

WEST LINDSEY DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the Meeting of the Planning Committee held in the Council Chamber - The Guildhall, Marshall's Yard, Gainsborough, DN21 2NA on 6 November 2024 commencing at 6.30 pm.

Present:

- Councillor Jim Snee (Vice-Chairman)
- Councillor Emma Bailey
- Councillor John Barrett
- Councillor Owen Bierley
- Councillor Karen Carless
- Councillor David Dobbie
- Councillor Ian Fleetwood
- Councillor Peter Morris
- Councillor Roger Patterson

In Attendance:

- Russell Clarkson Development Management Team Manager
- Ele Snow Senior Democratic and Civic Officer
- Natalie Smalley Democratic and Civic Officer
- Danielle Peck Senior Development Management Officer

Also in Attendance:

- 5 Members of the Public
- Councillor T Bridgwood

Apologies:

- Councillor Matthew Boles
- Councillor Sabastian Hague
- Councillor Tom Smith

160 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION PERIOD

There was no public participation.

161 TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

Cllr I Fleetwood congratulated the Democratic Services Team; he noted that despite staffing changes, the team was forming well, and the previous Planning Committee minutes had been a pleasure to read.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Planning Committee meeting held on Wednesday, 9 October 2024, be confirmed and signed as an accurate record.

162 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Cllr Fleetwood made a non-pecuniary declaration of interest regarding application number 147131, land south of Barfield Lane, Reepham, in his capacity as County Councillor for the Reepham Ward, and Chairman of the County Planning Committee.

163 UPDATE ON GOVERNMENT/LOCAL CHANGES IN PLANNING POLICY

The Committee heard from the Development Management Team Manager regarding updates to local and national planning policy. He explained some of the key planning headlines from the Chancellor of the Exchequer's Wednesday 30 October 2024 Autumn Budget. Firstly, the Government had confirmed its intention to respond to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) consultation by the end of 2024. Secondly, that the Government had pledged £46 million to hire 300 graduates and apprentices for council planning teams and to unblock large sites. Thirdly, it had been revealed that the Planning and Infrastructure Bill was to be introduced early in 2025. He continued, explaining that an additional £5 million to deliver improvements to the planning regime for Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects (NSIPs) had been pledged, alongside a £500 million contribution to the Affordable Homes Programme, to deliver up to 5,000 new social and affordable homes.

The Manager outlined that the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero had made a statement on 6 November 2024 extending the decision deadline for the West Burton Solar Project NSIP from 8 November 2024 to 24 January 2025, in order to allow time for necessary public consultation on potential variations to the application. He explained that the Applicant had recently submitted amendments to remove panels within the setting of a medieval deer park at the request of the Secretary of State.

In terms of Neighbourhood Plans, it was explained that the Reepham examination had finished, with the examiner having issued his report to the Parish Council and West Lindsey District Council for fact-checking purposes, as part of the final stage before the report was published. With the regard to the Dunholme Review, the Manager outlined that it had completed its public consultation stage, and the examination process had started. He continued, explaining that Sudbrooke's Regulation 14 consultation had begun, and would run until 17 November 2024. Similarly, Saxilby with Ingleby's Regulation 14 consultation had started, with a closing date of 9 December 2024.

Cllr D Dobbie asked whether any support would be provided from the Government to aid in the completion of Neighbourhood Plan Reviews, to which the Manager responded that he would raise the query with the Neighbourhood Planning Officer.

164 147131 - LAND SOUTH OF BARFIELD LANE, REEPHAM

The Committee then gave consideration to the only application on the agenda, number 147131, seeking permission for the construction and operation of a Battery Energy Storage System (BESS) including substations, inverters, transformer stations, cabling, fencing, internal service track and landscaping, on land south of Barfield Lane, Reepham.

The Officer presented the Committee with updates to the recommended conditions outlined in the report; she clarified that condition two required the submission of a Battery Safety Management Plan and a Fire Strategy Management Plan. It was recommended to the

Committee to change the wording of the condition, to combine the two as part of one document titled 'Detailed Fire Safety and Battery Management Plan' to reduce the amount of content repeated across the two statements. She then explained that condition three would also be updated, suggesting that the wording be altered to make it clear it was one document that incorporated both a Construction Management Plan and a Method Statement, which needed to be submitted as part of a condition discharge application.

