

## **PLANNING DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE PRE-APPLICATION FORUM**

ABERDEEN, 25 May 2023. Minute of Meeting of the PLANNING DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE PRE-APPLICATION FORUM. Present:- Councillor Henrickson, Convener; Councillor Bouse, Vice-Convener; and Councillors Alphonse, Blake, Boulton, Clark, Cooke, Copland, Crockett, Farquhar, McRae and Thomson.

**The agenda and reports associated with this minute can be found [here](#).**

**Please note that if any changes are made to this minute at the point of approval, these will be outlined in the subsequent minute and this document will not be retrospectively altered.**

### **INTRODUCTION AND PROCEDURE NOTE**

1. The Forum had before it the procedure note and guidance for members on the operation of Forum meetings.

#### **The Forum resolved:-**

to note the procedure note and guidance for members.

### **MINUTE OF PREVIOUS MEETING OF 20 APRIL 2023 - FOR APPROVAL**

2. The Forum had before it the minute of the previous meeting of 20 April 2023, for approval.

#### **The Forum resolved:-**

to approve the minute as a correct record.

### **PROPOSAL OF APPLICATION NOTICE - PROPOSED INSTALLATION OF A GRID BATTERY ENERGY STORAGE FACILITY (UP TO 40MW) WITH ASSOCIATED DEVELOPMENT - LAND AT NEWTON OF PITFODELS ABERDEEN - 230411**

3. The Forum had before it a report by the Chief Officer – Strategic Place Planning, on a submission of a Proposal of Application by Baron Willmore on behalf of Flexion Energy UK Storage, for the proposed installation of a grid battery energy storage facility (up to 40MW), with associated development, at land at Newton of Pitfodels Aberdeen, planning reference number 230411.

The report advised that the proposal was for a future application for planning permission for a battery energy storage system (BESS) facility and associated infrastructure. The

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applicants had advised that the potential electrical capacity would not be confirmed until a detailed design stage, but it was not expected to be more than 40MW. They had also indicated a development such as this would typically include:

- battery energy storage racks typically with indicative size of 2.73m high x 1.3m wide x 1.3m long;
- MV Skids (power conversion system, transformer and rig main unit together) with an indicative size of 3.35m high by 2.5m wide x 6.1m long;
- A switch room, control room and welfare container with an indicative height of 3.5m and indicative size of 5m x 15m for the switch room and 5m x 5m for the control room;
- Fencing around the site boundary, which would be 2.4m high “V” mesh security fence;
- Security lighting and infrared CCTV system columns with an indicative high of 4.5m; and
- Associated infrastructure, which would include an access onto Countesswells Road.

The report also stated that the application site related to an equestrian/ agricultural field extending to approximately 2.1 hectares in size, located on the southern side of Countesswells Road. The site was bound by a number of trees to the north, east and west. The surrounding area was predominantly equestrian and agricultural in nature, but did include a number of residential dwellings, Robert Gordon’s College playing fields and a garden centre and nursery to the north.

The report further advised that the site was zoned as Green Belt in the Aberdeen Local Development Plan and sits immediately adjacent to the Green Space Network. NPF4 Policy 8 (Green Belts) applied and had the aim of encouraging, promoting and facilitating compact urban growth and use the land around our towns and cities sustainably. More specifically, development proposals would only be supported if they fell into one of the categories listed and particular requirements were met. In the case of the current proposal, it would likely fall into the category of “*minerals developments and renewal energy developments*”. Given the emphasis placed on achieving net zero targets, it was accepted that battery storage could be considered as essential infrastructure or as a renewable energy development.

The Forum heard from Mr Gavin Clark, Senior Planner, who addressed the Forum and provided details regarding the planning aspects of the application.

