
NORTH AYRSHIRE COUNCIL

24th March 2021

Planning Committee

Locality	North Coast and Cumbraes
Reference	20/00942/PP
Application Registered	5th January 2021
Decision Due	5th March 2021
Ward	North Coast And Cumbraes

Recommendation	Approved subject to Conditions
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Location	Site To South West Of Hunterston Coal Yard Fairlie Largs Ayrshire
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Applicant	ESB Asset Development (UK) Ltd Fao Mr Thomas Walker
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Proposal	Installation of a synchronous compensator and ancillary infrastructure
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1. Description

Planning permission is sought for the installation of a synchronous compensator and associated infrastructure on a vacant yard. The site is to the immediate south-west of the former Hunterston Coal Yard and was last used for the siting of concrete batching plant and associated infrastructure (ref: 14/00443/PP).

A synchronous compensator is plant that can facilitate efficient and stable operation of electricity in a network. The applicant has provided a statement that the purpose of this plant would be to help create stability in the National Grid, reacting when extra power is needed and providing more control over voltage. This development would allow for increased renewable energy generation connecting onto the National Grid. This site has been selected as it has the ability to connect to the National Grid through a substation with the requisite transmission capacity.

The site is approx. 1.145ha in area with the existing access from the south-east being utilised. The plant would be on the western portion of the site, the existing hardstanding, some 3200sqm in area. The eastern portion of the site would remain as a landscaped area. The plant would comprise a generator and flywheel building, high-voltage switchgear, a transformer, electrical containers, and coolers. The building would be some 420sqm in area

and 15m in height with eaves of 14m. The exact details of the external finishes have not been confirmed but would be metal cladding. The other plant would be between 2.8m and 8m in height. The whole plant and access road would be enclosed by a 3m high chain-link fence.

The proposal was subject to EIA Screening under the Town and Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) (Scotland) Regulations 2017, on the 12th August 2020 and found not to require an EIA. However, any application was to be accompanied by; a Noise Report, Tree Report, Traffic Management Plan, Surface Water Management Details, and a Phase 1 Habitat Survey. These have been submitted and can be summarised as follows:

The Noise Report stated that an assessment has been carried out and determined that for all nearest receptors, the rating level does not exceed background level. It is not considered the development would have an adverse noise impact.

The Tree Report sets out the findings of a survey of the trees within the application site. The main interest is the woodland area on the eastern portion of the site that includes several moderate quality mature trees and one mature tree of high quality. The report concludes that the utilisation of the existing hardstanding means no loss of mature trees in anticipated. Some pruning of young specimens which have colonised the access road verge would be required.

Traffic and drainage issues are dealt with in a wider Environmental Report. In terms of traffic it states an average of 20 people are expected on site during construction. This would mean an average of 2.5 vehicle movements per hour during construction. This equates to an approximate 0.9% increase in traffic on the A78. Traffic would be managed through a Construction Management Plan. Drainage would be addressed by construction of a swale along the southern boundary. A temporary silt fence would be installed during the construction period. The Environmental Report also addresses issues including visual impact. It concludes that given the dense vegetation outwith the site, it would not be readily visible. Any visibility would be read in the context of the other adjacent industrial and energy developments.

The Extended Phase 1 Habitat survey found that the principle habitats were the plantation woodland and hardstanding. Breeding birds, bats, otter, badger, reptiles, invertebrates, and hedgehog were found to be using the site or adjacent land. As works are primarily to the hardstanding, the impact on habitats is limited. Recommendations are made to minimise any impacts on protected species during construction.

The application site is identified by the Local Development Plan adopted 2019 ("the LDP") as part of the Hunterston Peninsula Business and Industry Location. It is also part of the wider Hunterston Development Area. It is within the Hunterston House Tree Preservation Order. It is considered that the relevant policies of the LDP are Strategic Policy 2: Placemaking, Strategic Policy 3: Hunterston Strategic Development Area, Policy 18: Forestry, Woodland, Trees and Hedgerows and Policy 29: Energy Infrastructure Development

2. Consultations and Representations

The application was subject to statutory neighbour notification procedures. There has been one representation received which can be summarised as follows:

1. It is requested that all construction traffic be routed to the site from the south only.

Response: Details submitted with the application state that during construction there would be an increase of approx. 0.9% in traffic on the A78. As such it is not considered that there would be any significant impact from the construction of the development. Once complete the site will not generate significant traffic movements. Notwithstanding, a condition could be added to any permission to agree a Construction Management Plan with the Council.

2. Whilst energy infrastructure accords with the designation within the LDP, Hunterston should be redeveloped to help solve employment and social difficulties.

Response: Noted. This is energy infrastructure development which in principle accords with the LDP. The site is approx. 1% of the wider Hunterston area which is recognised as a Strategic Development Area. The potential of the wider site is to be subject to a master planned approach.

Office for Nuclear Regulation - no comment

Response: Noted

West Kilbride Community Council - acknowledge that the proposal is energy related, and make representations that the disturbance to wildfowl should be kept to a minimum, there should be planting on the southern side of the site and major items should be delivered by sea.

Response: As a condition of any permission, the developer could be required to adhere to the recommendations of the submitted Phase 1 Habitat survey which includes provision for minimising impact on birds. The site is screened to the south by trees which are part of the TPO. As such it is not considered further planting is required to screen the site. An assessment of visual impact is given below. It is not considered that there would be any significant traffic impact from the construction of the development. Notwithstanding, a condition could be added to any permission to agree a Construction Management Plan with the Council which could address any potential abnormal loads.

Fairlie Community Council - Question the methodology of the noise report.

Response: The submitted noise information has been assessed by NAC Environmental Health who offer no objections.

