

Safety concerns raised over proposed battery storage site in East Lothian

Concerns have been raised over fire safety at a proposed new electricity station and battery storage site in East Lothian after it was revealed emergency crews in the area do not have the right equipment to deal with an outbreak.

Local residents and the community council at Cockenzie have raised objections to the plans for an electricity generating station and storage facility, known as a BESS, which will house 140 lithium-ion battery containers, to store surplus electricity to be fed into the National Grid when required.

The new facility will be based to the south of the former Cockenzie Power Station site, partly on the former coal store and partly on agricultural land.

Approval of the project, which is considered a national development, will be given by the Scottish Government's Energy Consents Unit (ECU) with East Lothian Council only able to lodge objections.

At a meeting of their planning committee this week, councillors were told that Scottish Fire and Rescue Service

was not consulted by the ECU before any decision is taken and is not considered a statutory consultee.

Council leader Norman Hampshire expressed surprise that there was no need to engage with the emergency service ahead of siting a facility of this nature, particularly in close proximity to houses.

And he revealed that during a meeting he attended separately with local fire services they were asked about their ability to cope should a blaze break out at the new facility.

He told the committee: "We asked if there was a fire in one of these units would they be able to deal with it. They indicated to us that there were pieces of equipment that they would require to put cooling material onto the batteries but they did not have that within the fire service in this area.

"That is certainly something we would need to make sure was purchased, however it is done."

Councillors raised concerns about the lack of fire safety consultation and consideration in the application.

Councillor Colin Yorkston, local ward member said: "Local residents are concerned particularly with the close proximity to primary schools, medical centres, as well as houses.

Jamie Scott, appearing as agent for the applicant Cockenzie Storage Ltd, told the committee emergency plans were in place in the event of something going wrong at the facility.

He said: "There are active measures for detecting (fire) in the facility and if there is any detection measures can be taken to address it.

"This is an extremely well established and tested system. As a fail safe, in the event something did go wrong and the measures in place did not work there is an emergency plan in place and the site has been designed in a manner conducive to

allowing fire and rescue services access.

“There is an active water supply on site. There is a robust plan in place to prevent fire and a plan in place should it happen.”

Councillors were told that the lack of consultation with emergency services were not a material consideration for the local authority to object to planning permission for the facility.

Instead the committee agreed to raise concerns over the lack of it with the ECU as a condition of approving the plans.

The council did however agree to object to the new facility on grounds that it did not include a tree management plan and will have an unacceptable impact on trees and proposals for a link road planned next to the site.

Councillors also agreed that the East Lothian Chief Planning Officer be authorised to undertake any discussions with the Scottish Government Energy Consents Unit to resolve the objections and ensure conditions proposed should it go ahead are considered including addressing concerns over fire safety.

By Marie Sharp Local Democracy Reporter