Mr Clark provided details on the relevant planning policies noting that the following policies were relevant to the proposed application in regards to the Local Development Plan (2020):-

- Policy D1 (Quality Placemaking)
- Policy D2 (Amenity)
- Policy D4 (Landscape)
- Policy D5 (Landscape Design)

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- Policy NE1 (Green Belt)
- Policy NE2 (Green and Blue Infrastructure)
- Policy NE3 (Natural Heritage)
- Policy NE5 (Trees and Woodlands)
- Policy R7 (Renewal and Low Energy Developments)
- Policy T2 (Sustainable Transport)
- Policy WB3 (Noise)

It was noted that as part of the application, the applicant had been advised that the following information would need to accompany the formal submission:-

- Design and Access Statement (statutory requirement)
- Drainage Assessment
- Noise Assessment
- Phase 1 Ecological Survey
- Planning Statement
- Consultation
- Pre-Application Report (statutory requirement)
- Arboricultural Survey and Assessment

The Committee then heard From Colin Lavety, agent for the proposed development.

Mr Lavety began the presentation by explaining that the proposed development was a joint venture between Ion Ventures and GLIL Infrastructure and the team had combined experience of over 50 years of electricity infrastructure, design, build and management experience.

In terms of site selection Mr Lavety advised that Flexion undertook a robust site selection process based on Proximityto, a grid connection point, and avoided areas of flood risk and also aimed to reduce visibility to houses and roads. They also hoped to get a size with a minimum of two hectares and aimed to cut down as few trees as possible, with a suitable access route from the public highway.

Mr Lavety also advised that battery storage was essential to help achieve net zero by creating an electricity system that was clean, affordable and secure. As well as storing power generated by renewable sources, batteries improve the resilience of the electricity system. By storing energy from renewable sources which could then be used when its most needed, the electricity system would operate more efficiently and reduce the risk of blackouts.

In relation to the proposed development, Mr Lavety advised that typical components included:-

- Battery energy storage modular racks;
- MV Skids (Power Conversion System, Transformer and Ring Main Unit together);

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- Switch room, control room and welfare container;
- Fencing around the site boundary;
- Security lighting and infrared CCTV columns; and
- Associated infrastructure

Mr Lavety then spoke about the community consultation and noted that the first event was held on 11 May 2023 in the Airyhall Community Centre with more than 50 people in attendance and 15 feedback forms received. The second event was to be held on 8 June 2023 in the Airyhall Community Centre.

In terms of feedback received Mr Lavety highlighted the following comments from individuals:-

- Wishes to see biodiversity enhancement measures and there was a suggestion to ensure the remaining parcel of land within the red line should be well maintained;
- Impact on local residents which included visual impacts;
- Impact on the track between Countesswells Road and Craigton Road;
- The rural location and suggestion of alternative locations;
- Construction traffic impact;
- Impact on greenfield land;
- Flooding and noise concerns
- Set a precedent for development in the Green Belt.

Mr Lavety spoke about the technical considerations and noted the following

- The access was to be formed off Countesswells Road and would be designed to minimise the tree loss;
- The Landscape and Visual Assessment was underway and a planting plan was crucial to help screen development;
- A tree survey was underway with the majority of existing trees to be retained;
- In terms of lighting, this required careful consideration, given the location of nearby properties.
- Flooding and drainage – flood risk within the site had been considered and assessed as low probability and low impact. The Drainage Strategy was being produced and consideration was given to SuDS where possible.
- In relation to ecology, the preliminary Ecological Appraisal had been undertaken with opportunities for enhancement and the layout would take any recommendations into account.
- A Noise Impact Assessment would be carried out and that would determine any mitigations that would be required and would be implemented if necessary.

In conclusion, Mr Lavety explained the next steps.

- Technical assessment and site design work would continue;
- Second public consultation event to be held
- Finalise the technical reports
- Further pre-application discussions with Council officers;
- Submit planning application.

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The Forum then asked questions of both Mr Clark and Mr Lavety and the following was noted:-

- Various sites were looked at and examined but deemed not to be suitable;
- That the agent would continue to engage with Roads Development Management Officers and undertake any required actions suggested;
- They hoped to have minimal tree loss and noted that the access road only needed to be 3 to 4 metres wide which would help with the amount of trees required to be cut down;
- There would be minimal trips required to the site once in operation, with maybe one or two movements required per month;
- The agent was looking to screen the proposed development as much as possible;
- Acoustic fencing may be required so this would also assist with the screening;
- Construction would be roughly 8 months and the facility would have a forty year cycle with just routing maintenance required at the site;
- The site would be remotely maintained in most instances, and should anything happen, it would be embedded in the system to contact emergency services;
- The agent had liaised with local emergency services; and
- The agent in response to a question, confirmed that they were content to look at the retention of the drystone dykes.

