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## NORTH AYRSHIRE COUNCIL

### Planning Committee

Locality	Three Towns
Reference	23/00731/PPM
Application Registered	12th October 2023
Decision Due	12th February 2024
Ward	Ardrossan

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<b>Recommendation</b>	Approved subject to Conditions
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<b>Location</b>	Meiklelaught Farm Saltcoats Ayrshire KA21 6NF
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<b>Applicant</b>	GPC 1127 Ltd
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<b>Proposal</b>	The Construction and Operation Of A 30 MW Battery Energy Storage System with Associated Infrastructure, Substation, Security Fencing, CCTV, And Landscaping
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### 1. Description

The application site measures 0.86ha in area and consist of a portion of a field to the northwest of Meiklelaught Farm, to the north of Saltcoats. The site is in the northeast corner of an open grass field the boundaries of which are marked by low hedgerows. The countryside around the site is undulating and hilly and used primarily for the grazing of livestock. Also included within the site boundary is the dirt access track which runs through the adjacent field to the east and connects with the B714 via a field gate and small bell-mouth junction.

This application is presented to Planning Committee as it relates to a major development as defined by The Town and Country Planning (Hierarchy of Development) (Scotland) Regulations 2009

It is proposed to erect a 30MW Battery Energy Storage Facility and associated infrastructure on the site. The development is expected to be for a period of 40 years. It would consist of

no. 12 storage containers housing the battery storage, no. 12 inverters and no. 6 transformers, no. 1 storage container, no. 1 client substation and control room, no. 1 Distribution Network Operator (DNO) substation, and no. 1 auxiliary transformer. The storage containers would measure approx. 30sqm in area and would be 2.6m in height and made of corrugated metal on concrete plinths. The transformers would measure 2.7m x 1.4m x 2.6m and the inverters 2.3m x 1.4m x 1.5m. The battery storage containers would be arranged in a line with the inverters and transformers located to the north.

The storage container, client substation, DNO substation and auxiliary transformer would be located in the northeast corner of the site. The DNO substation would measure 3.9m x 4.7m x 7.9m and would consist of a small rectangular building with a low-pitched gable roof. The client substation and control room would measure 3.9m x 3.7m x 13.6m and would consist of a flat roof building. The storage container would be identical to the containers housing the batteries and the auxiliary transformer similar but smaller than the other transformers.

The battery storage facility would be connected to the grid via underground cables linking it to the substation at Sorbie Road in Saltcoats. A 2.4m high metal mesh fence would surround the compound with a hedgerow planted on the outer side of the fence. A new access would be formed approx. 25m to the south of the existing field gate allowing for a 6m wide access track mostly following the existing field track. Three parking spaces would be provided on site. Several CCTV cameras mounted on 4m high poles would be located on the site.

In the adopted North Ayrshire Local Development Plan (LDP) the site is located in a Countryside land allocation. The relevant policies of the LDP with relation to the proposed development are:

- The Countryside Objective of Strategic Policy 1: Spatial Strategy,
- Strategic Policy 2: Placemaking,
- Policy 27: Sustainable Transport and Active Travel, and
- Policy 29: Energy Infrastructure Development.

All development proposals also require to be assessed against the adopted National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4), the relevant policies of which are considered to be:

- Policy 1: Tackling the Climate and Nature Crisis,
- Policy 2: Climate Mitigation and Adaptation,
- Policy 5: Soil, and
- Policy 11: Energy.

A Proposal of Application Notice (Major) was submitted by the applicant in June 2023 outlining their proposed public consultation exercises (23/00468/PREAPM). The application has been screened for Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) and it was opined by The Council that no EIA was required for the development.

Planning Permission was approved in March 2018 for the erection of a wind turbine to the south of Meiklelaught Farm, however, this development was never implemented and has since expired (18/00067/PP)

## Supporting Documents

### Design and Access Statement

Contains an overview of the site, the proposed development and a brief description of the Planning policies which the applicant considers apply to the proposal.

### Preliminary Ecological Appraisal

The application site is dominated by grass leys and no notable or protected habitats would be directly impacted upon by the proposed development. The grass leys may support ground nesting birds and therefore it is recommended that a pre-commencement bird-nesting survey is undertaken if works commence during the bird breeding season. It is unlikely that the loss of badger foraging habitats would significantly impact upon the species, however, it is recommended that a pre-commencement badger survey is carried out. The development would not lead to a significant loss of foraging habitat for bats and no potential roost sites were identified.

