

Green light for substation at centre of £1.6billion project

A substation at the heart of a £1.6 billion project to create an underwater “super highway” to bring offshore energy into the UK network has been given the go ahead despite protests.

East Lothian Councillors today approved SP Energy plans for the National Grid connection.

The application is a key part of plans to create an Eastern Link between Torness and County Durham which aims to turn the North Sea into an energy powerhouse for the future.

However planning convenor Norman Hampshire raised concerns about out-dated planning rules which were allowing major developments under ‘green’ energy guidelines.

He told the meeting: “We need to change the process and bring it up to date to deal with renewable technology which is being set up all over the countryside.”

The committee heard there had been 60 objections to the substation with concerns raised by local communities about the cumulative effect of its approval.

Objectors said dozens of other projects were preparing to ‘bolt on’ to the substation in what one described as an ‘algal bloom’ of industrial sites which will spread out over the countryside.

The SP Energy application was for a 400 kilovolt (kV) Gas Insulated Switchgear (GIS) substation at Branxton which it is expected will be linked by up to 12km of underground cables to a converter station and landfall sites in East Lothian with 176km sub-sea cables linking the Torness and County Durham sites.

However the substation, which it is estimated could take up to five years to construct with work going on six days a week as it is built, sparked concern from local communities who said East Lothian has already taken an 'unfair amount' of renewable projects.

East Lammermuir Community Council said that while it supported renewable energy the substation would be "key to all of the other developments" and "major schemes" in the area.

And neighbouring West Barns Community Council said it had concerns about the cumulative impact of the number of energy projects focused around the site.

Councillors also voiced concern over the inability to consider other potential projects when determining the substation application.

Councillor Hampshire said legislation had been designed for a different time when an individual smaller substation might be built, and did not allow them to consider the wider impact of modern projects.

He said: "We need to write to Scottish Government asking for this to be looked at and policy changes to be made."

However he said, under the current planning process, the substation did meet requirements.

Councillors approved additional conditions urging the developers to work with the community to ensure local benefits come from the project as well as discussing construction plans

with them.

The committee unanimously approved the application.

By Marie Sharp Local Democracy Reporter