Policy 14 (Design, Quality and Place)
- Policy 22 (Flood Risk and Water Management)
- Policy 23 (Health and Safety)
- Policy 33 (Minerals)

Aberdeen Local Development Plan (2023)

- OP55: Blackhills Quarry
- Policy D1 (Quality Placemaking)
- Policy D4 (Landscape)
- Policy D5 (Landscape Design)
- Policy D6 (Historic Environment)
- Policy NE1 (Green Belt)
- Policy NE2 (Green and Blue Infrastructure)
- Policy NE3 (Our Natural Heritage)
- Policy NE4 (Our Water Environment)
- Policy NE5 (Trees and Woodland)
- Policy B3 (Aberdeen International Airport and Perwinnes Radar)
- Policy R1 (Minerals)
- Policy R7 (Renewable and Low Carbon Energy Developments)
- Policy WB3 (Noise)

Aberdeen Planning Guidance

- Landscape
- Natural Heritage
- Noise
- Transport and Accessibility

Other Material Considerations

- Battery Energy Storage Systems – Research Paper (House of Commons Library)
- Grid Scale Battery Energy Storage System Planning – Guidance for Fire and Rescue Services (National Fire Chiefs Council)
- Health and Safety Guidance for Grid Scale Electrical Energy Storage Systems (Department for Energy Security & Net Zero)

EVALUATION

Background

Renewable energy sources such as wind and solar power rely on the weather to generate electricity. This means that renewables cannot adjust to demand from consumers and businesses as easily as fossil fuels and nuclear power can. Therefore, with the energy system increasingly relying on renewable sources, it will need to be underpinned by technologies that can respond to fluctuations in supply and demand, such as battery energy storage, gas with carbon capture and storage, and hydrogen.

Grid scale battery energy storage systems ('BESS') store the energy that is produced when demand is lower than supply. The energy stored in batteries can be released when there is little wind and sun, to ensure the demand can always be met, a process known as "grid balancing". Without such facilities, excess energy is wasted as any surplus cannot be stored in the electricity network.

The Scottish Government's planning advice on energy storage states that "*A clear case has been made that, if the energy sector is to maximise environmental, economic and social benefits, renewable energy will need to be linked to energy storage. Energy storage technologies can counteract intermittency associated with certain energy supplies, can ensure excess power is not lost at times of high production, can provide energy on demand off-grid in a variety of ways. Oversupply is likely to become more prevalent the closer Scotland gets to realising its 100% electricity from renewables target. It is also expected that energy storage will be essential if Scotland is to realise its ambition to become a renewable energy exporter and to attract the economic advantages of ensuring that the energy storage supply chain locates in Scotland.*"

According to the UK Government's Renewable Energy Planning Database, as of January 2024, in Scotland there were 18 operational BESS and 259 BESS that have applications submitted or are under construction. Across the UK there were 116 operational BESS and 1026 have been given planning consent and are awaiting or under construction (as of October 2024).

Principle of Development

Green Belt Designation

The site is zoned as Green Belt where Policy 8 (Green Belts) of NPF4 applies and has the aim of encouraging, promoting and facilitating compact urban growth and use the land around our towns and cities sustainably.

Development in the green belt is strictly controlled. For proposals to be supported, they must fall into one or more of the categories of development which are acceptable in the green belt. Thereafter should they fall into ones of these categories, they must also meet a range of other requirements to ensure the integrity of the green belt is retained.

In terms of being an acceptable development type, the proposal falls into two categories of development which are generally permitted in the green belt. The first relates to essential infrastructure, which under Policy 8 is described as '*essential infrastructure or new cemetery provision*' and in Policy NE1 Green Belt of the ALDP 2023 as development that "*is directly associated with essential infrastructure such as telecommunications, electricity grid connections, transport proposals identified in the Plan or roads planned through masterplanning of sites, if they cannot be accommodated anywhere other than the Green Belt*".

The second category relates to renewable energy, which under Policy 8 is categorised as ‘*minerals operations and renewable energy developments*’ and in Policy NE1 as development that ‘*is related to the generation of renewable energy (wind turbine, solar farm, or hydro scheme) and/or heat;*’

As described earlier in the report, given the emphasis placed on achieving net-zero targets and the essential role BESS plays in decarbonising the UK’s electricity network, such developments are therefore essential infrastructure and related to renewable energy development. Therefore, with it established that the development is of a type acceptable as an exception within the green belt, the second element of Policy 8 requires a range of other matters to be demonstrated –

1. *why a green belt location is essential and why it cannot be located on an alternative site outwith the green belt;*

The UK’s electricity grid is highly constrained and therefore identifying a location where a BESS can be connected to the electricity grid is a significant challenge. Typically, for a grid scale BESS to be commercially viable it must be located within 2km of a grid supply point that has available capacity. The greater the distance from the grid supply point, the greater the electricity transmission loss and greater the cost to lay a cable to the connection point. Even within 2km, viability relies upon there being no significant physical obstacles which would make the laying of a cable between the two locations technically or financially unviable.

In this case, the applicant has indicated that the facility would be connected to SSEN’s Redmoss Supply Point on Langdykes Road in Cove, situated approximately 1.7km to the north of the application site.

At the request of the Planning Authority, the applicant has submitted a Site Selection Matrix and Sequential Test Assessment (which was further updated at the request of the Planning Authority) which considered why a number of brownfield sites in closer proximity to the application site were discounted and why a green belt site is necessary to accommodate the development. The documents submitted provide an analysis of sites which were considered as potentially being capable of accommodating the development in closer proximity than the current site.

