

**PLANNING APPEAL STATEMENT
SITE AT OLD GREENOCK ROAD, BISHOPTON**

ON BEHALF OF ERSKINE GENERATION LTD

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PRODUCTIONS

- Production 1: Application package (consisting of all plans, Planning Statement, Air Quality Impact Assessment (plus 2 updates) and Noise Impact Assessment)
- Production 2: Planning Application Refusal Notice
- Production 3: Planning Application Report of Handling

1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This appeal is lodged against the decision taken by officers of the Renfrewshire Council to refuse planning permission for the Installation of a gas powered electricity generation plant with associated access and fencing on a site 300 metres south west of Shilton Cottage, Old Greenock Road, Bishopton.
- 1.2 The plant is being developed in response to the UK Government's reform of the UK electricity market and specifically to support and make more efficient use of renewable energy developments by ensuring the grid network has sufficient generation capacity to meet demand during peak times. The proposal is also required as a result of the need to balance the grid using local sources that can react at short notice to deliver electricity to the network. Gas peaking plants, using natural gas as a clean fuel, are generally used at times of 'stress' on the network and by offering this balancing mechanism provide the last line of defence to prevent serious fluctuations and blackouts.
- 1.3 The UK's electricity supply is undergoing a transition from traditional, ageing, large scale, centrally managed base load thermal (most commonly coal) plants to low carbon sources such as renewables, natural gas and new nuclear. To compensate for the closure of the large and older Coal fired power stations and the future losses from the closure of nuclear generators in Scotland there is an urgent requirement for smaller, more flexible "on demand" plants, such as the Erskine Gas Peaking Plant.
- 1.4 The development is therefore being proposed in response to the need to guarantee security of electricity supply and prevent future blackouts, particularly during busy periods of peak demand. The proposed Development represents a part of the estimated £100 billion capital investment needed in the UK to meet the projected increases in electricity demand over the next decade. It is also important that the Erskine Gas Peaking Plant will therefore only operate for a limited number of hours a week, on request from National Grid to meet peak hour demands. It is also important that the gas powered plant provides a secure source of electricity to balance any shortfalls for renewable resources in times of low wind and solar generation. As the development is proposed as a source of reserve power, which will only operate when the National Grid needs it to, it will not operate continuously, with maximum anticipated operation of 3000 hours per year.
- 1.5 In relation to the application the locational requirements of gas peaking plants are very specific in that they require to be located :
- close to a suitable point of connection to the national grid i.e. a substation with sufficient available capacity and an appropriate voltage; and
 - a gas supply with suitable pressure.
- 1.6 The site selection process therefore concentrated on identifying suitable areas of land close to these key infrastructure components. Having identified Erskine Substation as having sufficient capacity for a plant of this nature further assessment

identified a gas pipeline of suitable, intermediate pressure within Old Greenock Road immediately adjacent to the site as well as sufficient land available in the vicinity. **Identifying sites suitable for development of this nature is rare there is therefore a strong argument supporting the Development at this location.**

- 1.7 The full justification for the proposal is provided in the Planning Statement which was submitted with the application package (**Production 1 refers**).

2 THE PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

- 2.1 The proposed development, which will be operational for up to 40 years, will consist of ten modern, highly efficient gas generators within acoustically controlled containerised units and ancillary equipment comprising a control building, transformer units, gas meter, ancillary plant, parking spaces and perimeter fencing. The development will have a maximum electricity generating capacity of 19.9MW from containerised gas engines. The location of the site, close to the national electricity and gas networks is of key importance in maximising the efficiency of the gas engines. The Development will be designed to operate intermittently as instructed by National Grid in order to supply electricity during peak or strained times.

THE SITE

- 2.2 As outlined above there are few sites suitable for the development of a gas powered generation facility as a result of the locational needs of such an operation and this site was selected on the basis of:

- Proximity to existing 33kV substation with sufficient capacity;
- Proximity to the gas network (at sufficient pressure);
- Availability of suitable, relatively level land;
- Good access direct from the Old Greenock Road;
- Proximity to existing infrastructure – Erskine Substation, electricity pylons and a large motorway junction;
- Low visibility and a degree of existing screening;
- Distance from nearest designated ecological or archaeological sites; and
- Distance to nearest houses.

