



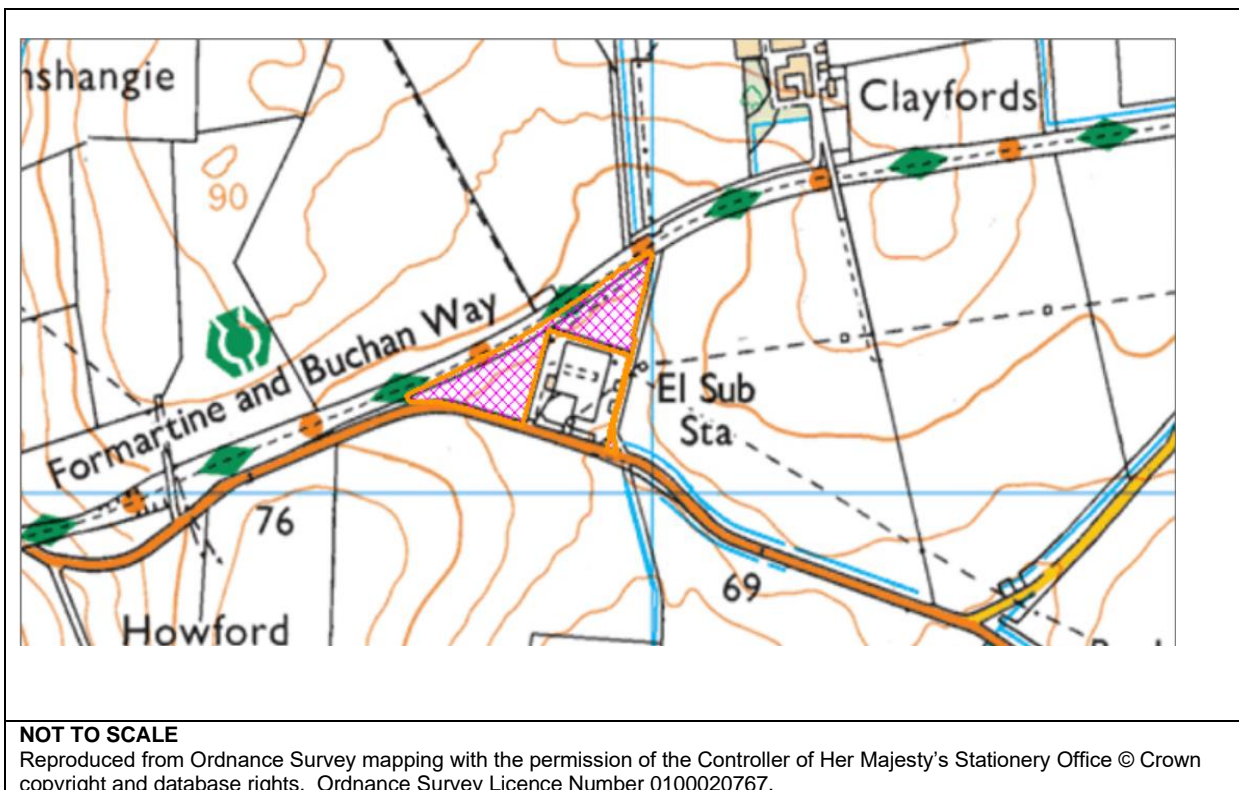
Buchan Area Committee Report 22 February 2022

Reference No: APP/2021/2556

Full Planning Permission for Erection of Battery Storage Facility (up to 50MW) and Associated Works at Land Adjacent to Electricity Sub Station, Strichen, Aberdeenshire, AB43 6RH

Applicant: Intelligent Land Investments Group Plc, 33 Bothwell Road, Hamilton
Agent: Logan PM, Inverlair Farm, Tulloch, Roy Bridge

Grid Ref: E:395854 N:855160
 Ward No. and Name: W04 - Central Buchan
 Application Type: Full Planning Permission
 Representations: 0
 Consultations: 7
 Relevant Proposals Map: Aberdeenshire Local Development Plan 2017
 Designations: None
 Complies with Development Plans: Yes
 Main Recommendation: Grant



1. Reason for Report

- 1.1 The Committee is able to consider and take a decision on this item in terms of Section B.8.1 of Part 2A List of Committee Powers and Section C.2.1 of Part 2C Planning Delegations of the Scheme of Governance as the application is for major development.
- 1.2 The Head of Finance and Monitoring Officer within Business Services have been consulted in the preparation of this report and had no comments to make and are satisfied that the report complies with the Scheme of Governance and relevant legislation.