- A number of brownfield sites in the Altens Industrial Estate were considered, however these were discounted for a number of reasons, including the presence of utility infrastructure within the curtilage of the site, flood risk, impacts on residential amenity, planning permissions for alternative uses having been granted on the site, the presence of Scheduled Ancient Monuments and insufficient size. One of the sites (Altens Site 3) was considered potentially suitable, but the applicants failed to reach an agreement with the landowner along with an inability to secure the necessary land rights.
- Four brownfield sites in the Balmoral Business Park were also considered and were discounted for similar reasons but primarily due to the size of the development sites and flood risk.
- No assessment of other green belt sites were considered, although it is noted that there are no other significant areas of Green Belt in close proximity to the site. The large OP51 Loirston allocation is for residential development. The applicants have also indicated that the current site was chosen to minimise the impact on the green belt and to utilise poorer agricultural quality land due to its lower lying location compared to the rest of the land.

Therefore, whilst there are brownfield sites available in close proximity to the application site, particularly in the Altens area which could accommodate the development, the applicant has

adequately demonstrated that these are not available for development and therefore that a green belt site is required, in order to be in the necessary 2km proximity to the Redmoss grid connection.

2. the purpose of the green belt at that location is not undermined;

Policy NE1 of the ALDP 2023 states that the aim of the Aberdeen green belt is to maintain the distinct identity of Aberdeen, and the communities within and around the city, by defining their physical boundaries clearly. Safeguarding the green belt helps to avoid coalescence of these settlements and sprawling development on the edge of the city, maintain Aberdeen's landscape setting, and provide access to open space. The green belt directs planned growth to the most appropriate locations and supports regeneration.

The site itself has not been developed previously and sits adjacent to Blackhills Quarry. This particular area of green belt acts as a visible buffer between the settlement of Cove and Blackhills Quarry and runs from west to east as it heads towards the North Sea. The application site would be seen against the backdrop of the bunding associated with Blackhills Quarry and would be surrounded by mitigatory planting. The proposals would be visible from certain public vantage points when viewed from Cove Road or the Cove Woodland Walk but, in time, would have a limited impact on the landscape setting of this area of green belt once the landscaping had matured. The provision of "living wall" fencing would also lessen the visual impact in this instance. In addition, the proposals would not result in the loss of or access to open space, given that the fields are currently utilised for agricultural purposes. An area of green belt land approximately 225m wide would be maintained between the southern edge of housing in Cove and the application site.

3. the proposal is compatible with the surrounding established countryside and landscape character;

Policy D4 (Landscape) of the ALDP indicates that development should avoid adversely affecting the character of landscapes which are important for the setting of the city, including the coast, river valleys and hill landscapes.

This particular area of green belt acts as a visual buffer between the settlement of Cove and Blackhills Quarry. The land undulates from west to east and has is utilised for agricultural purposes, although it is noted by the applicants that this particular field is not of a high agricultural quality. The BESS structures would be seen against the backdrop of bunding associated with the quarry and landscaping would be provided around its periphery which would be appropriate for its setting, which would help lessen the visual impact of the development. It is therefore the view of the Planning Service that the proposals could be accommodated on site without having an adverse impact on the countryside or landscape setting of this particular area of green belt.

4. the proposal has been designed to ensure it is of an appropriate scale, massing and external appearance, and uses materials that minimise visual impact on the green belt as far as possible; and

Subject to mitigation measures, it is the view of the Planning Service that the development could be accommodated on site without having an adverse impact on the Green Belt setting and would be also be seen against the backdrop of the bunding associated with Blackhills Quarry, with sufficient planting and boundary treatments provided to minimise the visual impact of the development. Overall, the landscape and visual effects would be localised and limited in nature.

5. there will be no significant long-term impacts on the environmental quality of the green belt.

The site has limited ecological value and the applicant has indicated that the land is of limited agricultural value, even though the land appears to still be in such use.

In summary, the proposal is for a development type which is permitted within the green belt. Due to the specific locational characteristics of the site, on the edge of the greenbelt and seen against the backdrop of the quarry, with sufficient landscaping in place to mitigate the visual impact of the development, the criteria which all developments within the green belt are required to adhere to can be met. The proposals could therefore be seen to be in compliance with Policy 8 of NPF4 and Policy NE1 (Green Belt) of the ALDP 2023.

In addition, Policy 1 (Climate and Nature Crises) of NPF4 requires decision makers to give significant weight to the global climate and nature crises when considering nature proposals. Battery storage would support Scotland's transition to renewable energy, a major part of addressing climate change. The proposal would therefore attract support from this policy.

Minerals Impact

In terms of the principle of development, there are a number of other policies that require to be considered in the assessment of this application. Firstly, Policy R1 (Minerals) and OP55: Blackhills Quarry) of the ALDP 2023, which states that *"sites identified for mineral extraction are safeguarded from development which will sterilise the mineral resource or which compromises the safe operation of a quarry."* Blackhills Quarry was granted planning permission (130490) in January 2015 to continue hard rock extraction and processing within the quarry. This permission remains valid until 2050.

Policy 33 (Minerals) of NPF4 states that *"development proposals that would sterilise mineral deposits of economic value will only be supported where: there is an overriding need for the development and prior extraction of the mineral cannot reasonably be undertaken"*.

It is noted that a number of concerns have been raised by the operator of the quarry in terms of proximity of the proposed BESS facility to the quarry and the potential for the development to adversely impact on its operation. Further concerns were also raised in relation to noise, vibration and fire risk associated with the proposed use. It was also stated, in line with the above policy that the quarry should take some form of precedence as it has been operational for a number of years, with a consent in place for its retention until 2050, with further extraction possible along the northern boundary of the site. The quarry operators therefore consider that the quarry should be protected.

In response to the above objection, further supporting information was requested and received from the applicants which sought to address the matters raised by the quarry operators. In addition, and at the request of the Planning Authority, an independent third party assessment of the proposals was undertaken by a certified consulting engineering firm. The applicant's legal representative also submitted a statement which noted that the applicants had provided a comprehensive technical assessment that demonstrated that the development would not adversely impact on the quarry's operation or sterilise the mineral resource or compromise the safe operation of the quarry. This statement also set out that it was up to the Planning Authority to assess the acceptability of the proposals and not be seen to take the side of either the applicant or objector when making an assessment of the acceptability of any proposals.

