

NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL

STRATEGIC PLANNING COMMITTEE

At the meeting of the **Strategic Planning Committee** held at Meeting Space - Block 2, Floor 2 - County Hall on Tuesday, 6 July 2021 at 4.00 pm.

PRESENT

T Thorne (Chair) (in the Chair)

MEMBERS

C Ball	L Darwin
B Flux	J Foster
G Hill	JI Hutchinson
J Lang	J Reid
M Robinson	G Stewart
A Wallace	

OTHER COUNCILLORS

OFFICERS

H Bowers	Democratic Services Officer
D Feige	Environment and Design Team Manager
D Lally	Chief Executive
L Little	Senior Democratic Services Officer
C Mead	Highways Development Manager
R Murfin	Director of Planning
J Murphy	South East DM Area Manager
G Park	Environmental Health Officer
E Sinnamon	Development Service Manager
A Ward	Communications Lead - External
S Wilson	Media Communication Officer

Around xxx members of the press and public were present.

10 PROCEDURE AT PLANNING COMMITTEES

The Chair outlined the procedure to be followed at the meeting

11 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillors Dodd, Swinbank and Watson.

12 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETINGS

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RESOLVED that the minutes of the Strategic Planning Committee held on Tuesday 8 June 2021, as circulated, be agreed as true record and signed by the Chair.

13 **DISCLOSURE OF MEMBERS' INTERESTS**

Councillor Reid advised that he had a conflict of interests and withdrew from the meeting. Councillors Flux stated that he was a member of Cramlington Town Council who had been consulted on the application, however he had taken no part in any discussion. Councillor Foster stated that she was a member of Choppington Parish Council who had advised of their strong support for the application, however she had taken no part in any discussion.

14 **DETERMINATION OF PLANNING APPLICATIONS**

The report requested the Committee to decide the planning applications attached to the report using the powers delegated to it. Members were reminded of the principles which should govern their consideration of the applications, the procedure for handling representations, the requirement of conditions and the need for justifiable reasons for the granting of permission or refusal of planning applications.

The Chair acknowledged the huge amount of work undertaken by Officers in bringing this application to Committee and stated he hoped that the site visit and information provided would assist Members to make an informed decision.

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

15 **21/00818/FULES**

Erection of battery manufacturing plant with ancillary offices, together with associated development and infrastructure works (including site preparation works, ground modelling, drainage, landscaping, vehicular access, cycle and pedestrian access, parking provision, substation and other associated works)

Land at Former Power Station Site on Northern Side of Cambois, Cambois, Northumberland

J Murphy, South East Area DM Area Manager introduced the application to the Committee with the aid of a power point presentation. It was confirmed that all Members had received and read the update which had been circulated by email earlier that day, which had also been uploaded to the Council's website.

R Murfin, Director of Planning informed the Committee of the way in which the application had been assessed by officers, the alignment with both the existing and emerging development plan and the reasonableness of the significant weight which could be given to the localised and wider economic benefits of the application.

He advised that as the proposal was also subject to the Environmental Impact

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Assessment (EIA) regulations, Members should also consider the extent to which the application was supported by a rigorous, robust and up to date information in the Environmental Statement (ES). He went on to describe how the ES had;

- Been used to inform the evaluation of the proposal and how a “triangulation exercise” had taken place with consultees and statutory consultees in order to verify the conclusions set out the ES.
- Subject to appropriate public consultation, including on the receipt of additional information
- Informed the design and evaluation of mitigation and the formulation of conditions and legal agreements to secure such

R Murfin then drew Members attention to the specific sections of the officer report which addressed the suitability of the ES and confirmed that, for all the reasons set out and described, that it was his advice that the EIA Regulations had be fully and properly complied with.

D Feige, Environment and Design Team Manager, further advised of the significant important ecological considerations in the EIA in respect of this large site which was in proximity to the coast and a range of different habitats and was important to specific bird species. He confirmed that while a certain amount of mitigation could be provided on site, as the development was so large, it had also been necessary to identify off site provision for the remainder. The “Potland Burn” site had been agreed with Natural England as being well-suited for habitat creation and the level of net gain was over and above what was commensurate with the loss on site. Defra’s biodiversity net gain metric had been used to calculate the area of land required, to ensure there was both rigour and transparency to the process.

