

Concerns raised over plans to build battery energy storage site near Bathgate

Concerns have been raised over plans to build a battery energy storage site on the fringe of Bathgate.

A response to a Holyrood consultation on the plan had been delayed after West Lothian Councillor Danny Logue expressed his fears about fire risks.

A motion presented by the council leader highlighted the dangers of battery plant fires and called on the Scottish Government to take note of the historic risks at such plants.

Planners recommended concerns could be handled by planning conditions.

Last month Councillor Logue highlighted the severity of fires at storage plants around the world including Australia and the US, where firefighters had fought for days to control fires.

At this month's meeting he again raised his fears about the planned site next to the Boghead Roundabout.

"I'm concerned about the distance," he told fellow councillors. "There's been a number of serious incidents around the world. I have reservations because the distance from residential areas is not great enough."

And the SNP councillor Carl John asked a planning officer if he thought the Fire Service would be able to tackle a disaster

at such a site.

Councillor Fitzpatrick, who had tabled the motion, said it was not for the council planning department to speak for the Fire Service.

Planning officer Tony Irving told the meeting that the Scottish Government was consulting Scottish Fire and Rescue as part of the wider consultation.

Councillor Fitzpatrick reminded the meeting that the council was being asked for its views as a consultee and not as the planning authority making a decision on the development.

Other worries raised about the proposed site centred on pollution and the disposal and decommissioning of batteries.

The council could object to the plans set to be lodged under the 1989 Electricity Act but that would force a government public enquiry with a potential financial liability for the council if it lost.

The plan proposes the installation of a battery energy storage system and associated infrastructure with a generating capacity of up to 200MW on land at Pond Industrial Estate, Whitburn Road, Bathgate.

The proposed development consists of the siting of 74 containerised battery storage units and ancillary equipment. A sub-station building and a high voltage compound, together with a Scottish Power Transmission compound area. Storage containers, a SUDS basin and concrete perimeter walls measuring 11ft and a 16ft wall height on the southern and eastern sides of the application site respectively will be erected, which will act as acoustic barriers.

The site will be surrounded by a further security fence with CCTV installed.

Fire officers told a recent meeting of Bathgate Local Area

Committee that such sites have significant input from the Fire Service at all development stages. The town's community council has lodged no objections during the Scottish Government consultation.

The paper before the Executive recommended no objections be lodged and also that the council rules governing responses to consultations around national infrastructure such as the Electricity Act be updated by the next meeting of the full council at the end of the month.

The Council Executive also agreed to convey to the Scottish Government that any consent granted should take into account concerns raised by members at the Executive. It added information on the five biggest lithium-ion battery fires to date, calling on the government to take cognisance of them.

By Stuart Sommerville, Local Democracy Reporter