

CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

FOR INFORMATION

**Title: PROPOSAL OF APPLICATION NOTIFICATION –
PROPOSED BATTERY STORAGE FACILITY
ADJACENT TO THE BOAT OF GARTEN
SUBSTATION BY WHIRLWIND ENERGY STORAGE
LTD.
REFERENCE: PRE/2021/0015**

Prepared by: Katie Crerar, Planning Officer

Purpose of Report

To inform the Planning Committee of: a Proposal of Application Notification (PAN) made to Highland Council on 7 May 2021 and notified to the CNPA on 26 May 2021 for a major planning application for the creation of an electrical energy storage: the CNPA's pre-application advice in response to the consultation from the Highland Council; and to allow members to raise any relevant views on the issues to be addressed in an application.

Recommendation

That the Planning Committee:

- a) **Note the PAN for the creation of an electrical energy storage facility consisting of a compound containing up to 50 energy storage containers, an electrical control building, transformers, switchgear, landscaping and access on land adjacent to the Boat of Garten Substation;**
- b) **Note the CNPA's pre-application advice on the issues to address; and**
- c) **Make comment on any additional relevant issues to be addressed in any future application.**

Background

1. The Planning Committee agreed a procedure to allow member involvement in pre-application advice for major planning applications in December 2015. The procedure involves officers presenting the information provided with the notification alongside an assessment from officers on the issues that need to be addressed. Planning Committee members have an opportunity to note issues that an application would be expected to address. Members are not being asked to approve the advice of officers.
2. The formal pre-application process is led by the relevant local authority, with the CNPA being a consultee in the process. The CNPA's comments focus on the planning context natural heritage, landscape and access issues. Relevant Local Authority teams such as transport planning, flooding and contaminated land teams provide advice alongside any necessary statutory consultees.

3. Planning Committee members are expected to approach decision-making on the applications presented at Committee with open minds. Being involved in pre-application process places a responsibility on members not to express views that would indicate pre-determination of a future application. To do so could mean that the member could not take part in the future decision-making or could lead to a legal challenge. Members are reminded that this is not a planning application and that they should not comment on the merits of such a proposal. Any additional issues raised by members will be recorded and passed on the applicant's agent for their consideration.

The Proposal

4. The proposal is to develop an electrical energy storage facility consisting of a compound (covering approx. 1 Ha) containing up to 50 energy storage containers immediately adjacent to the northern boundary of the existing substation. The site would also include an electrical control building, transformers and switchgear. The site would have an inner enclosure consisting of 3m tall wooden acoustic fencing, with planted native tree belts and bunding outwith this fence. The planting would be designed to complement the existing landscape character and create enhanced wildlife corridors between the Loch Garten NNR to the south and the River Spey to the north.
5. Access to the site would be either be via a new access road along the eastern edge of the existing substation requiring direct access from the B970 or alternatively using the existing access via East Croftmore to the east of the site. Once operational the site would be operated remotely and would generate very low levels of traffic, typically weekly visits by a light van.
6. The site comprises sloping agricultural land located immediately adjacent to the north-west boundary of the Boat of Garten Substation, just off the B970 and just under a mile west of Boat of Garten village. A copy of the location and site plans are attached in **Appendix 1**.

CNPA Officer Advice

7. CNPA staff attended Highland Council's major application pre-application advice service meeting with the applicant's team on 5 May 2021 when this proposal was presented. CNPA staff provided written feedback to Highland Council on 17 May 2021 and a copy of this advice is attached in **Appendix 2**. The PAN was submitted to the Highland Council in May 2021.
8. Relevant planning policy and information requirements have been set out. Key land use planning issues raised during the pre-application process included:
 - a) the need to fully consider landscape impacts particularly to the north and west of the site;
 - b) potential impacts on layout of the site given the slope and prominence of the site;
 - c) environmental impacts given the proximity to the River Spey and existing trees;
 - d) safe access to the site;
 - e) the need to demonstrate the role of this proposal in the wider energy network.

Conclusion and Next Steps

9. CNPA officers consider that the relevant issues for such a development on the site selected by the applicants have been raised with the applicant through meetings and correspondence. Any additional relevant issues that members consider important that are raised at the Planning Committee meeting will be passed on to Highland Council and the applicant for their consideration following the Committee meeting.

Katie Crerar

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katiecrerar@cairngorms.co.uk