The Officer proceeded to give a presentation about the application, explaining that it was for the construction and operation of a 53MW Battery Energy Storage System (BESS), and outlining the route to the connection point which would be a pylon at North Greetwell. An overview was given of the location and key features of the proposed development, notably that it was currently an existing agricultural field, and that the sewage works sat west of the site, with the oil refinery to the east. She then brought attention to the contents of the report, reminding Members that it had been conditioned for the final details of the battery containers to be submitted and approved before they were brought to site. The Officer then went on to explain that the legal agreement, which had not yet been signed, would ensure that a secondary access point was in place for use by the fire service in the event of an emergency.

The Chairman thanked the Officer for her presentation and stated that there were two registered speakers; the first speaker, Mr James Cook, as Agent to the Applicant, was invited to address the Committee.

Mr Cook explained that the Government target to decarbonise the power grid by 2030 remained a cornerstone policy to address climate change, energy security, and cost to the consumer. As a result of the policy, he outlined that a predicted increase in electricity capacity demand by 40-60% had been forecast, which would need to be met entirely by renewable energy sources. He then relayed the challenges of generating renewable energy through intermittent power sources, such as grid instability, frequency, and its ability to satisfy demand at times of high need. Battery Storage Systems, it was explained, would be able to solve these issues by storing renewable energy during periods of high generation and low demand, and provide power to the grid in periods of low generation and high demand. Mr Cook outlined other benefits of BESS, namely grid stability services such as frequency control and dynamic containment; these systems would help to maintain energy security in the local community and aid in the transition away from reliance on fossil fuels. He explained that access to the grid was a significant barrier to delivering infrastructure required to meet decarbonisation targets, with grid capacity and access points more limited than ever before.

The Agent then explained that the application site was chosen due to its distance from other settlements, with Sudbrooke approximately 600 metres away, and the nearest residential property at an approximate distance of 450 metres from the site. Mr Cook added that the proposed development site was on partially existing scrubland, situated between two industrial sites, and was well-screened by the surrounding topography. A Landscape Mitigation Plan had been prepared to support the application, and he added that there would be significant developments in biodiversity to support the site, including the creation of a landscape bund, amongst other measures; it was detailed that there would be an estimated 26% net gain in habitats and a 10% increase in hedgerow habitats on the proposed site.

Finally, Mr Cook emphasised that the Applicant had taken safety measures on site seriously,

and had undertaken consultation with Star Energy, the operators of the neighbouring facility, alongside consultation with Lincolnshire Fire and Rescue Service. As a result, an outline Battery Safety Management Plan had been submitted for review, with a more detailed plan to follow. A central feature of the former plan was an on-site water tank and secondary emergency access, as well as improvements to battery management technology that allowed greater temperature monitoring to enhance safety and efficiency. He concluded that the proposal would provide a range of social, economic, and environmental enhancements.

The Chairman thanked Mr Cook for his comments, and invited the second registered speaker, Cllr T Bridgwood, Ward Member, to address the Committee.

Cllr Bridgwood referred to the meeting of Council on 4 November 2024, indicating that he had no bias against Battery Energy Storage Systems, but had concerns about the lack of legislation in relation to how the sites were controlled. He explained that the application in question was of much concern to him, as he felt it was not the right location for the site. He highlighted that the proposed development would be adjacent to the Star Energy site, an upper-tier Control of Major Accident Hazards (COMAH) site; the site featured crude oil storage, gas pipelines, and gas networks. In the event of a fire on a BESS site, Cllr Bridgwood explained that lithium-ion fires produced dangerous smoke particles and chemicals, with evacuation of the surrounding area being the general procedure undertaken by the fire service. The Councillor outlined that in other cases, evacuation radius distances had been approximately within 500 metres, he explained that the Star Energy COMAH site was within 500 metres of the proposed development site. Upper-tier COMAH sites, he continued, were staffed for 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, and in the event of an evacuation, it would require two hours to shut the site down. Cllr Bridgwood accepted that consultation had taken place with Star Energy but reported that little consultation had been undertaken; he continued, explaining that the draft Battery Safety Management Plan had no mention of working with Star Energy. He concluded by suggesting a further amendment to the recommendation to ensure the Battery Safety Management Plan was COMAH-compliant and approved, due to the location of the proposed development site.