CURRENT LAND USE

- 2.3 The site is located within an area of agricultural land between the SPEN Erskine Substation on Old Greenock Road and the M898 slip road at Junction 30 of the M8. The Site is currently used as agricultural grazing land. Land immediately east and north of the site is crossed by electricity pylons associated with the Erskine Substation. There is a degree of existing screening, provided by trees and the motorway itself, between the site and the transport corridors which surround it.

- 2.4 A photograph of the proposed site, taken from Old Greenock Road at the proposed site entrance, is included below.



HISTORIC LAND USE

- 2.5 No previous uses of the land other than for agricultural purposes have been identified. The M8 motorway was constructed to the southeast of the site in the 1960s and forms a distinct boundary to this part of the site. The construction of the motorway and the use as an agricultural site are considered to be the extent of the recent historical use of the site.
- 2.6 Whilst it has some value as agricultural land for grazing of livestock, this is limited to grazing land, and the site is not prime agricultural land. The design of the proposed development, following existing field boundaries, **will allow the majority of the field in which it is located to continue in its current use.**
- 2.7 Further north of the site is the larger Shilton Plantation, which provides more extensive screening of views of the site from the north. The M8 and M898 provide a separation between the site and the more distant settlements of Bishopton and Erskine respectively. Whilst located within an area of farmland, the site is within an area that has clearly been influenced by infrastructure development.
- 2.8 The gas generators will be fuelled by low carbon natural gas. This fuel is considered to be very clean, resulting in no smoke and negligible emissions of nitrous oxides (NO_x), carbon monoxide (CO) and particulates and no emissions of sulphur oxides (SO_x). The gas is supplied to the application site through the regular, national and local gas distribution network located nearby.

- 2.9 The Planning statement submitted with the application (**Production 1**) provides a comprehensive assessment of current and relevant planning policies particularly in the Renfrewshire Council Local Development Plan and supports the contention of the applicant that the proposal is in full compliance with the Local development plan and as such should have been approved.

3 REASONS FOR REFUSAL

- 3.1 As outlined above four reasons for refusal were offered in the Report of Handling (see **Productions 2 and 3**) and a response to each of these reasons is offered below.

REASON FOR REFUSAL NUMBER 1

- 3.2 The first reason for refusal states that :

The proposal is contrary to Policy ENV1 of the Adopted Renfrewshire Local Development Plan in that it would introduce development into the green belt which, by virtue of its scale, location and design, would not be commensurate with the aims of protecting and enhancing the landscape setting of the area.

- 3.3 This reason for refusal must be considered against the assessment provided in the report of handling (**Production 3**) which concluded that **“I am satisfied that the proposal constitutes an acceptable form of development in the green belt in principle, and is thus compliant with this aspect of policy ENV1.”**

- 3.4 The assessment states that :

“Assessment

Policy ENV1 states that appropriate development within the green belt will be considered acceptable where it can be demonstrated that it is compatible with the provisions of the New Development Supplementary Guidance. The supplementary guidance sets out several forms of development which are acceptable in the green belt in principle. This includes essential infrastructure where it is demonstrated that a green belt location is required.

In this instance, the application site was chosen primarily for its proximity to the Erskine substation, an electricity transformer which would provide access to the local electricity distribution network and is able to accept the export of electricity from the proposed installation. The need for the proposed development is also considered to be justified with regard to the role such gas powered electricity generation installations will have in the modernising and evolving electricity distribution network. The development will be able to provide on demand back up at times of stress on the electricity network when demand exceeds supply. This is considered to be particularly relevant given the move towards increased generation of electricity from renewable sources which can be intermittent in nature.

In view of the above, I am satisfied that the proposal constitutes an acceptable form of development in the green belt in principle, and is thus compliant with this aspect of Policy ENV1.”

- 3.5 Against this assessment the reason for refusal cannot be justified and should be set aside.

REASON FOR REFUSAL NUMBER 2

3.6 The second reason for refusal states that:

The proposal is contrary to the Adopted Renfrewshire Local Development Plan New Development Supplementary Guidance – Delivering the Environment Strategy in that it would introduce development into the green belt which would, by virtue of its scale, position and design, undermine the core role and function of the green belt by both individual and cumulative means, and would fail to maintain and enhance the local landscape character of the area.