### Historic Environment Impact Assessment

The proposed development would not create any significant direct or indirect adverse impacts on the historic environment. A programme of archaeological works will be undertaken in order to ensure that any historic artefacts located below ground level are suitably catalogued and preserved if of historic interest.

### Noise Impact Assessment

The main noise impacts of the proposed development are considered to be construction noise, and then noise generated by the fixed plant once the battery storage system is operational. Noise from construction is expected to fall below the Building Standards noise criteria at all receptors and therefore no mitigation is required. The rating levels at the receptors is predicted to be negligible during the day, however, a low adverse impact is predicted at night. Background noise levels are very low and therefore an assessment of absolute noise levels was undertaken which assumes the worst-case scenario (i.e., battery storage at 100% capacity). The assessment of absolute levels indicated that there will be no increase in ambient levels during the day and only a slight increase at night and therefore no significant impact. Given the above, no noise mitigation is considered necessary.

### Planning Supporting Statement

Contains a more in-depth analysis of the various polices, both Planning legislation and climate legislation, which apply to the proposed development.

### Transport Statement

Access to the site via the B714 would be through a simple priority T junction located approx. 25m to the south of the existing junction. It is estimated that there will be approx. 604 two-way trips during construction (1,208 vehicle movements) roughly half of which would be HGV movements. This would amount to about 8 two-way trips per day at the busiest point of construction. During operation only 10-20 vehicle trips per annum are expected and these would likely be by car or van.

### Landscape and Visual Impact Appraisal

During construction there will be some moderate adverse landscape impacts in the landscape immediately adjacent to the site. These effects would be temporary and limited to nearby residents and drivers along the B714. The effect during operation would be moderate adverse to neutral and again is only likely to affect some nearby residents and drivers along the B road. Over time a landscaping scheme would help integrate the development into the landscape.

### Pre-Application Consultation (PAC) Report

Two in person consultation events were held at Ardeer Golf Club on the 11<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> of July 2023. Each event was publicised in advance in the Ardrossan and Saltcoats Herald. A website was also set up with information on the proposal and a feedback form. Key stakeholders were also consulted directly via e-mail including community councils, local councillors and MSPs. A letter drop was undertaken to 30 residences close to the application site. 2 feedback forms were returned and 8 people attended the consultation events. The key issues raised were; the potential realignment of the B714, noise levels, site selection and grid connection.

## **2. Consultations and Representations**

The standard Neighbour Notification process was undertaken, and the application was advertised in the local press. One neutral letter of representation has been received; the points raised in which are summarised below:

1. The battery storage compound could be moved further west which would reduce its visual impact and move it further away from nearby dwellinghouses.

Response: The development has been assessed in terms of the proposed siting submitted by the applicant and it is not considered that the proposal would result in unacceptable visual or noise impacts. Therefore it is not considered appropriate to suggest an alternative siting.

2. The noisiest elements of the compound should be moved to the western side of the compound so that they would be further from the nearby dwellinghouses.

Response: As above.

3. Landscaping should be chosen to reduce the visual impact of the development in three years.

Response: Conditions could be attached to any Planning Permission which may be forthcoming to ensure that details of landscaping are provided, and the landscaping is suitably maintained. The hedgerow would be formed of 60-80cm high native standard trees of a variety of species and may take some time to become fully established and grow to a height where they adequately screen the compound, so it is not possible to guarantee that the development would be screened in three years. Whilst it would be possible to screen the site in a quicker time period using fast growing conifers (i.e. leylandii) this would result in a new negative landscape impact and would not offer the positive ecological benefits of native species.

4. The containers should be grey or dark green in colour to minimise the visual impact.

Response: Final details of the finishing materials including colour could be ensured via condition.

5. The visualisations provided do not include views from Darlieth or Tower Lodge despite these properties being likely to have direct views of the development.

Response: The information provided in the Landscape and Visual Impact Appraisal including the visualisation is considered to be acceptable for the purposes of determining the Planning Application.

6. What measures would be put in place to ensure that the noise and visual impacts are as predicted by the supporting documents and what steps would be taken if the impacts are worse than predicted?

Response: A condition would be attached to ensure that the noise level does not exceed a certain threshold at nearby noise sensitive premises. In terms of the visual impacts, these would be as per the proposed drawings, the only exception to this would be if the applicant did not erect the development in accordance with the plans in which case The Council would have powers to take enforcement action.