Guy Wakefield, Agent on behalf of the applicant addressed the Committee speaking in support of the application. His comments included the following:-

- He thanked officers for their hard work and professionalism in dealing with this application. He also thanked the Town and Parish Councils who had been keen to engage, learn and share their views on the proposals and advised that BritishVolt (BV) remained committed to continuing those discussions going forward.
- The application had been submitted following months of pre-application discussions with officers to understand the issues which needed to be assessed.
- The EIA robustly assessed those matters and concluded that there would be no significant adverse effects subject to appropriate mitigation which would be secured by conditions and the S106 agreement and examples of these were provided.
- The scheme had the potential to generate 3,000 jobs and at its peak for 2,400 construction workers and potential for subsequent employment opportunities in the future and the use of the railway line. Local people would be employed and training provided.

Peter Rolton, Chair and UK Chief Executive Officer of BritishVolt addressed the Committee speaking in support of the application. His comments included the following:-

- BV was at the vanguard of the electrification ability. Their world class team planned to build the world's first major gigaplant with a minimum capacity of 30 g/w per hour at the former coal stock yards in Cambois.
- He also thanked the Council's planning team who had worked hard, efficiently and diligently alongside BV team and it was a remarkable achievement that an application of this size had been brought to Committee in such a timely manner.
- The UK automotive industry needed gigafactories, with 4 to 8 gigafactories required before 2030 to meet demand as vehicles powered by combustion engines were phased out.
- Cambois was the best site in the UK, its unique combination of grid, deep water port and rail renewable power made it such.
- He was brought up in the North East and he was proud to be able to offer this project to the Committee for determination. He referred to the previous loss of industries and mining and the investment which was needed in the area which would bring skilled and semi-skilled jobs for current and future generations.
- Electric vehicles and their batteries were part of the next industrial revolution as we transitioned to a zero carbon economy.
- The Company hoped to be a catalyst for wider economic and social uplift across the area. He highlighted the number of young people who had moved away due to the lack of prospects and it was hoped that BV would provide the first step on the journey to reverse this.
- It was a major opportunity to put Northumberland on the map and this had been the most exciting project he had ever worked on.

In response to questions from Members of the Committee the following information was provided:-

- A large part of negotiations undertaken in respect of the application had been in relation to the fundamental concerns of Highways England on the impact of the scheme on the road network. A lot of work had been undertaken to provide cycle/pedestrian routes to the site and a condition attached to any permission granted would seek to flesh out the details of links between Blyth and the site and other areas of population were factored into the design at an early stage. There would be requirements to use land outside the applicant's ownership for some parts and this had been written into the S106 agreement. Due to the timescale it had not been possible to achieve rail connectivity to the site however talks had been undertaken with the applicant and how this could be achieved and the applicant was in dialogue with Network Rail in respect of this.
- The scheme was striving to achieve nearly 50% sustainable travel for employees with 20% to use the shuttle bus; 7% cycling; 1% walking and 17% car sharing all included in the travel plan targets which were conditioned. There was a commitment to provide land for the cycle track which would be a 4m wide facility which was the

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- newest standard. A review would need to be undertaken in respect of street lighting and the applicant had committed to this being done.
- Members were advised that they could not take account of ownership of the land to be developed, however to provide context the Director of Planning advised that the sale of the land was conditional on the site being developed.
 - The recently announced battery plant for Nissan was only a third of the size of this application and was aimed at supply for the Nissan factory, the production of batteries at this plant was aimed at the wider UK and beyond market. If both plants were running at full capacity then this would still only generate 1/5th of the production required for the Country's needs. There was a very strong pattern emerging of this being a favoured location for renewable energy and this could be the first part of the economic regeneration of the area and there could possibly be more capacity for battery production.
 - The habitat mitigation to be provided at Potland Burn would not be like for like as the post-industrial use of the coal stocking yard was particularly good for some species and to provide like for like would require huge amounts similar materials to be imported. The site had been characterised as to what was important and equivalents provided, i.e. habitats to attract similar types of wading birds and diverse planting communities to attract the similar types of invertebrate communities.
 - All swept path analysis necessary had been undertaken in respect of the application and everything done to ensure that the highway was not harmed as a consequence of this development. Signage to the site during the construction phase would be managed through the Construction Management Plan which would ensure that the works were correctly signed. There would be fewer HGV movements during the operational aspect of the plant with more familiar trips being undertaken, however if there was a need for additional clear signage, Highways would ensure that this was delivered.
 - Public Protection had looked at all aspects of adverse impacts on residents and the design of the screening and layout of the plant reflected this process and they were happy with the proposals subject to the recommendations outlined in the report. The detailed Construction Management Plan included information on liaison with the local community and details of complaints handling /resolution with significant onus on the applicant to ensure that this was undertaken.
 - Significant weight had been given to the economic benefit of the proposals to the local area with everything being done to ensure that local people who were out of work and families on low incomes were able to access jobs with a local supplier strategy, employment support strategy and skills strategy to provide the training and skills infrastructure required.
 - The characteristics of the biodiversity on the site which would be lost had been looked at and whilst Potland Burn was not a like for like replacement it would allow a 10% uplift in the quality of biodiversity to be provided. Potland Burn was the only location in the County where this could be achieved. If other sites came forward for future