The independent review was undertaken by Thornton Tomasetti, a *"multi-disciplinary engineering consultancy firm specialising in developing unique and innovative solutions to some of the most challenging problems that exist today"*.

In this assessment, they concluded that the design of the BESS, including the proposed mitigation measures (where it is essentially going to be installed on isolation mounts with associated foundation designs) would ensure that the future quarrying operations in the area would not be restricted by the presence of the BESS. They concluded that the applicant's analysis appeared accurate, supported by data showing that blasting activities could continue within the quarry with no impacts on mineral accessibility.

It was also noted that ongoing and future operations of the quarry should not be restricted by the BESS. The submitted vibration analysis demonstrated that the quarry's blasting activities, even with higher maximum instantaneous charge or closer proximity, would not adversely affect the BESS due to implementation of isolation mounts and conservative modelling. The review considered these mitigation measures to be technically sound, with the applicant proposing industry standard practices to ensure that there would be no restrictions imposed on the adjacent quarrying activities.

In terms of futureproofing, the potential for increase in maximum instantaneous charge was assessed by the applicants in their response to the objectors' concerns. This modelled larger maximum instantaneous charge values up to 144kg and predicated peak particle velocity levels at various distances from the blast site, including as close as 40m. The mitigation measures proposed, particularly the use of isolation mounts, indicate that a system could be designed to handle the higher peak particle velocity associated with the increased maximum instantaneous charge. The third party review concluded that this conservative approach would ensure that the BESS facility would be future proofed against potential future increases in blasting power.

In terms of quarry primacy, the review concluded that the BESS has been designed to ensure that the development would not interfere with quarry operations. It also concluded that the proposals had taken into account the quarry's potential for future expansion and operational needs.

The analysis also noted that the foundation design would incorporate dynamic loading considerations, with the foundations capable of handling high-frequency short duration blasts and even at higher peak particle velocity, the BESS structure would remain stable. The performance of isolation mounts also indicates an 87.5% reduction in peak particle velocity and that these types of mounts are a widely acceptable solution. The analysis also concluded that the mounting systems can reduce the impacts to within safe operational limits, even when blasts occur at closer distances (than 40m).

The analysis therefore concluded that the applicant's technical claims appear to be well supported by industry standard practices and robust data. The mitigation measures proposed (which would be controlled via appropriately worded planning conditions) including the isolation mounts, vibration modelling and advanced foundation design are comprehensive and appropriate for ensuring the safe operation of the BESS facility alongside the ongoing quarrying activities. It was therefore advised that with ongoing collaboration and monitoring, both operations could co-exist without compromising safety or efficiency.

The Planning Service has taken a balanced approach, noting the specific circumstances of the proposed BESS site, the adjacent quarry, the legitimate matters raised by the quarry operator, and has ensured a robust assessment of the issues arising, having regard to the requirements of Policy R1.

Therefore, when assessing the proposals against Policy 33 (Minerals) of NPF and Policy R1 (Minerals) of the ALDP 2023, it is the view of the Planning Authority that the applicant have demonstrated the need for the facility in this location, which, subject to appropriate mitigation measures, could be provided without sterilising the existing quarrying operation, which is consented

until 2050. The proposed development could therefore be provided to ensure compliance with these policies.

Economic Benefit

Policy 11 (Energy) of NPF4 explains that development proposals will only be supported where they maximise net economic impact, including local and community socio-economic benefits such as employment, associated business, and supply chain opportunities.

Battery energy storage makes an indirect but significant contribution to renewable energy generation targets and greenhouse gas emissions reduction targets, by increasing the productivity of renewable generators elsewhere on the grid. The provision of a secure electricity system brings economic benefits across the national economy. The construction and decommissioning of the development presents supply chain opportunities for business and would contribute to local economic activity.

Energy Developments and Design Impacts

As well as supporting energy developments in general, Policy 11 (Energy) of NPF4 expects the design of projects and any associated mitigation measures to demonstrate how the following impacts are addressed. Many of these matters are aimed more towards considering large scale renewable projects, such as wind farms, nonetheless each is considered in relation to this application. Policy R7 (Renewable and Low Energy Developments) of the ALDP 2023 also contains such criteria, much of which reiterates that in Policy 11. Where Policy R7 has additional requirements, they are highlighted in the relevant part of the discussion or considered at the end of this section.

In considering all these impacts, Policy 11 requires significant weight to be placed on the contribution of the proposal to renewable energy generation targets and on greenhouse gas emissions reduction targets. The significant weight required to be given to the global climate and nature crises by Policy 1 of NPF4 must also be considered. This substantial support for the principle of the development should not be outweighed by other matters unless it can be demonstrated that significant harm would be caused.

- i. *impacts on communities and individual dwellings, including, residential amenity, visual impact, noise, and shadow flicker.*

In considering these matters, Policy 14 (Design, Quality and Place) of NPF4, Policy D1 (Quality Placemaking and D2 (Amenity) of the ALDP 2023 are relevant and requires development proposals to be designed to improve the quality of an area whether in urban or rural locations and regardless of scale. Development proposals that are poorly designed, detrimental to the amenity of the surrounding area or inconsistent with the six qualities of successful places, will not be supported.

The site has a fairly open aspect and would be visible from both Cove Road and the community woodland located to the north of the site and would essentially be viewed against the bunds for Blackhills Quarry, which is located to the immediate south.

BESS facilities are considered to have an industrial character and appearance, similar to that of an electricity substation. In this case, the equipment and associated structures would be relatively low in height and would sit less than 3m above ground level. The equipment would sit within an enclosed compound, surrounded by a 2.4m high fence, and a 3m high acoustic fence on the northern, and partially on the eastern and western boundaries. Planting is also proposed along the northern, eastern and western boundaries, which would help to screen the equipment from Cove and the woodland to the north. The provision of such landscaping, which would help screen the required

fencing would lessen the overall visual impact of the development and help the facility to blend in with the existing bunding located to the rear of the site at Blackhills.

