

Councillors concerns over battery storage near school campus

Concerns have been raised over plans to build a large battery storage site on a 12 hectare field less than 100 metres from a school campus.

Midlothian councillors were this week asked for their views on the proposals for a battery energy storage system (BESS) on land behind Dalkeith schools campus which has around 2,500 children and young people on its rolls.

The local authority will not be able to decide the outcome of the application which is with the Scottish Government's Energy Consent Unit, but are able to give their views as a consultee.

At a meeting of its planning committee a number of councillors voiced concern at the location on the field behind the campus which includes Dalkeith and St Davids High Schools as well as Saltergate School and Woodburn Primary School.

Councillor Ellen Scott, SNP administration education spokesperson, pointed to an explosion and major fire in Merseyside four years ago at a battery storage unit where it was reported the temperature on the site rose to 40 degrees Celsius within two minutes.

She urged the council to object to the application saying: "This site is just 70 metres from the edge of the schools

campus where 2,500 of our young people, some very young at three years old and some with severe complex needs, are going to be.”

Her comments were supported by Councillor Dianne Alexander who also said the site was over a ‘coal seam and gas pipe” She said: “I just think this is too dangerous for us to allow.”

The proposals for the site include a BESS with a capacity of 200 megawatts with 168 storage containers spread across four compounds. The containers will be used to house Lithium-ion batteries and the compounds will be hard surfaced and enclosed with three metre high fencing.

Councillor Derek Milligan told the meeting that if the local authority wanted to meet net zero targets sites like the one proposed were needed. He asked officers if alternative sites for facilities like it could be identified in future plans.

Planning convenor Russell Imrie said one of the problems the council faced in voicing concerns was that there was not an alternative site identified as another option.

And he pointed out it was not councillors who would make the decision they were only commentating adding: “It is a good one for us we don’t make the decision, we can oppose it here and go and have a rant and say it was nothing to do with us.

“I don’t want that to happen because we will, at the end of the day, have to regulate it.”

Councillor Imrie suggested the committee write to the ECU reflecting comments from elected members about the site and concerns. The committee agreed his proposal.

By Marie Sharp Local Democracy Reporter