2. Background and Proposal

- 2.1 The proposal involves the siting of up to 50MW of battery storage units on a rural site at Clayfords, to the east of Strichen. As the proposal would involve electricity generation for more than 20MW (but less than 50MW) the proposal is classed as a Major development. The site comprises 2 triangular shaped fields which flank a small electricity substation in between. The site is located north of the B9093 public road and borders the Strichen to Fraserburgh leg of the Formartine and Buchan way to the north. The site is in current agricultural use.
- 2.2 The battery storage proposal would effectively involve the siting of 52 battery storage units, 2.8m(h) x 13m(l) x 2.5m(w), on site – the units would be similar to a standard shipping container, coloured green. Also on site would be 13 power converters/transformers, boundary/security fencing (3m tall), security cameras and landscape planting around much of the perimeter. In addition to the 52 battery units, there would be 4 storage units (similar scale and proportions) also on site. Access to the site would be taken via the existing Clayfords access from the public road, immediately to the east of the substation complex.
- 2.3 Battery storage is an emerging technology designed to support the electricity grid as the country makes the transition towards the use of renewable energy which in turn can result in intermittenencies in supply. The batteries store power when available and then can feed back into the grid when this is required – it is this feeding into the grid which categorises this type of development as “electricity generation” in planning terms. There is a locational requirement for such proposals to be near to substations given the transfer of energy in between. Operational examples (albeit of a smaller scale) are available at Grange Road in Peterhead where there is a battery unit associated with the Hywind offshore wind farm sited next to a small substation at that location.
- 2.4 The submission outlines that the battery units would be connected to the substation via buried cables, this does not form part of this application. A site substation is however to be included on site, measuring 3.2m(h) x 13m(l) x 6m(w), this would be coloured dark green and would house electrical equipment.

3. Representations

3.1 No valid letters of representation have been received.

4. Consultations

4.1 **Environment and Infrastructure Services (Contaminated Land)** advised that the site had potential contamination from previous uses, but did not raise any concerns and requested that the applicant be advised via an informative attached to any grant of permission.

4.2 **Environment and Infrastructure Services (Environment Team)** raised no concerns in terms of natural heritage or landscaping.

4.3 **Environment and Infrastructure Services (Environmental Health)** raised no concerns in terms of noise or amenity, but did request a condition be attached to any grant of permission securing noise limits from the scheme.

4.4 **Environment and Infrastructure Services (Flood Risk and Coastal Protection)** made no comments and raised no objections to the application.

4.5 **Environment and Infrastructure Services (Roads Development)** raised no objections to the application.

4.6 **Scottish Water** did not offer a response to the consultation, however given the nature of the proposal, this is not considered to be an issue.

4.7 **Strichen and District Community Council** had not offered any comments at the time of writing.

5. Relevant Planning Policies

5.1 Scottish Planning Policy

The aim of the Scottish Planning Policies is to ensure that development and changes in land use occur in suitable locations and are sustainable. The planning system must also provide protection from inappropriate development. Its primary objectives are:

- to set the land use framework for promoting sustainable economic development;
- to encourage and support regeneration; and
- to maintain and enhance the quality of the natural heritage and built environment.

Development and conservation are not mutually exclusive objectives; the aim is to resolve conflicts between the objectives set out above and to manage change. Planning policies and decisions should not prevent or inhibit development unless there are sound reasons for doing so. The planning

system guides the future development and use of land in cities, towns and rural areas in the long term public interest. The goal is a prosperous and socially just Scotland with a strong economy, homes, jobs and a good living environment for everyone.

5.2 Aberdeen City and Shire Strategic Development Plan 2020

The Strategic Development Plan (SDP) was approved on 12 August 2020.

The purpose of this Plan is to set a clear direction for the future development of the City Region. It sets the strategic framework for investment in jobs, homes and infrastructure over the next 20 years. All parts of the Strategic Development Plan area will fall within either a strategic growth area or a local growth and diversification area. Some areas are also identified as regeneration priority areas. There are also general objectives identified. In summary, these cover promoting economic growth, promoting sustainable economic development which will reduce carbon dioxide production, adapt to the effects of climate change and limit the amount of non-renewable resources used, encouraging population growth, maintaining and improving the region's built, natural and cultural assets, promoting sustainable communities and improving accessibility in developments.

Paragraph 6.16 of this document outlines that a more diverse mix of renewable energy sources, along with storage, will be needed if we are to meet Scottish Government renewables targets, make best use of the resources available, and ensure continuity of supply to serve communities and businesses across the City Region.

The Aberdeenshire Local Development Plan 2017 will continue to be the primary document against which applications are considered. The Aberdeen City & Shire SDP 2020 as approved forms part of the Development Plan.