The proposals are also located a significant distance from any residential properties, with those nearest being located on Creel Wynd, approximately 220m to the north and separated by areas of mature planting and woodland. The visual impact and amenity impact on residential properties is therefore considered to be negligible in this instance.

In the wider context, the site itself is relatively open in nature and acts as a buffer between the settlement of Cove and Blackhills Quarry. The area is characterised by rolling agricultural land and woodland which gradually slopes from west to east as it heads towards the North Sea. The submitted Landscape Visual Appraisal considers the visual impact of the development from several locations in the wider area. It determines that there would be little to no visual impact from more distant views. Overall, the landscape and visual effects would be localised and limited in nature.

It is also important to note that the test within Policy R7 of the ALDP is that “*proposals will not have a significant adverse impact on the amenity of dwelling houses.*” In this case, although there would be an impact upon visual amenity, it would be minor, rather than being significant.

The distance between the site and any surrounding uses ensures there would be no impact on daylight availability or overshadowing. There would be no shadow flicker generated by the BESS.

In terms of noise, the applicants have submitted a Noise Impact Assessment in support of the application, which has been reviewed by colleagues in Environmental Health. They were content with the findings of the NIA, provided the proposal comprises the plant detailed in Section 3.58 (28 battery storage units with associated PCS and transformer units), with A-weighted sound power levels not exceeding those detailed in Table 3-5, and is arranged as shown on the infrastructure layout plan (Resources Unlimited LLP, SEC0001 Rigifa Farm [Version 1]).

In addition, they have noted that prior to construction of the BESS, the warranted sound power levels, number of items and location of the chosen plant shall be checked against the assumptions considered in the assessment and where the proposed items are found to vary (i.e., in sound power level, location or number) an updated assessment shall be undertaken to confirm that the operational noise levels meet the relevant criteria (noise limits). This matter could be controlled via an appropriately worded planning condition.

Finally, they have noted that a 3 metre high acoustic grade fence (minimum surface density of 15 kg/m²) is installed around the northeast half of the proposed development as detailed in Figure 3.2, Appendix 3A.

Provided the above works and recommendations have been carried out, they have advised that the proposed development would be acceptable from a noise perspective. The proposals would therefore be in accordance with Policy 23 (Health and Safety) of NPF4, Policy WB3 (Noise) of the ALDP 2023 and its associated APG: Noise.

- ii. *significant landscape and visual impacts, recognising that such impacts are to be expected for some forms of renewable energy. Where impacts are localised and/ or appropriate design mitigation has been applied, they will generally be considered to be acceptable.*

As has been discussed elsewhere in the report, the proposed facility would be located adjacent to Blackhills Quarry and would be seen against the backdrop of the bunding associated with this facility. Whilst the structures would be fairly industrial in nature, they would be enclosed by a mixture of acoustic and security fencing, which in turn would be bound by a mixture of mature landscaping

(details of which would be controlled via an appropriately worded planning condition. The LVIA submitted in support of the application has also looked at the structures from a number of key viewpoints and its setting is considered to be acceptable in this regard. Appropriate mitigation measures would therefore be provided and could be controlled via an appropriately worded planning condition.

- iii. *public access, including impact on long distance walking and cycling routes and scenic routes.*

As operational agricultural land, there is no public access to the site at present, and this would remain the case. The community woodland, which includes a footpath network within it would remain unaffected.

- iv. *impacts on aviation and defence interests including seismological recording.*

The proposals have been subject to consultation with Aberdeen International Airport, who have noted that the proposed development does not conflict with safeguarding criteria and therefore have no objection to the proposed development. They have, however, requested the insertion of an informative in relation to the use of cranes, were planning permission to be approved for the proposed development. Subject to the above, the proposed development would comply with Policy B3: Aberdeen International Airport and Perwinnes Radar of the ALDP 2023.

- v. *impacts on telecommunications and broadcasting installations, particularly ensuring that transmission links are not compromised.*

No impacts on telecommunications and broadcasting installations are expected.

- vi. *impacts on road traffic and on adjacent trunk roads, including during construction.*

Although there would inevitably be construction traffic associated with the installation of the equipment, this is not expected to be significant. Operationally, only occasional maintenance vehicles would be required to attend the site. The ACC Roads Development Management Team was consulted and no concerns have been raised (as is discussed further below).

- vii. *impacts on historic environment.*

The proposal was subject to consultation with colleagues in the archaeology service, who have reviewed the submitted Cultural Heritage Impact Assessment and agree with its conclusions. They confirmed that no archaeological mitigation works are required ahead of the development and have no further comments to make on the application. The site is not within a conservation area and there are no historic assets, such as listed buildings or scheduled monuments, either within the site or in the surrounding area that would be affected by the proposed development.

- viii. *effects on hydrology, the water environment and flood risk.*

Policy 22 (Flood Risk and Water Management) of NPF4 and Policy NE4 (Our Water Environment) of the ALDP 2023 relate to surface water drainage and in summary require all new developments to incorporate Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems (SUDS) to manage surface water; presume no surface water connection to the combined sewer; and to minimise the area of impermeable surface.

The proposal was originally subject to consultation with colleagues in the flooding team, who noted that there is a small dam located on the northern boundary of the site and therefore requested the submission of a Flood Risk Assessment. They also confirmed that there appeared to be a culverted

watercourse draining into the dam and located parallel to one of the proposed sections of the access road. Investigations were therefore required for a proposed crossing or relocation of the proposed access road, noting that the above information was required prior to determination of the application.

They also originally noted that the proposed attenuation storage at 32m³ would not be realistic given the size of the site and the proposed discharge rates for a 1 in 200 year-event. They also requested that the detailed drainage design should include any drainage arrangements for the proposed access road.