### **The report recommended:-**

that the Forum –

- (a) note the key issues identified;
- (b) if necessary, seek clarification on any particular matters; and
- (c) identify relevant issues which they would like the applicant to consider and address in any future application.

### **The Forum resolved:-**

- (i) to thank Mr Lavety for his informative presentation as well as Mr Max Gray for answering questions in relation to the proposed application; and
- (ii) to request that the applicant consider the points raised above

## **PROPOSAL OF APPLICATION NOTICE - BATTERY ENERGY STORAGE SYSTEM AND ASSOCIATED INFRASTRUCTURE - LAND AT PERSLEY CROFT, ABERDEEN - 230447**

4. The Forum had before it a report by the Chief Officer – Strategic Place Planning, on a submission of a Proposal of Application Notice by RE Projects Development, for a proposed battery storage system and associated infrastructure at land at Persley Croft, Aberdeen, planning reference 230447.

The report advised that the site related to a group of derelict agricultural buildings and associated land extending to around 0.7 hectares. It was located immediately west of the

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Parkway (A92) from where vehicular access to the site exists. The site slopes from north to south. To the north was an agricultural field; to the west an area of mixed woodland & improved grassland. To the south was a recycling/scrap yard; and to the east across the Parkway were residential properties and the Tesco supermarket forming part of the wider Danestone residential area.

The report also noted that as part of any application, the applicant had been advised that the following information would need to accompany the formal submission –

- Arboricultural Survey and Assessment
- Design and Access Statement (statutory requirement)
- Drainage Assessment
- Noise Assessment
- Phase 1 Ecological Survey
- Planning Statement
- Pre-Application Consultation Report (statutory requirement)

The applicant had also indicated they were likely to submit –

- Cultural Heritage Assessment
- Earthworks Strategy
- Landscape and Visual Assessment
- Outline Battery Safety Management Plan
- Phase 1 Contaminated Land Assessment
- Transport and Access Statement

The Forum then heard from Mr Matthew Easton, Senior Planner, who addressed the Forum and provided details regarding the planning aspects of the application.

Mr Easton provided details on the relevant planning policies noting that the following policies were relevant to the proposed application:-

### Aberdeen Local Development Plan (2017)

- Policy D1 (Quality Placemaking by Design)
- Policy D2 (Landscape)
- Policy D4 (Historic Environment)
- Policy NE1 (Green Space Network)
- Policy NE2 (Green Belt)
- Policy NE5 (Trees and Woodland)
- Policy NE6 (Flooding, Drainage and Water Quality)
- Policy T2 (Managing the Transport Impact of Development)
- Policy T5 (Noise)

### Proposed Aberdeen Local Development Plan (2020)

- Policy D1 (Quality Placemaking)
- Policy D2 (Amenity)

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- Policy D4 Landscape
- Policy D5 (Landscape Design)
- Policy D6 (Historic Environment)
- Policy NE1 (Green Belt)
- Policy NE2 (Green and Blue Infrastructure)
- Policy NE3 (Natural Heritage)
- Policy NE5 (Trees and Woodland)
- Policy R7 (Renewable and Low Energy Developments)
- Policy WB3 (Noise)

The site was zoned as Green Belt where National Planning Framework Policy 8 (Green Belts) applied and had the aim of encouraging, promoting and facilitating compact urban growth and use the land around our towns and cities sustainably. A small part of the site was currently zoned as Green Space Network, however this was not considered material to the proposals.

The Forum then heard from Sebastian Tibenham (Pegasus Group) and Emma Devlin, (Field Energy), agents for the development.