Consultations:

North Ayrshire Council (NAC) Active Travel and Transport: No objections subject to conditions relating to visibility splays and hard surfacing of the access.

Response: Noted, such conditions could be attached to any Planning Permission which may be forthcoming.

NAC Environmental Health: No objections, subject to a condition controlling noise levels.

Response: Noted, such conditions could be attached to any Planning Permission which may be forthcoming.

NAC Flooding: The site is not indicated as being at risk of flooding in SEPA's Flood Maps. No objections, subject to a condition relating to run-off flow paths.

Response: Noted, such a condition could be attached to any Planning Permission which may be forthcoming.

Kilwinning Community Council: No response

Stevenston Community Council: No response.

West of Scotland Archaeological Service WOSAS: No objections subject to a condition requiring the implementation of a programme of archaeological works.

Response: Noted, such a condition could be attached to any Planning Permission which may be forthcoming.

### **3. Analysis**

The Countryside Objective of Strategic Policy 1: Spatial Strategy, of the LDP states that we will support development in the countryside with a demonstrable site locational need, including developments for renewable energy. Whilst battery storage is not a renewable energy generating technology in and of itself, it is increasingly becoming a vital part of the required infrastructure for the transition to renewable energy, as higher percentages of our energy mix come from renewable sources there is a requirement to store the energy generated from renewables for periods when the conditions are not right for renewable energy production. Battery storage can be located anywhere with a good connection to the grid, however, in general countryside or industrial estate locations are favoured as they move the infrastructure away from residential properties and have a lower visual impact when compared with locations closer to settlements. It is important however when locating battery storage to choose a site with minimal impacts on high value natural landscapes, and this will be assessed later in this report. Notwithstanding the above, it is considered that the proposal accords with the Countryside Objective of Strategic Policy 1: Spatial Strategy.

Strategic Policy 2: Placemaking, states that all development proposals must meet the qualities of successful places as outlined in the policy. In terms of scale, the proposed battery storage facility compound would measure approx. 2,900sqm in area which within the context of a rural landscape comprising of large fields would not be significant. In terms of height the fencing and containers would measure approx. 2.5m whilst the highest element would be the CCTV poles at 4m. There is a lack of vertical elements in the surrounding landscape and therefore the compound would be the tallest feature for some distance, however, the hilly topography of the area would largely screen the compound from many views. Overall, the scale of the proposed development is considered to be acceptable.

Turning to design, the proposed battery storage scheme would, by its nature, be a utilitarian development not in-keeping with the pastoral character of the surrounding countryside. Steps would be taken to limit the visual impact of the proposed development such as the secluded siting and the planting of hedgerows around the perimeter of the compound, however, it is acknowledged that the appearance of the development would not be visually attractive. The visual impact of the proposed development will be considered in more detail in the forthcoming sections of this report.

In terms of amenity impacts, the closest nearby dwellinghouse would be Muirlaught Bungalow located 345m to the northeast of the site. Therefore, it is not considered that the proposed development will result in any overshadowing, and given the nature of the development, no overlooking of neighbours would occur. The applicant's Noise Impact Assessment concludes that no increase in ambient levels during the day and only a slight increase at night would be perceptible at nearby noise sensitive receptors. It therefore considers that no noise mitigation is necessary. It is not considered that the proposed development would result in any significant adverse amenity impacts on nearby residential properties.

The scale of the proposed development is acceptable, and it would not significantly negatively affect the amenity of nearby properties. While the appearance of the development would not be visually attractive or in-keeping with the character of the area, this needs to be considered within the context of providing essential infrastructure for the green transition. Within this context, the proposed site is considered to be suitable for the proposed development given its low visual impact or impact on important landscapes or habitats. Given the above, it is considered that the proposed development accords with the qualities of successful places and therefore with Strategic Policy 2 of the LDP.

Policy 27 of the LDP relates to sustainable transport and active travel. The site is located in the countryside and can only be accessed via motor vehicle. Whilst significant traffic is expected during the construction phase, when the battery storage facility is operational it will generate minimal traffic and have a negligible effect on the surrounding road infrastructure. The proposal involves a new priority T junction on the B714, to the south of the existing field gate. NAC Active Travel and Transportation have been consulted and have not raised any concerns relating to the design of this junction. From the access to the compound a new 6m

wide HGV access track would be provided. Further details of the design of this access track could be ensured via Planning condition, should permission be granted. During the applicant's PAC process a respondent highlighted that the B714 is scheduled to be upgraded. The proposed upgrade would not significantly alter the route of the B714 around the area of the proposed access and NAC Active Travel and Transportation did not raise any concerns. Notwithstanding, it would be for the applicant to co-ordinate with NAC Roads to ensure that the proposed access aligns with the upgrading plans for the B714. Internally within the compound, parking for three vehicles would be provided as well as an HGV turning area. It is considered that the proposed development accords with Policy 27.