Subsequently, the applicants submitted a Flood Risk Assessment in support of the application, which looked at a number of aspects and noted that there appeared to be no internal watercourses within the application site. Colleagues in FPU accepted the findings of the report but noted that they were aware of a watercourse crossing the site and one located parallel to the access road. They have advised that this should be considered during the works and excavations and further conditions could be attached to the consent in this regard.

In addition, they have noted that a detailed Drainage Impact Assessment would be required in support of the proposals, but noted that this could be submitted as a condition of the planning permission.

Therefore, subject to the above works taking place and controlled through suitable conditions, the proposals would be acceptable in principle from a flood risk and drainage perspective and would therefore be in compliance with Policy 22 of NPF 4 and Policy NE4 of the ALDP 2023.

ix. *biodiversity including impacts on birds.*

Policy 4 (Natural Places) of the NPF4 aims to protect, restore, and enhance natural assets making best use of nature-based solutions. It states that development proposals which by virtue of type, location or scale will have an unacceptable impact on the natural environment, will not be supported. Policy NE3 (Our Natural Heritage) of the ALDP has similar provisions. In addition, Policy 2 (Climate Mitigation and Adaptation) of NPF4 requires development proposals to be designed and sited to minimise lifecycle greenhouse gas emissions as far as possible, and to adapt to current and future risks from climate change and Policy 3 (Biodiversity) of NPF4 requires proposals for local development *'to include appropriate measures to conserve, restore and enhance biodiversity, in accordance with national and local guidance. Measures should be proportionate to the nature and scale of development.'*

An ecological assessment was submitted in support of the application, this looked at various aspects and noted that there would be an indirect loss of habitat due to noise and vibration disturbance along with potential dust and water pollution during the construction phase of development. The report concluded that these short term impacts would not be significant if the recommended mitigation is undertaken, which would include the implementation of new habitat creation, along with a new wildflower meadow and hedgerows. These works would take place around the periphery of the site and would have the potential to increase local wildlife. The report was subject to consultation with colleagues in Natural Environment Policy, who were content with the findings of the report, where implementation of the recommendations could be controlled via an appropriately worded planning conditions to ensure compliance with the aforementioned policies.

x. *impacts on trees, woods and forests.*

An arboricultural impact assessment was submitted in support of the application, which noted that no trees are proposed for removal in order to implement the development, and that there was sufficient space within the land to accommodate new tree, hedge and shrub planting (which would

be controlled via an appropriate planning condition). The findings of the report were considered to be acceptable to colleagues and the proposals would have no adverse impact on existing tree stock.

- xi. *proposals for the decommissioning of developments, including ancillary infrastructure, and site restoration.*

The proposals are designed to operate for 25 years, after which they would be removed. The construction works would not require a significant physical intervention, so their removal would also be a relatively simple process.

- xii. *the quality of site restoration plans including the measures in place to safeguard or guarantee availability of finances to effectively implement those plans; and*

Due to the simple reversible nature of the installation, it is not considered necessary to have any site restoration plan. However, a condition would be proposed which requires the proposals to be removed once they are no longer operational.

- xiii. *cumulative impacts.*

There are no other developments in close proximity which in combination with this development would generate any unacceptable impacts.

In addition to the matters covered by both Policy 11 of NPF4 and Policy R7 of the ALDP above, Policy R7 also requires that proposals for all energy developments –

- i. *will not negatively impact on air quality.*

The structures would not emit any emissions and their use in the wider scale would help reduce emissions and in turn air quality from non-renewable energy sources.

- ii. *will not negatively impact on tourism*

There are no tourist activities associated with the site or surrounding area.

In relation to such development specifically, Policy R7 requires proposals to meet the following requirements –

- i. *consideration has been given to glint and glare issues and it has been demonstrated that any significant impacts will have a duration of less than five minutes in any one day.*

The proposal has been subject to consultation with the airport, who have raised no objections to the proposals and it is not anticipated that such facilities would have any impacts in terms of glint and glare.

- ii. *Low impact vegetation management can be achieved (grazing).*

It is noted that the site is partially utilised for the grazing of animals, but the applicants have indicated that this particular area of land is of a particularly poor quality given its close proximity to the bunding associated with the quarry. Given the large amount of land that would remain, the impacts in these regards would be minimal.

In summary, both Policy 11 of NPF4 and Policy R7 of the ALDP require decision makers to give significant weight to the benefit which the development of renewable energy project in terms of

reducing carbon emissions. It is considered that the criteria contained within Policy 11 in terms of potential impacts because of the development have been satisfactorily addressed and that any impact as a result of the proposal would be localised and minor. None would outweigh the significant weight which should be attached to the benefit of reducing carbon emissions.

Transportation

Policy T2 (Sustainable Transport) of the ALDP 2023 seeks to minimise traffic generation, increase accessibility, encourage public transport and provide relevant infrastructure within developments. It also advises that existing routes, such as core paths should be enhanced and retained during development. Policy T3 (Parking) discusses matters such as parking within development and electric vehicle infrastructure.

The proposals, which include the erection of an approximately 660m long access road, that would take access from an unadopted road that serves the office and associated facilities at the quarry from a junction off Cove Road, have been subject to consultation with colleagues in Roads Development Management. They have noted that the existing road is capable of accommodating larger vehicles as evidenced in the submitted swept path analysis and that the proposed visibility splay is appropriate for the development as proposed.

No staff would be located on site on a permanent basis, and the submitted site plan notes that parking would be available within the curtilage of the site where permeable hardstanding is to be located. The applicant has also noted that *“a designated turning space has been included to accommodate the largest vehicle expected to use the site”*. The submitted swept path, which shows a large vehicle entering and existing the site, is considered to be acceptable.

Colleagues in Roads Development Management have also noted that the applicant has stated that the connection to the substation would be via an underground cable and they have advised that the proposals should be discussed with colleagues in Roadworks Coordination at the earliest opportunity to discuss the necessary permits and approvals.