5.3 Aberdeenshire Local Development Plan 2017

Policy P1: Layout, siting and design

Policy P4: Hazardous and potentially polluting developments and contaminated land

Policy RD1: Providing suitable services

Policy E1: Natural Heritage

Policy PR1: Protecting Important Resources

Policy HE1: Protecting Historic Buildings, Sites and Monuments

5.4 Proposed Aberdeenshire Local Development Plan 2020

Aberdeenshire Council on 5 March 2020 resolved to agree the Proposed Aberdeenshire Local Development Plan (LDP) 2020 as the 'settled view of the Council' on what the final adopted content of the LDP 2021 should be. A period during which representations on the Proposed LDP 2020 could be made took place between 25 May and 31 July 2020.

The Proposed LDP 2020 is a material consideration in the determination of planning applications. The Planning Authority must therefore assess what weight it should have in the context of this particular application. The Proposed LDP has been subject to public scrutiny and has now been submitted for Examination by an independent Reporter. Nevertheless, it is considered that the level of weight that should be applied to the Proposed LDP 2020 remains as not significant at this time. The Aberdeenshire LDP 2017 remains the up-to-date LDP for the area and the primary document against which planning applications should be determined until such time as a new LDP for the area is adopted.

5.5 Other Material Considerations

None

6. Discussion

- 6.1 The main planning considerations with this application relate firstly to establishing the principle of development on this site and then considering the potential environmental and amenity impacts associated with this.
- 6.2 There is no specific LDP Policy concerning the siting of battery units or energy storage facilities. There is reference elsewhere in the Development Plan however, with paragraph 6.16 of the SDP outlining the need to deliver development including energy storage in order to meet Government targets in relation to renewables. While battery storage is not a renewable energy development in of itself, it is ancillary in that it assists this transition away from fossil fuels. There is therefore an acceptance of the principle of development from a strategic level.
- 6.3 This principle on a strategic level is accepted, however the development must also be acceptable on a local level. There are LDP Policies covering aspects including environmental and amenity impacts including layout, siting and design, access and nuisance and an assessment of these is also required.
- 6.4 The site is in a rural setting on the edge of Strichen. The existing substation does influence the character of the immediate area to an extent, but the proposal would significantly expand this infrastructure/industrial nature across the site having a more pronounced impact and subsequently create a more definitive industrial character at this location. While the development would not comfortably match and respect the rural character of the area in terms of Policy P1, mitigation in the form of landscaping is proposed to assist in reducing or diluting visual impacts from surrounding areas, which in turn seeks to retain a natural characteristic in and around the site. This is evidenced by the existing substation and associated landscaping which has this function. There is also a locational requirement for the development to be here, given the need to connect into and support the electricity transmission network via the substation. It is also a fact, as outlined in the SDP, that the transition away from fossil fuels will require the upgrade and strengthening of the electricity network and associated infrastructure. The intensification and

expansion of electrical sites is therefore a necessary step. Taking this into account, the principle of locating the development on this site, subject to appropriate landscape mitigation, is accepted.

- 6.5 The physical nature of the proposal in terms of design, layout and physical characteristics must also be considered. As above, some 52 battery units, each akin to a shipping container in terms of scale and form up to 2.8m in height, would be sited here alongside some electrical infrastructure. As above, this would have the potential of creating an industrial type character on site. The colouring of the units green as proposed and presence of landscaping would however offer a degree of mitigation. Without these aspects the site would have the potential to resemble an industrial or storage site which may not be wholly appropriate for this location, however this mitigation is considered to assist in diluting any such impacts. From public viewpoints including the main road, the landscaping plus green buildings would help the development appear more rural in nature and thus blend into the surrounds, which is considered to conform to the principles of Policy P1.
- 6.6 Overall with regard to the layout, siting and design of the proposal as well as cognisance of all of the above, the proposal can be considered to be acceptable. Taking the site individually or as a de facto expansion of the electrical substation already in situ, the nature and intensification of any impacts can be successfully managed through appropriate design and landscape mitigation, ultimately meaning that the proposal can be considered to comply with ALDP Policy P1.
- 6.7 Access would be taken via an existing farm access road connecting to the public highway, complete with existing visibility. There would be no operational traffic requirements for the site and so all impacts would be during the construction period. In any case, no adverse issues are anticipated. The Council's Roads Development Team did not raise any issues. The proposal is therefore considered to comply with ALDP Policy RD1 in terms of providing an appropriate means of access.
- 6.8 Given the rural nature of the site, there are limited potential impacts upon residential amenity, with the closest properties around 300m distant. With the proposed landscape screening, visual impacts from properties would be limited. The operation of the site has the potential to give rise to some noise output, predicted levels are outlined in the submission and the Council's Environmental Health Service have advised that there are no issues, subject to appropriate planning conditions.
- 6.9 It is not considered likely that the proposal would give rise to any adverse issues concerning drainage. The submission outlines that most of the site including tracks are proposed to remain permeable. The battery storage containers would be placed above ground level on pad supports. The surfacing across the site would be permeable comprising aggregate on permeable geotextile membrane, resulting in no change to the existing drainage and runoff. A filter trench has been designed to take the roof drainage of the site meter building in order to provide suitable attenuation.