3.7 Against this refusal it is important that the Core Role and function of the Green belt has been defined, in the Report of Handling as being to support planned growth, maintain the identity of settlements, protect and enhance the landscape setting of an area and protect and promote access opportunities to Open Space.

3.8 In this context the proposed development supports planned growth by providing a secure source of electricity without which further growth of planned urban growth cannot be achieved. It is however relevant that the site of the proposed development is remote from the urban area. It is in a landscape which is defined by existing infrastructure, including the adjacent motorway infrastructure and is not visible from the urban area. As such it has no impact on the identity of any settlement nor the landscape settlement of the area. Whilst the site is currently in agricultural use the proposed development will have no adverse impact on public access to open space.

3.9 **In such circumstances it is maintained that the proposal would not undermine the Core Role and function of the green belt.**

3.10 With regard to the landscape character of the area the site is part of an agricultural field which is well defined by the existing landscape structure with the proposed development set back against the trees to the south and with an acoustic screen fence 3 metres high which effectively screens the development to the point that it will hardly be visible.

3.11 The refusal focuses on the visibility of the development from the Old Greenock Road as it crosses the M898. The photo below is taken in the direction of the site from this road. It is clear from the photo that even when the trees are without leaves, that the site is barely visible from this location. Whilst views of the site may be apparent further west on this road, they would be largely screened by the proposed planting plan, and in any event only occur for a distance of approximately 250 m. Taking account of the 60 mph speed of this road, these views would be very limited.



- 3.12 In such circumstances it is maintained that **the proposed development will have no adverse impact on the landscape character of the area**. If however this was considered to be an issue the applicant would accept a condition, similar to that imposed on other such infrastructure developments in the area, to provide additional landscaping to the satisfaction of the planning authority, prior to work commencing on site. Screening has already been proposed as part of the application process, although the applicant would be happy to agree additional screening in this regard.
- 3.13 **It is maintained that there is no justification for refusal on the basis of reason for refusal number 2.**

REASON FOR REFUSAL NUMBER 3

- 3.14 The third reason for refusal states that:

The proposal is contrary to Policy 16 of the Adopted Renfrewshire Local Development Plan in that the location, siting and design of the development would have a significant and detrimental impact, both individually and cumulatively, on the landscape character of the area.

- 3.15 **Policy 16** of the Adopted Local plan states in relation to Renewable Energy and Low Carbon Energy Developments that:

“Renewable and low carbon energy developments will be supported in principle where they are appropriate in terms of the location, siting and design having regard to any individual or cumulative significant effects on:

- *Local environment, landscape character, built, natural or cultural heritage;*
- *Amenity of existing or allocated uses;*
- *Visual amenity;*
- *Outdoor sport and recreation interest; and,*
- *The safe and efficient use of the airport, flight activity, navigation, flight paths and Ministry of Defence surveillance system. Any development will require to comply with the above criteria as well as the details outlined in the New Development SG.”*

3.16 Against these criteria and as outlined above the promotion of the gas powered plant is an important element in the secure supply of electricity during peak periods. It is however important that the proposed development is in one of the rare locations where such a facility can be provided in a relatively small field outwith the urban area and adjacent to major infrastructure that helps to screen any adverse impacts of the proposal. As stated above the proposed development can be developed without any significant effect on the local environment landscape character or built environment with no impact whatsoever on cultural heritage. In addition :

- The proposal will have no adverse impact on existing or allocated uses and indeed will increase the viability of the existing agricultural unit.
- The proposal will not have any significant impact on Visual Amenity.
- The proposal will have no impact whatsoever on outdoor sport or recreation.
- The proposal will have no impact whatsoever on the safe and efficient use of Glasgow Airport or the Ministry of Defence surveillance system.

3.17 **As such it is again maintained that there is no justification for refusal on the basis of reason for refusal number 3.**

REASON FOR REFUSAL NUMBER 4

3.18 The fourth reason for refusal states that :

The proposal is contrary to the Adopted Renfrewshire Local Development Plan New Development Supplementary Guidance – Delivering the Infrastructure Strategy in that it would introduce a significant visual intrusion in to the landscape which would, by virtue of its scale, position and design, result in an adverse and detrimental impact, both individually and cumulatively, on the landscape character of the area.