Subject to the above, the proposals would be in general compliance with Policies T2 and T3 of the ALDP 2023 and its associated APG: Transport & Accessibility.

Noise

Policy 23 (Health and Safety) of NPF4 indicates that *“Development proposals that are likely to raise unacceptable noise issues will not be supported. The agent of change principle applies to noise sensitive development. A Noise Impact Assessment may be required where the nature of the proposal or its location suggests that significant effects are likely.”* In addition, Policy WB3 Noise of the ALDP 2023 requires that there will be a presumption against noise generating developments, being located to noise sensitive developments, such as existing or proposed housing, with suitable mitigation measures in place to reduce the impact of noise to an acceptable level.

The applicants have submitted a Noise Impact Assessment in support of the application, which has been reviewed by colleagues in Environmental Health. They are content with the findings of the NIA, provided the proposal comprises the plant detailed in Section 3.58 (28 battery storage units with associated PCS and transformer units), with A-weighted sound power levels not exceeding those detailed in Table 3-5, and is arranged as shown on the infrastructure layout plan (Resources Unlimited LLP, SEC0001 Rigifa Farm [Version 1]).

In addition, they have noted that prior to construction of the BESS, the warranted sound power levels, number of items and location of the chosen plant shall be checked against the assumptions

considered in the assessment and where the proposed items are found to vary (i.e., in sound power level, location or number) an updated assessment shall be undertaken to confirm that the operational noise levels meet the relevant criteria (noise limits). This matter could be controlled via an appropriately worded planning condition.

Finally, they have noted that a 3 metre high acoustic grade fence (minimum surface density of 15 kg/m²) is installed around the northeast half of the proposed development as detailed in Figure 3.2, Appendix 3A.

Provided the above works and recommendations are carried out, they have advised that the proposed development would be acceptable from a noise perspective. The proposals would therefore be in accordance with Policy 23 (Health and Safety) of NPF4, Policy WB3 (Noise) of the ALDP 2023 and its associated APG: Noise.

Health and Safety

Policy 23 (Health and Safety) of NPF4 aims to protect people and places from environmental harm and mitigate risks arising from safety hazards. The Planning Service is aware of concern surrounding battery storage and their associated fire risk, as well as recent incidents with such facilities in the UK and abroad. Therefore, as part of any planning application the applicant has been asked to submit details of the measures which would be employed to mitigate such a risk.

The applicants have submitted a Fire Risk Management Plan in support of the application. This document noted that the main risks associated with such a facility are fire within components of the BESS, poor waste management and maintenance of vegetation and arson attacks on the structure. In order to mitigate against fire, the individual components have been designed to specific electrical codes so that the risk of them overheating and starting a fire are minimised. They are also constructed of materials that are difficult to ignite and any combustible materials are kept to a minimum. The combustible materials within the current proposals relate to the transformers, which are to be oil cooled. The transformers have also been located an appropriate distance from the site boundary and the site is to be monitored using infrared CCTV cameras. Therefore, with the provision of the Fire Risk Management Plan, and the production of a future emergency plan, the potential for fire risk would be minimised and appropriate mitigation measures have been proposed.

The findings and recommendations of the FRMP are considered to be appropriate, and the document has been subject to consultation with the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service, who provided some general advice in relation to the proposed development, and a condition has been inserted requesting the submission of an Emergency Plan (condition 9), which would be subject to further consultation with the Fire Service. Provided the mitigation measures and conditions are adhered to the development would not conflict with Policy 23 of NPF4.

Cultural Heritage

Policy D6 (Historic Environment of the ALDP aims to ensure that *“proposals which have the potential to impact on historic environment, historic assets, and heritage assets, or a significant element thereof, will be required to ensure the effective recording, assessments, analysis, archiving and publication of any reports or records to an agreed timeframe”*. Policy 7 (Historic Assets and Places) of NPF4 provides similar guidance.

In response to the above, a Cultural Heritage Assessment was submitted in support of the application, which has been reviewed by colleagues in the Archaeology service. They agree with its conclusions and have confirmed that no archaeological mitigation works are required ahead of the

development and had no further comments to make on the application. Subsequently there would be no conflict with either Policy 7 of NPF4 or Policy D6 of the ALDP.

Climate Mitigation and Adaptation

Policy 2 (Climate Mitigation and Adaptation) of NPF4 seeks to encourage, promote and facilitate development that minimises emissions and adapts to the current and future impacts of climate change. It goes on to require development proposals to be sited and designed to minimise lifecycle greenhouse gas emissions as far as possible and adapt to current and future risks from climate change. In this regard, the site is not at any known risk of flooding, with drainage proposals designed to accommodate anticipated future rainfall. More generally, the development itself would contribute towards minimising emissions by allowing renewable energy to be used to its full potential.

Matters Raised in Representations

Support

1. Note that having flexible and responsive local storage is key to supporting an energy grid powered by renewables, noting that such facilities would be beneficial to the local business community. *Response: comments noted, an evaluation of the acceptability of the proposals have been provided above.*
2. A reliable energy storage facility can contribute to a stable energy supply, which is beneficial to the local business community. *Response: comments noted, an evaluation of the acceptability of the proposals have been provided above.*
3. Note that the grid cannot cope at certain times, and having the demand needed at peak times, such infrastructure is critical to give energy security in the future. *Response: comments noted.*
4. Note that the facility is sited on poorer quality land and would have little effect on agricultural production. *Response: comments noted, an assessment of the acceptability of the site has been provided above.*
5. Having a BESS storage site close to the Aberdeen Energy and Innovation Park strengthens the reputation of the region as a pioneer of green energy. *Response: the Planning Service is unsure of the relevance of these comments, given the above innovation park is located approximately 11km away in Bridge of Don.*

In terms of the matters raised in objection, these can be addressed as follows:

1. Note Policy R1 (Minerals) of the ALDP) and that Blackhills Quarry is a safeguarded site and encroachment has been prevented to ensure that quarry operations can continue and that important reserves are not sterilised. Note that a permanent 400m wide zone has been maintained around the quarry free of development. Also note that the safeguarding of mineral resources is recognised by NPF4. *Response: this matter has been addressed in the above evaluation, where it has been adequately demonstrated that the development could proceed without having an adverse impact on the operation of the quarry.*
2. Concerns in relation to fire/ thermal runaway and the impact that this would have on the neighbouring uses. *Response: an adequate Fire Risk Management Plan has been submitted and a the submission of an Emergency Plan would be controlled via an appropriately worded planning condition.*

3. A store used for storing explosive materials for quarry blasting adjoins the proposed BESS access road and is in operation and required in relation to quarry operations. There were concerns about the proximity of a high voltage underground cable in proximity to the store and raised concerns about the consenting scheme for this element of the proposal. *Response: it is considered that this could be provided, and a condition has been attached to the consent to provide a detailed design for the proposed access road, including cross-sections to ensure that the road can be provided without detriment to any facilities or utilities in the surrounding area.*
4. Concern in relation to quarry blasting and vibration, noting that frequent blasting takes place at the quarry as part of the rock extraction, which creates ground vibration. Note that there are still reserves within the exiting quarry and note that Blackhills is a “first come” development and therefore have concerns that the BESS facility may impact on quarry operations. Note that information shared by the applicant doesn’t contain any information in relation to blasting and no guarantees have been provided that the presence of the BESS facility would place no restriction or curtailment on the current and future operation of the quarry. *Response: this matter has been addressed in the above evaluation.*
5. Note that minerals can only be worked where they exist in a quantity and quality which allow for economic recovery and Blackhills Quarry is such a location and should be protected. *Response: this matter has been addressed in the above evaluation.*

Following neighbour re-notification further comments were received as follows:

6. In terms of blasting and vibration, noted that the Leith’s office building is located further from the quarry than the proposed facility, and note that blasting and extraction of rock may still take place on the northern boundary of the quarry, noting that there are still some unworked rock reserves in the north west corner of the quarry, therefore the applicants assumption that blasting is expected to be more than 300m from the BESS location is wrong. *Response: this matter has been addressed in the above evaluation.*
7. The applicant should be prepared to mitigate and construct a facility to accept a PPV higher than 50 mm/s. Leiths cannot accept a limit of 50 mm/s at the BESS facility. *Response: this matter has been addressed in the above evaluation.*
8. Note that frequent blasting may take place at the facility. *Response: this matter has been addressed in the above evaluation.*
9. The applicant should be required to produce a detailed design for the BESS facility with foundation/ isolation design to accept a higher PPV limit, which may be generated by the quarry operations now, or in the future. *Response: this matter has been addressed in the above evaluation, with detailed design controlled via condition to ensure compliance with the recommendations of the submitted information.*
10. Note that if planning permission is approved, a condition should be imposed which requires the submission of a scheme for approval which provides a detailed design for the access road and includes protection measures close to the explosives store. *Response: a condition has been attached in relation to the above.*

RECOMMENDATION

Approve Conditionally

REASON FOR RECOMMENDATION

Policy 11 (Energy) of NPF4 and Policy R7 (Renewable and Low Carbon Energy Developments) of the ALDP require decision makers to place significant weight on the contribution of development to renewable energy generation targets and on greenhouse gas emissions reduction targets. This is echoed by Policy 1 (Tackling the Climate and Nature Crises) of NPF4 which requires significant weight to be given to the global climate and nature crises when determining all applications. The principle of the proposed battery energy storage facility is therefore lent substantial support by these policies.

The proposal is for a development type which is permitted within the green belt, subject to specific criteria being met. The stated absence of suitable alternative sites outwith the green belt by the applicant has advised of no suitable brownfield sites in proximity to the substation and is accepted. The specific locational characteristics of the site, seen against the backdrop of bunding associated with Blackhills Quarry coupled with design and mitigation measures, will reduce visual impacts, and accordingly the criteria which all developments within the green belt are required to adhere can be met.

The applicants have adequately demonstrated that the proposed facility could be accommodated on site, subject to appropriate conditions, without having an adverse impact on the operations of the adjacent Blackhills Quarry. The proposals are therefore in compliance with Policy 33 (Minerals) of National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4) and Policy R1 (Minerals) of the Aberdeen Local Development Plan (ALDP) 2023.

Otherwise, with suitable mitigation measures in place, the proposals satisfactorily address how the potential impacts in Policy 11 (Energy) would be addressed, ensuring the protection of residential amenity and the environment. The most significant impact would be the visual impact of the compound, however with appropriate landscaping the facility could be satisfactorily be integrated into its surroundings, with the residual impact being minimal. The proposed development would therefore be in compliance with Policies 4 (Natural Places), 6 (Forestry, Woodland and Trees), 8 (Green Belts), 14 (Design, Quality and Place) and 23 (Health and Safety) of NPF 4 and with Policies D1 (Quality Placemaking), D4 (Landscape), D5 (Landscape Design), NE1 (Green Belt), NE2 (Green and Blue Infrastructure), NE3 (Our Natural Heritage), and NE5 (Trees and Woodland) of the ALDP

All other matters raised, including those relating to health and safety, noise drainage, accessibility and transport have been satisfactorily addressed or can be controlled via appropriately worded planning conditions which would ensure compliance with Policies 2 (Climate Mitigation and Adaptation), 3 (Biodiversity), 12 (Zero Waste), 13 (Sustainable Transport), 22 (Flood Risk and Water Management) and 23 (Health and Safety) of NPF4 and with Policies NE4 (Our Water Environment), B3 (Aberdeen International Airport and Perwinnes Radar), WB3 (Noise) and T2 (Sustainable Transport) of the ALDP.