These measures are considered to be sufficient in order to confirm that no adverse issues would arise. Council's Flood Risk and Coastal Protection Team did not make any comments on the proposal in this regard.

- 6.10 The site is currently in agricultural use, meaning that there is a relatively low ecological value to the site at present. The nature of development and structures to be located on site would not have any adverse impacts upon surrounding ecology, including tree lines or hedge rows. Landscape screening is proposed which would also serve to enhance the biodiversity value of the site. This is considered to be acceptable. The proposal is therefore considered to conform to ALDP Policy E1
- 6.11 The proposal is unlikely to directly impact any sites of cultural heritage interest. There may be a level of visibility, but this is not considered to be significantly detrimental. Similarly, there is likely to be visibility from the Formartine and Buchan way which runs along the northern boundary of the site. Again, it is unlikely that this would represent an impact of any significant detriment which would impinge the enjoyment or use of this resource. Indeed visibility is likely to be limited to the higher part of the line and bridge over the farm track at the north east corner of the site owing to planting/screening and reduced ground levels along the remainder of the route. The proposal is therefore considered to conform to ALDP Policies HE1 and PR1.
- 6.12 Taking all of the above into account, the proposal can be considered to comply with the relevant policies contained within the ALDP. There would be a level of visual impact as a result of the development and a relatively significant change in terms of the introduction of 52 battery units and associated infrastructure onto a previously undeveloped site, albeit with a small substation already in situ. However sufficient mitigation is proposed to dilute these impacts and with this, plus the wider need and policy support for battery technology, as well as the specific locational requirements behind the scheme, the proposal can be considered to be acceptable.

7. Area Implications

- 7.1 In the specific circumstances of this application there is no direct connection with the currently specified objectives and identified actions of the Local Community Plan.

8. Implications and Risk

- 8.1 An integrated impact assessment is not required because the granting or refusing of the application will not have a differential impact on the protected characteristics of the applicant or any third parties.
- 8.2 There are no staffing and financial implications.
- 8.3 There are no risks identified in respect of this matter in terms of the Corporate and Directorate Risk Registers as the Committee is considering the application as the planning authority in a quasi-judicial role and must

determine the application on its own merits in accordance with the Development Plan unless material considerations justify a departure.

- 8.4 No separate consideration of the current proposal's degree of sustainability is required as the concept is implicit to and wholly integral with the planning process against the policies of which it has been measured.

9. Departures, Notifications and Referrals

9.1 Strategic Development Plan Departures

None

9.2 Local Development Plan Departures

None

- 9.3 The application is not a Departure from the Local Development Plan or Strategic Development Plan and no departure procedures apply.

- 9.4 The application does not fall within any of the categories contained in the Schedule of the Town and Country Planning (Notification of Applications) (Scotland) Direction 2009 and the application is not required to be notified to the Scottish Ministers prior to determination.

- 9.5 The application would not have to be referred to Infrastructure Services Committee in the event of the Area Committee wishing to grant permission for the application.

10. Recommendation

10.1 **GRANT Full Planning Permission subject to the following conditions:-**

- 01 Noise from the development shall not exceed Noise Rating Curve 25 when measured within any habitable room of any noise sensitive dwelling.

Reason: To ensure that noise from the development does not result in undue loss of amenity for surrounding properties

- 02 All soft and hard landscaping proposals shall be carried out in accordance with the approved planting scheme, schedule, arrangements and management programme generally as set out in drawing *J327/034/15112021*. Any planting which, within a period of 5 years from the completion of the development, in the opinion of the Planning Authority is dying, being severely damaged or becoming seriously diseased, shall be replaced by plants of similar size and species to those originally required to be planted. Once provided, all landscaping works shall thereafter be permanently retained.

Reason: To ensure the implementation and management of a satisfactory scheme of landscaping which will help to integrate the proposed development into the local landscape in the interests of the visual amenity of the area.

10.2 Reason for Decision

The planning authority considers that the application is for a development that is in accordance with the Aberdeenshire Local Development Plan 2017.

Alan Wood
Director of Environment and Infrastructure Services
Author of Report: Stuart Murison
Report Date: 7 February 2022