NAC Environmental Health - No objections to the principle of the development. Any permission should be subject to a condition that the noise level should not exceed background noise level at the curtilage of any noise sensitive premises existing or consented at the date of any permission.

Response: Noted. Such a condition would also prevent the development from potentially sterilising the rest of the Strategic Development Area from future development. The applicant has advised that the plant will be able to operate at that level and has agreed to the condition.

NAC Active Travel and Transportation - No objections and suggest Transport Scotland should be consulted given the access is from the Trunk Road.

Response: The access is some 265m from the Trunk Road and is already in existence. Transport Scotland is only consulted in certain circumstances including when development is within 67m of the Trunk Road. The proposal does not meet any of the circumstances in which Transport Scotland would require consultation.

3. Analysis

Strategic Policy 3, in respect of Hunterston, recognises the strategic national importance of Hunterston as an energy hub, and sets out the type of development which will be supported, which includes energy sector development. The Policy advises that "Hunterston is an area where co-ordinated action and a masterplanned approach is required. We would expect all development to take account of the special environmental and safety constraints of Hunterston including detailed transport studies to identify options for enhancing port/rail/road accessibility, and management of impact of uses on nearby communities and the natural and built heritage assets in the area". To date a masterplan has not been approved by the Council. The proposal could therefore be considered as potentially contrary to this advice contained within Strategic Policy 3.

The proposal site is some 1.145ha in area which equates to roughly 1% of the Strategic Development Area, not including the areas identified as Hunterston Nuclear or Marketable Employment Land in the LDP. The proposal is for installation of plant, relating to the energy sector, on an existing standalone hardstanding. The development can be operated, and controlled by condition, at background noise level when measured at the nearest receptors. Therefore, despite the lack of a masterplan, it is considered the proposal accords with the identified suitable uses for the area and would not interfere with any wider redevelopment proposals.

Policy 29 of the LDP states that support will be given to energy infrastructure development where it will contribute to the transition to a low carbon economy and have no unacceptable adverse environmental impacts. The relevant factors in this instance are considered to be impacts on residential amenity by way of noise, landscape and impact on trees and habitats. The proposal supports the provisions of a low carbon economy.

Policy 18 of the LDP states that development will only be supported when it would not result in the loss or deterioration of long-established plantation or semi-natural woodland.

Strategic Policy 2 of the LDP sets out the qualities of a successful place including the visual and amenity considerations for a development. The plant would be used to facilitate efficient provision of electricity to the National Grid and as such it is considered it would contribute to a low carbon economy. The development would utilise an existing hardstanding and would have minimal impact on the adjacent woodland and the wider Hunterston Tree Preservation Order Area. It would not result in any loss or deterioration of the woodland. The Council would retain control over any trees in the site. It is not considered there would be any significant impacts on habitats. Any permission could be conditioned to ensure construction is carried out in accordance with the relevant recommendations of the submitted Habitat Survey.

In terms of residential amenity, the nearest residential property is approx. 400m to the east. The settlement of Fairlie is some 2km to the north-east. The applicant has submitted a Noise Report which states the development would not operate above background noise level. Environmental Health has no objection to the proposal and a condition could be added to any permission controlling the noise levels. Environmental Health also has powers to control any statutory noise nuisance. A condition could also be added to any permission to agree a Construction Management Plan to minimise potential disruption during the construction period.

The development would have a utilitarian appearance, as may be expected in an industrial area. A condition could be attached to any permission to confirm the external finish of the building. The site is screened by mature trees to the west, south and east. Beyond the plantation woodland on the eastern portion of the site is the former coal yard with further woodland between that and the A78. To the north of the site is the rest of the former coal yard which extends for some 1.65km. The development would be largely screened from public viewpoints. Any parts which may be visible would be viewed in the context of the industrial land and as such it is not considered there would be any adverse visual impact from the developments.

The development is for energy infrastructure development. It is not considered that the development would have any unacceptable environmental impacts. The proposal therefore accords with Strategic Policy 2, Policy 18 and Policy 29 of the LDP. The proposal also accords with the aims of Strategic Policy 3 for the development of Hunterston.

The absence of an approved masterplan for the wider site means that the proposal could be considered potentially contrary to Strategic Policy 3. However, given the other material considerations noted above, including compliance with other policies, the ability to control potential noise emissions and therefore prevent neutralisation of the wider site for development and the planning history, it is recommended that planning permission can be granted subject to conditions.

4. Full Recommendation

Approved subject to Conditions

Reasons for Decision

Condition

1. That prior to the commencement of the development, details of the external finishes for the generator and flywheel building shall be submitted to the Council, as Planning Authority, for written approval. The development will thereafter proceed in accordance with any details as may be approved.

Reason

To ensure an appropriate external appearance for the building in the interests of visual amenity

Condition

2. That prior to the commencement of the development, a Construction Management Plan, including details of routing of any abnormal loads, shall be submitted to the Council, as Planning Authority, for written approval. The development will thereafter proceed in accordance with any Plan as may be approved.

Reason

To ensure the construction of the development is carried out in an appropriate manner with particular regard to road safety.

Condition

3. The development will be undertaken in accordance with the recommendations set out in Section 4.5 of the Extended Phase 1 Habitat Survey, prepared by Nevis Environmental dated September 2020, and submitted with this application.

Reason

In the interest of local habitat

Condition

4. That the Rating Noise level, as defined in BS 4142:2014+A1:2019, from the operation of the synchronous compensator and ancillary fixed plant must not exceed the background noise level at the curtilage of any noise sensitive premises existing or consented as of the date of the permission.

Reason

To ensure the development is operated at an appropriate noise level in the interests of amenity and the potential development of the wider area.

Russell McCutcheon
Executive Director (Place)

For further information please contact Mr Iain Davies on 01294 324320.

Appendix 1 – Location Plan

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