Mr Tibenham began the presentation and explained that batteries were used on the UK power grids to provide balancing services and store excess electricity generation for use when needed and their storage ability created a more reliable, flexible and greener grid. He advised that to store excess electricity until demand was high or renewable output was low was essential for intermittent renewable energy sources. He also noted that storage ability also shielded from risks such as blackouts, gas shortages and other threats to international energy supplies. It was further noted that the proposed battery infrastructure would enable the storage of up to 49.9MW of energy, equivalent to a full day's energy consumption for over 10,000 homes.

In relation to the site, Mr Tibenham explained that the land they were looking to develop currently supported a former piggery on the outskirts of Persley and the old farm buildings were visible from the A92 and were in poor condition.

In terms of the proposed development, it would be made up of:-

- battery storage units;
- inverters and transformers;
- two substations;
- office accommodation and welfare facilities;
- car parking;
- acoustic fence;
- perimeter fencing; and
- landscape buffers.

At the end of its 40-year operational life, the equipment would be removed and the site would be restored.

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Mr Tibenham indicated that the site was located in the Aberdeen Green Belt but represented previously developed land given the existing built form on site and the was located within an appropriate distance of a viable grid connection point with capacity for the development proposals.

There was also support in both the new Scottish National Planning Framework 4 at Policy 11 and the Proposed Aberdeen Local Development (2020) Policy R7 for renewable energy generation, with specific reference to energy storage facilities, which included battery storage.

NPF4 also allowed for renewable energy developments in the Green Belt under Policy 8 and careful consideration had been given to designing a scheme which aimed to enhance the Green Belt setting, making the best use of a previously developed site with the inclusion of planting to soften the sites impact on the wider Green Belt setting.

Mr Tibenham highlighted that the planning application would include an Outline Battery Safety Management Plan which would explain the safety features of the BESS and the planned response to emergency events and the team were currently engaging with the Local Fire and Rescue Service to ensure they had an adequate Emergency Response Plan in place once the project was operational.

It was noted that work was currently underway on a range of technical reports to support the planning submission and the outcome and recommendations of these reports would inform the design of the scheme.

In relation to ecology, as assessment found on-site habitats potentially suitable for mammals, nesting birds and common reptiles. The final report would identify any mitigations required.

In regards to heritage, an initial heritage assessment had not identified any built heritage constraints. The site was not located within a flood zone and they aimed to develop a surface water runoff from the new development and ensure this was not increased from current levels. In terms of noise, they were modelling existing/background noise levels and would include any mitigation features where necessary, notably an acoustic fence and in relation to trees, these would be retained where possible, and mitigated through replacement planting if necessary.

In terms of public consultation, a meeting was held with Danestone Community Council on 10<sup>th</sup> May 2023 to discuss the proposed development and take on board any feedback. The first public consultation was held on 11 May 2023 at Danestone Congregational Church and presentation boards were available to view and members of the project team were available to answer questions.

Members then asked a number of questions of Mr Tibenham, Ms Devlin and the case officer and the following information was noted:-

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- access to the site would be from the existing access points to the site at present and would be left in and left out only;
- in relation to car parking spaces at the site, they would comply with the car parking standards;
- they were looking at ways to mitigate the noise impact on the site, which would include acoustic fencing. It was noted that the site layout was designed to the back of the development in order to mitigate potential noise;
- following a query, the applicant advised that they would investigate the potential for fencing and landscaping all the way round the site;
- the applicant also advised they would look at the finish materials for the fencing on site and would continue to liaise with the acoustic consultant to mitigate any impact on the surrounding area; and
- the fencing would hopefully be pleasing to the eye and fit in well with the surrounding areas and the countryside.

**The report recommended:-**

that the Forum –

- (d) note the key issues identified;
- (e) if necessary, seek clarification on any particular matters; and
- (f) identify relevant issues which they would like the applicant to consider and address in any future application.

**The Forum resolved:-**

- (iii) to thank Mr Tibenham and Ms Devlin for their informative presentation; and
  - (iv) to request that the applicant consider the points raised above.
- **Councillor Dell Henrickson, Convener**