Policy 29: Energy Infrastructure Development, of the LDP notes support for development proposals for energy infrastructure which will contribute to our transition to a low carbon economy and have no unacceptable adverse environmental impacts. Similar to this policy is Policy 11: Energy, of NPF4, which notes support for all forms of renewable energy and notably considers energy storage to be a form of renewable energy. The policy goes on to describe a number of impacts which should be assessed as part of any proposal for example, impacts on nearby communities, landscape impacts, transport, water environment, ecology etc. but notes that significant weight should be placed upon the contribution of the proposal to renewable energy targets and greenhouse gas emission reduction targets.

The most significant impact of the proposed development is expected to be its landscape impact. The application site is not within any protected landscape designations, nor is it located close to any such designations. While the immediately surrounding landscape has a rural and agricultural character, to the west of the site is significant established renewable energy infrastructure in the form of various wind farms. The choice of site has ensured that the battery storage facility would not be highly visible from the road or any highly populated areas. The battery storage facility will only be visible from a small number of nearby dwellinghouses/farm steadings and from the hills immediately to the north and west of the site. The applicant's Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment concludes that the visual impact would be moderately adverse to neutral, and Planning agrees with this assessment. Whilst typically a development with a moderately adverse impacts on a rural landscape would not be supported, it is considered that the role that the development would play in the green energy transition would offset the negative landscape impact, and this is explicitly supported by Policy 29 of the LDP and Policy 11 of NPF4.

Policy 1: Tackling the Climate and Nature Crises, of NPF4 states that when considering development proposals significant weight will be given to the global climate and nature crises. Policy 2: Climate Mitigation and Adaptation, states that development proposals should be sited and designed to minimise greenhouse gas emissions. This report has already highlighted that the proposed development is considered to be part of the infrastructure required for a transition to green energy and therefore it is clear that the proposal complies with these two policies.

Policy 5: Soils, of NPF4 seeks to protect carbon rich soils and prime agricultural land from development. The site is classed as 4.2 on the national scale of capability for agriculture which means that it is land capable of producing a narrow range of crops and is primarily



grassland with short arable breaks of forage crops. In short, the site is primarily used for grazing and is not considered to be prime arable land. The proposed development would only occupy a small corner of a large field within a landscape dominated by large fields. It is not considered that the proposed development would result in any long term contamination of the soils, and the only significant ground disturbance would be the concrete bases for the battery units and other infrastructure. The applicant's Planning Support Statement claims that the development is temporary for a period of 40 years and following this the land can be decommissioned and returned to its following state. It is considered that 40 years is pushing the definition of temporary to its limits, and as with other renewable infrastructure such as wind turbines, Planning should assess the suitability of the site for the proposed development in the long term, with the view that the infrastructure could potentially be replaced after the end of its lifecycle. Notwithstanding the above, it is considered appropriate to attach a condition requiring the restoration of the site should the battery storage facility become redundant. The proposal accords with Policy 5 of NPF4.

The proposed development accords with the relevant policies of the Development Plan, and there are no other material considerations. It is therefore recommended that Planning Permission be granted.

#### **4. Full Recommendation**

Approved subject to Conditions

#### **Reasons for Decision**

##### **Condition**

1. That prior to the commencement of the development hereby approved, the developer shall provide full details of finishing materials of the containers, buildings and other ancillary structures for the written approval of North Ayrshire Council as Planning Authority. For the avoidance of doubt, the colour of the finishing materials shall be chosen to be sympathetic to the rural landscape. Thereafter the development shall progress in accordance with such details as may be approved.

##### **Reason**

In order to ensure that the finishing materials are chosen to minimise the landscape impact of the development.

##### **Condition**

2. That within a period of 24 weeks of the battery storage facility ceasing operation or becoming redundant for any reason, the site shall be remediated and restored to its previous condition to the satisfaction of North Ayrshire Council as Planning Authority.

##### **Reason**

In order to ensure that the site is suitably remediated should the battery storage facility be no longer required.

