

PRE-APPLICATION FORUM

ABERDEEN, 21 September 2023. Minute of Meeting of the PLANNING DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE PRE-APPLICATION FORUM. Present:- Councillor McRae, Convener; Councillor Bouse, Vice-Convener; and Councillors Alphonse, Boulton, Clark, Cooke, Copland, Farquhar, Macdonald, Radley and Thomson.

Also present as local Members: Councillor Nicoll.

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 24 AUGUST 2023

2. The Forum had before it the minute of the previous meeting of 24 August 2023, for approval.

The Forum resolved:-

to approve the minute as a correct record.

BATTERY STORAGE UNITS WITH ASSOCIATED INFRASTRUCTURE, CONTROL AND SWITCH BUILDING, CONTAINERS AND ASSOCIATED WORKS INCLUDING ACCESS - LAND AT RIGIFA FARM, COVE ROAD ABERDEEN - 230397

3. The Forum had before it a report by the Chief Officer – Strategic Place Planning, on the submission of a Proposal of Application by Sustainability Unlimited LLP, for the proposed installation of battery storage units with associated infrastructure, control and switch building, containers and associated works including access at land at Rigifa Farm, Cove Road Aberdeen, planning reference 230397.

The report advised that in terms of the site description, the application site extended to approximately 13000sqm and was located within the green belt to the immediate south of the settlement of Cove (approximately 130m) and to the immediate north of Blackhills Quarry. The surrounding area was fairly open in nature and sloped gradually from west to east eventually leading towards the North Sea, to the east. A community woodland was located to the north of the site along with a reservoir.

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The Proposal of Application Notice related to the installation of battery storage units with associated infrastructure, control and switch building containers and associated works, including access. No site layout plan had been submitted, but the supporting documents indicated that the development would consist of multiple units totalling 49.9 megawatts, with the connection to the substation via a 300m long underground cable. Access would be via the existing entrance to the offices associated with Blackhills Quarry.

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 (2023):-

- OP55 (Blackhills Quarry)
- D1 (Quality Placemaking)
- D2 (Amenity)
- D4 (Landscape)
- Policy NE1 (Green Belt)
- NE2 (Green and Blue Infrastructure)
- NE3 (Natural Heritage)
- R7 (Renewal and Low Energy Developments)
- WB3 (Noise)

In terms of National Planning Framework 4, the following policies were relevant:-

- Policy 1 (Tackling the Climate and Nature Crises)
- Policy 2 (Climate, Mitigation and Adaptation)
- Policy 3 (Biodiversity)
- Policy 4 (Natural Places)
- Policy 5 (Soils)
- Policy 8 (Green Belt)
- Policy 11 (Energy)
- Policy 13 (Sustainable Transport)
- Policy 14 (Design, Quality and Place)
- Policy 22 (Flood Risk and Water Management)
- Policy 23 (Health and Safety)

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:-

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- Design and Access Statement
- Drainage Assessment
- Noise Assessment
- Planning Statement
- Pre-Application Consultation Report

The Committee then heard from Mr David Bowman, agent for the proposed development.

Mr Bowman began the presentation by explaining that Battery Energy Storage (BESS) had a key part to play in ensuring homes and businesses could be powered by more green energy, even when the sun was not shining or wind not blowing. He noted that battery storage technologies were essential to speeding up the replacement of fossil fuels with renewable energy and explained that battery storage systems would play an increasingly pivotal role in allowing energy supplies to meet electricity demands.

Mr Bowman advised that in terms of consultation, the applicant carried out in person and online Pre Application consultations during May 2023 which identified the following salient items to be addressed by the feedback:-

- Strategic Importance of Quarry and its operations;
- Biodiversity and removal of trees/ other habitats;
- Fire safety
- Noise
- Benefit for the local community

Mr Bowman explained why the green belt location had been identified and why no alternative sites were suitable.

- BESS was considered as essential infrastructure and/or was a renewable energy development;
- The distance to the sub-station with available capacity;
- Various site constraints;
- Available land; and
- Assessment of the quality of the agricultural land and justification for its loss.

In terms of noise, Mr Bowman advised that the applicant had undertaken a detailed Noise Impact Assessment for the site and were awaiting pre submission feedback from the Council's Environmental Health Service.

- A total of 12 noise sensitive receptors were included in the assessment within a Study Area of 500m of the noise generating area of the application site;

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- Levels at each receptor were below the Night Noise Guideline value set out in the WHO Night-Time Guidelines; and
- The noise levels at all receptors were below the target NR25 Noise Rating Curve.

In terms of visual impact, Mr Bowman explained that the applicant had undertaken a detailed Landscape and Visual Appraisal for the site and the following was noted:-

- There was proposed mitigation and infill planting would be introduced to field boundaries where required;
- Mitigation planting would be an enhancement to the landscape structure which would add to the characteristics of the surrounding landscape character;
- At the end of the Proposed Development's lifespan, the predicted effects were reversible as the land would be returned to its former pastoral use, similar in form to its current state; and
- The introduction of mitigation/infill planting to the western, eastern and northern boundaries of the application site would be recommended in a Landscape and Ecology Management Plan.

In regards to fire risk, Mr Bowman stated that there were perceived fire risks associated with BESS which included:-

- Thermal runaway;
- Deep-seated fires; and
- Faulty battery management control systems.

However he indicated that these perceived risks were unlikely to occur with the modern BESS units and their infrastructure. In addition the following mitigations would be considered and deployed were appropriate in the monitoring, protecting and managing fire risk.

- Control Panel technology;
- Detection (Heat, Smoke, Gas, etc);
- Ventilation control; and
- Battery Separation and Containment.

Mr Bowman also advised that the proposed development would strictly adhere to current regulations and standard practices and all equipment used at the site would undergo rigorous testing to ensure full compliance with the necessary electrical and safety regulations. This approach would guarantee that the proposed development meets the highest industry standards and ensures the safety and reliability of the energy storage system.

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In relation to lighting, Mr Bowman indicated that there would be no lighting on site which would illuminate the development on a permanent basis and there were plans for motion sensitive security lighting around the substation only. The CCTV would use infrared to switch on and off.

Mr Bowman also advised that the applicant was liaising with the nearby Cove Youth Football and Community Youth Club on potential areas where the applicant could support and enhance their work in the local community. The applicant had also reached out to and was awaiting a response from the Cove & Altens Community Council.

The Committee then asked various questions of the Planning Officer and Mr Bowman and the following information was noted:-

- That the applicant would address in the final report any road closures that may be required during construction;
- To request that the feedback received from the second consultation event be circulated;
- In regards to mitigations against anti social behaviours on the site, it was noted that infra red lights would be used as well as CCTV, and the agent would liaise with the applicant in regards to extending the protections;
- The agent advised that they had communicated with the local Community Council, Cove Youth Football and Community Youth Club as well as the Cove Woodland Trust;
- In terms of fire safety, there would be an operational and maintenance agreement that would be put in place to ensure safety;
- Mitigating fencing would be put in place to ensure noise levels were kept to a minimum; and
- Existing trenching would be used for connections to the substation and it would be made clear in the final application the depth of the trenching.

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 Bowman for his informative presentation; and
- (ii) to request that the applicant consider the points raised above.

- **Councillor Ciaran McRae, Convener**