The Chairman thanked Cllr Bridgwood and asked for any Officer response. The Officer responded that consultation with Star Energy had been carried out, and that they had responded to the Applicant. Further consultation had been initiated via email and letter after the outline Battery Safety Management Plan had been received, to which no response from Star Energy had been received. She added that the final copy of the Battery Safety Management Plan would be issued to Star Energy as evidence of the risk reduction plan; however, the outline plan indicated that the sites could run safely adjacent to each other.

Cllr Fleetwood emphasised that despite the proposed development's remote appearance, the site was close to other developments such as the Star Energy site, and a railway network which had been used by tankers. He highlighted his concerns, noting that the secondary emergency entrance to the site appeared to lead into the village of Reepham, which may cause potential access issues.

Cllr Fleetwood then brought the Committee's attention to media discussion around the self-combustion of batteries, noting that with this in mind, there could be significant issues due to the proximity of the proposed BESS site and the Star Energy site. He emphasised that further issues may arise from nearby trains frequently transporting many carriages, the contents of which were unknown to the Committee, which could potentially be dangerous

nearby to a BESS site. He explained that if a serious fire occurred, these combined factors could lead to a major disaster. Cllr Fleetwood then questioned if the current BESS legislation was fully adequate to cover the proposed development and suggested a site visit may be an appropriate next step.

Cllr O Bierley remarked that the Central Lincolnshire Local Plan (CLLP) did support the development of BESS sites, particularly through policy S16 relating to renewable energy, although this was a general policy and not specific to individual applications. He then asked two questions, enquiring whether the remote monitoring of the BESS site would be ongoing 24-hours a day, and whether the finish of the structures would be specified by condition eight in the report. With the specific details in mind, Cllr Bierley reiterated Cllr Fleetwood's suggestion to visit the site for more information. The Officer then responded to the Councillor's questions, explaining that there would be 24-hour remote monitoring, and that the fence finish would be covered by condition eight of the planning conditions.

After examining the site map, Cllr Dobbie suggested an additional site access point to reduce disturbance to the village of Reepham. In relation to site access points, Cllr Fleetwood then added a point of information; he explained that there was a road in front of the Star Energy site leading up to the A158, which was in fact a gated grass track, emerging onto the A158 amidst of a row of houses.

Concluding his comments, Cllr Dobbie echoed the sentiments of other Members, that the proposed development site should be further away from the neighbouring Star Energy site; he then proposed a site visit citing personal unfamiliarity with the area and a need to gather more information.

Cllr E Bailey expressed safety concerns that the Government did not require the fire service as a statutory consultee on BESS planning applications but acknowledged the local fire service had been consulted on this application. Cllr Bailey then proceeded to ask the Officer a question regarding the site's noise potential noise levels. In terms of the noise levels, the Officer later clarified that a noise-related survey had concluded the site noise levels would be of an acceptable level. In addition to her first question, Cllr Bailey had enquired how much wastewater the landscape bund could hold in the event of a fire, referencing the Liverpool BESS fire in 2020. The Officer responded that the lower level bunding would most likely hold the capacity of the water tanks, until the water could be tested and later released. The Officer added that the local fire service had reviewed the plans and raised no concerns regarding the water capacity plans.

In terms of enforcement, Cllr Bailey then asked who was responsible for ensuring that the site's spacing was designed and enforced appropriately, to which the Officer explained that spacing would be considered a planning enforcement issue if the conditions had not been met.

Referencing S8 of the CLLP in relation to energy consumption reduction, Cllr Bailey enquired how much energy the development would require, and whether the site would contribute significantly to Co2 emissions, noting the absence of an energy statement. She felt the site would not enhance the rural economy, may conflict with a neighbouring site in the event of a fire, and was not in keeping with the rural character of the area. In response, the Officer explained that S8 of the CLLP was not relevant to the application, noting the application pertained to energy storage rather than consumption. Additionally, the

Development Management Team Manager added that planning policy was in support of BESS sites at a national and local level, and as the proposed development was classed as a renewable and low-carbon development, the focus of the Committee was whether the chosen location was appropriate.

Cllr J Barrett repeated many of Cllr Bailey's concerns, acknowledging the Committee's unfamiliarity with BESS technology, and seconded Cllr Dobbie's proposal for a site visit to ascertain further information regarding the safety of the proposed development location.

RESOLVED that the application be deferred for a site visit to be held, to afford Members a greater understanding of the potential development site including the safety of the location, and access to the site.

165 DETERMINATION OF APPEALS

There were no Determination of Appeals to note.

The meeting concluded at 7.16 pm.

Chairman