3.19 The objectives of the Supplementary Guidance with regard to Delivering the Infrastructure Strategy states that **“Renfrewshire’s LDP places an emphasis on investment in infrastructure as it is central to increasing sustainable economic growth as well as supporting the transition to a low carbon economy”**. Support

for the transition should have encouraged the support of this application, however, it is also of relevance to this appeal that the Supplementary Guidance Delivering the Infrastructure Strategy also states :

“The transition to a low carbon economy must include maintaining an effective supply of affordable energy and other resources. The aim is not only to adapt to and help mitigate the effects of climate change but also to support the economic opportunities that arise from the implementation of renewable and low carbon energy technologies. The Council is supportive of an increase in the proportion of electricity produced from renewable sources, but will require proposals for development to meet the following criteria:

- *There is no significant impact on the amenity of nearby residents, in terms of statutory air quality objectives, noise or other nuisances;*
- *Significant visual intrusion within the landscape in terms of scale, location, design, etc. has been minimised;*
- *During the process leading to the selection of the proposed site, consideration must also be given to alternative sites, and the selection of the proposed site justified;*
- *The individual or cumulative impact of the proposed development along with any other existing and approved similar developments will not lead to an unacceptable impact on the environment, amenity, community or recreational interest;*
- *The transportation aspects associated with implementation of developments can be accommodated or mitigated against;*
- *Arrangements are in place to ensure restoration of the site to an acceptable standard after the operation has ceased;*
- *SEPA’s Thermal Treatment of Waste Guidelines should be referred to where development involves recovering energy from waste;*
- *Development would be encouraged and supported where thermal treatment plants are co-located with existing energy and heat intensive uses which maximise the opportunities for effective energy use.”*

3.20 With regard to this reason for refusal it is maintained that

- There is no significant impact on the amenity of nearby residents.
- There is no significant visual intrusion within the landscape in terms of scale, location, design.
- The process leading to the selection of the proposed site, has considered alternative sites, and the selection of the proposed site justified above and in the planning Statement that accompanied the application (**see Production 1**).

- The impact of the proposed development along with any other existing and approved similar developments will not lead to an unacceptable impact on the environment, amenity, community or recreational interest.
- The transportation aspects associated with implementation of developments can be accommodated.
- There is no recovery from waste involved in the clean gas processes in this proposal.
- The proposed development is co-located with existing energy and heat intensive uses which maximise the opportunities for effective energy use.

3.21 **As can be seen from the extracts of the Supplementary Guidance referred to above there is no justification for refusal on the basis of reason for refusal number 4.**

4 CONCLUSIONS

- 4.1 UK Government's reform of the UK electricity market and specifically to support and make more efficient use of renewable energy developments by ensuring the grid network has sufficient generation capacity to meet demand during peak times.
- 4.2 Identifying suitable sites of this nature is rare and the appeal site fulfils all necessary specific locational needs for this proposal.
- 4.3 The Proposed development is necessary to ensure a secure source of electricity and to prevent serious fluctuations and blackouts at peak usage times.
- 4.4 The proposal constitutes an acceptable form of development in the green belt and complies with Policy ENV 1.
- 4.5 The proposal has no significant adverse impact on the Core Role and Function of the green belt.
- 4.6 The proposal complies with Policy I6 and the Supplementary Guidelines on Delivering the Infrastructure Strategy.
- 4.7 Renfrewshire's LDP places an emphasis on supporting the transition to a low carbon economy and should encourage the proposal.
- 4.8 There is no significant impact on the amenity of nearby residents.
- 4.9 There is no significant visual intrusion within the landscape in terms of scale, location or design. In considering visual impacts, the case officer has focussed on a 250m stretch of a 60mph road, which already has a degree of screening, and offers views towards the M8 motorway where there are breaks in this screening.
- 4.10 The impact of the proposed development along with any other existing and approved similar developments will not lead to an unacceptable impact on the environment, amenity, community or recreational interest.
- 4.11 The transportation aspects associated with implementation of the proposals can be accommodated and there is no objection from the head of roads.
- 4.12 There is no recovery from waste involved in the clean gas processes in this proposal
- 4.13 The proposed development is co-located with existing energy and heat intensive uses which maximise the opportunities for effective energy use.
- 4.14 The applicant is prepared to provide additional landscape planting if this is considered necessary by the Council.
- 4.15 Against these conclusions it is respectfully requested that this application is approved (and this appeal upheld) in the national interest and in full compliance with the Local Development Plan.