**Condition**

3. That no development shall take place until there has been submitted to and approved by North Ayrshire Council as Planning Authority a scheme of landscaping, which shall include details of species, planting densities, soil treatment and aftercare and shall include indications of all existing trees and hedgerows on the land and details of any to be retained together with measures for their protection in the course of the development.

**Reason**

In order to ensure that a suitable scheme of landscaping is undertaken to help to mitigate the landscape impact of the development hereby approved.

**Condition**

4. That all planting, seeding or turfing comprised in the approved details of landscaping shall be carried out in the first planting season and seeding seasons following the occupation of the buildings or the completion of the development, whichever is the sooner; and any trees or plants which, within a period of five years from the completion of the development die, are removed or become seriously damaged or diseased shall be replaced in the next planting season with others of a similar size and species, unless North Ayrshire Council as Planning Authority gives written consent to any variation.

**Reason**

In order to ensure that the landscape is suitably maintained.

**Condition**

5. That the rated noise level, as defined in BS 4142:2014 +A1:2019, from the operation of the proposed facility must not exceed the background noise level at the curtilage of any noise sensitive property, by 5dB or more, to the satisfaction of North Ayrshire Council as Planning Authority.

**Reason**

In order to ensure that the development does not result in any noise disturbance to nearby noise sensitive premises; in the interest of amenity.

**Condition**

6. That no development shall take place within the development site as outlined in red on the approved plan until the developer has secured the implementation of a programme of archaeological works in accordance with a written scheme of investigation which has been submitted by the applicant, agreed by the West of Scotland Archaeology Service, and approved by the Planning Authority. Thereafter the developer shall ensure that the programme of archaeological works is fully implemented and that all recording and recovery of archaeological resources within the development site is undertaken to the satisfaction of the Planning Authority in agreement with the West of Scotland Archaeology Service.

**Reason**

To ensure that any archaeological artefacts uncovered during construction are suitably recorded and preserved, in the interest of historical preservation.

**Condition**

7. That Visibility splays of 2.5 metres by 120 metres, in both directions, must be provided and maintained at the junction with the public road to the satisfaction of North Ayrshire Council as Planning Authority. No item with a height greater than 1.05 metre above adjacent carriageway level must be located within these sightline triangles. The first 5 metres of the access measured from the existing edge of the public road shall be hard surfaced.

**Reason**

In the interest of road safety.

**Condition**

8. That prior to the commencement of the development hereby approved full details of the proposed access track shall be provided for the written approval of North Ayrshire Council as Planning Authority. These shall include details of the route, surfacing material and drainage as well as details regarding the proposals for the existing field access and dirt track. Thereafter, the development shall progress in accordance with such details as may be approved.

**Reason**

In the interest of road safety.

**Condition**

9. That the construction of the development hereby approved shall take place outwith the main bird breeding season of March to August, otherwise, if taking place within this period, a pre-commencement nesting survey shall be undertaken by a suitably experienced ecologist and the results submitted for the written approval of North Ayrshire Council as Planning Authority. Any remediation/mitigation required shall be undertaken prior to the commencement of the development, to the satisfaction of North Ayrshire Council as Planning Authority.

**Reason**

In order to ensure that no protected bird species are disrupted by the proposed development; in the interest of the ecology of the site.

**Condition**

10. That prior to the commencement of the development hereby approved, a Badger Survey shall be undertaken by a suitably experienced ecologist and the result submitted for the written approval of North Ayrshire Council as Planning Authority. Any remediation/mitigation required shall be undertaken prior to the commencement of the development, to the satisfaction of North Ayrshire Council as Planning Authority.

**Reason**

In order to ensure that no badgers are disrupted by the proposed development; in the interest of the ecology of the site.

**Condition**

11. That measures to appropriately maintain run-off flow-paths through the site and/or reroute runoff flow-paths around the site would be provided for the written

approval of North Ayrshire Council as Planning Authority and that the identified measures would be fully implemented prior to the first use of the site as an energy storage facility.

**Reason**

To ensure that the development is not subject to flooding

**Informative**

B714 Upgrade

The B714 is scheduled to be upgraded and the developer should consult with North Ayrshire Council Roads in order to ensure that the access to site aligns with the proposed plans for the upgrading of the B714.

Allan Finlayson  
Chief Planning Officer

For further information please contact Mr John Mack on 01294 324794.

## Appendix 1 – Location Plan

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