CONDITIONS

(01) DURATION OF PERMISSION

The development to which this notice relates must be begun not later than the expiration of 3 years beginning with the date of this notice. If development has not begun at the expiration of the 3-year period, the planning permission lapses.

Reason - in accordance with section 58 (duration of planning permission) of the 1997 act.

(02) LANDSCAPING

All soft landscaping proposals shall be carried out in accordance with the approved scheme of landscaping (Neo Environmental drawing: NEO01249_026_B) or such other drawing approved for the purpose) and shall be completed during the planting season immediately following the commencement of the development or such other date as may be agreed in writing with the planning authority. Any planting which, within a period of five years from the completion of the development, in the opinion of the planning authority is dying, is severely damaged or becoming seriously diseased, shall be replaced by plants of similar size and species to those originally required to be planted.

Reason – to satisfactorily integrate the development into the surrounding area and enhance biodiversity.

(03) NOISE – EQUIPMENT

No development shall take place unless evidence has been submitted to and approved in writing by the planning authority that the warranted sound power levels of the chosen equipment meets the assumptions considered in the Noise Impact Assessment: 231336-04 Rev D produced by Neo Environmental. Where the proposed items are found to vary in sound power level from the assumptions, confirmation is required that the operational noise levels will meet the relevant criteria (noise limits) through an updated noise impact assessment to be submitted to and approved in writing by the planning authority.

Reason – to protect surrounding residential properties from any unreasonable noise generated by the development.

(04) PROVISION OF NOISE BARRIER

The development hereby approved shall not be brought into use unless the noise barrier recommended in Noise Impact Assessment 231336-04 Rev D produced by Neo Environmental has been installed in accordance with paragraph 3.70 and Figure 3.2 of the assessment along with the detailed design shown on Drawing No: J7/01166 and PLN00XX REV 1 (or other such details approved for the purpose). Thereafter, the barrier shall remain in place for the duration of the life of the development and shall be maintained to ensure that it continues to perform to the minimum specifications of the assessment.

Reason – to protect surrounding residential properties from any unreasonable noise generated by the development.

(05) CESSATION OF OPERATION

The operator of the battery energy storage system shall notify the planning authority in writing if the site does not function for a continuous period of more than six months. The notification must occur within one month of the expiry of the six-month period.

Reason – to define the cessation of operation and to give effect to the restoration of the development site.

(06) DECOMMISSIONING

Six months prior to the decommissioning of the battery energy storage system, a decommissioning and site restoration scheme shall be submitted for the written approval of the planning authority. The scheme shall provide details of

- (i) how equipment, ancillary structures and infrastructure located within the development hereby approved would be decommissioned and removed and the site made good; and
- (ii) a timescale for these actions.

Thereafter, decommissioning and the making good of the site shall be carried out in accordance with the approved restoration scheme.

Reason – to ensure satisfactory restoration of the site and continued integrity of the green belt.

(07) DETAILED DESIGN – ACCESS ROAD

No development shall take place unless a detailed design for the proposed access road, including detailed cross-sections and protection measures for parts of the road adjacent to any existing infrastructure shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Planning Authority. Thereafter, the proposed access shall be completed in accordance with the approved details.

Reason: to ensure that the proposed access road can be adequately constructed and in the interests of road safety.

(08) MITIGATION SCHEME – DESIGN OF BESS

No development shall commence unless and until full details of the proposed battery storage containers (and ancillary infrastructure) hereby permitted has been submitted to and approved in writing by the Planning Authority. These details shall include:

- (a) design (if deviating from the Noise Impact Assessment accompanying the application), layout and dimensions of the battery storage containers (and ancillary infrastructure) and the metering building to be installed' and
- (b) detailed design of the structures including foundations and insulation mount design to accept a higher peak particle velocity limit as detailed in the supporting documents "Response to Quarry Objection" and the updated Design and Access Statement.

Thereafter, the battery storage containers and associated infrastructure shall be installed and operate in accordance with these approved details and maintained in the approved colours, free from rust, staining or discolouration until such time as the development is decommissioned. All cables between the battery storage containers, metering building and any point of connection to the public network shall be installed and kept underground.

Reason: to ensure the Planning Authority is aware of the development details and to protect the visual amenity of the area.

(09) FUTURE EMERGENCY PLAN

In line with the recommendations of the approved Fire Risk Management Plan and prior to the occupation of the proposed facility, an emergency plan shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Planning Authority. Thereafter, the development shall be carried out in accordance with the approved document.

Reason: to ensure that any potential fire risk/ accidents are adequately mitigated against and to ensure that appropriate mitigation measures are put in place.

(10) DRAINAGE DETAILS

That prior to the commencement of development, a Drainage Impact Assessment shall be submitted to, and approved in writing by the Planning Authority. For avoidance of doubt, the detailed drainage design should also include any drainage arrangements for the proposed access road. Thereafter, the proposals shall be implemented in full accordance with the approved scheme.

Reason: to ensure that the proposed site and mitigation measures are fit for purpose, and to ensure that the site can be adequately drained.

ADVISORY NOTES FOR APPLICANT

(01) HOURS OF DEMOLITION AND CONSTRUCTION WORK

Unless otherwise agreed in writing with Aberdeen City Council Environmental Health Service (poll@aberdeencity.gov.uk / 03000 200 292), demolition or construction work associated with the proposed development should not take place out with the hours of 07:00 to 19:00 Mondays to Fridays and 08:00 to 13:00 on Saturdays. No noisy work should be audible at the site boundary on Sundays.

Where complaints are received and contractors fail to adhere to the above restrictions, enforcement action may be initiated under the Control of Pollution Act 1974.

(02) ROADS COORDINATION

It is noted that the cables would be routed underground. The applicant should discuss the proposed routing with colleagues in Roadworks Coordination at their earliest convenience (roadworkscoordination@aberdeencity.gv.uk). These works will require the necessary permits and approvals.