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- development then it might be possible to fund work at other sites if they have suitable characteristics
- Work had been undertaken with the Skills Team at the Council to map gaps in skills in areas of multiple deprivation and to tailor support to those locations. No guarantee could be provided that residents from those areas would get jobs but they would be given the best chances to allow this to happen. Training would be provided to those not in employment, help provided to update their CVs and if they attended the training course they would be guaranteed an interview. The plant would not be at full capacity until 2028 and performance targets could be included to recruit a percentage from certain areas and conditions attached to any permission granted to ensure that the type of training being provided could be revised if these targets were not being achieved.
 - It had been made very clear during the opening of the examination in public of the Local Plan submitted in May 2019, that as a result of the Borderlands deal, North of Tyne deal, the development of Energy Central, including the proposals by BritishVOLT, growth of the Port of Blyth and the opening of the Northumberland Line that the Local Plan would need to be tweaked and adjusted to reflect these. Cabinet had agreed that immediately following adoption of the Local Plan a review would be undertaken to ensure that the alignment of housing and infrastructure was right bearing in mind those changes.
 - As part of the Local Planning process, the assessment of the highways network capacity had taken into account all committed development and allocated land for future development. The key point of tension was Moor Farm and there were national debates on this taking place. BV could be accommodated and the interventions planned on the other elements of infrastructure could also be accommodated. Work was being undertaken as part of the North of Tyne infrastructure mapping to ascertain other works that would be required and it was possible that funding for network improvements would come forward through that. Scoping works for improvements to Moor Farm were proposed to be completed by 2025 with the scheme to be implemented by 2030 and it was hoped that this could be accelerated.
 - The applicant was very keen to progress to construction phase if permission was granted and skills training would commence straight away.
 - Contingencies would be in place for emergency re-routing of vehicles however this would be different during different phases of the scheme. If there was a route which was unsuitable for vehicles should they be unable to access the main strategic road network, then a conversation would need to be had with Highways England. Route logistics planning would also be undertaken with the applicant and part of the information given to drivers could be that they were not to take diversions but to stay on the strategic routes even if this meant a delay to their journey. The condition regarding the logistics and management plan would allow leverage to have this factored in and be picked up as the scheme developed.

Councillor Robinson proposed acceptance of the recommendation to approve the

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application subject to the conditions in the report and as amended in line with the update circulated and the completion of the S106 agreement as outlined in the report which was seconded by Councillor Flux.

Members thanked the officers for the diligent and professional work undertaken in bringing this application to Committee and advised that they fully supported the application. Councillor Wallace advised that previous applications for this site had fallen through and the residents of Cambois hoped that this application would come to fruition. It was hoped that better facilities including the provision of a much improved bus service to Cambois would result from the application and Members asked that signage made it clear that the gigaplant was in Cambois and not Blyth. Councillor Robinson in summing up stated that he hoped that the development would be truly transformational for the deprived area and would redress the balance of the loss of previous industries and send the message that Northumberland was open for large scale businesses.

A vote was taken and it was unanimously

RESOLVED that the application be **GRANTED** subject to the conditions in the report and as amended in the update circulated and the completion of a S106 agreement to secure the following obligations:-

- Financial contribution of £1,688,400 towards off site Ecological compensation and Net Gain to be attributed at the Potland Burn site.
- The provision of Highways works including suitable sustainable connectivity along Brock Lane and the entering into of a Highways Agreement.
- A Construction Local Supplier Employment Strategy
- An Employment Plan and
- A Training Skills Plan.

The meeting was adjourned for a 5 minute break at this point and resumed at 5.32 pm.

16 **21/01746/FUL**

**Provision of temporary substations and associated cabling for the construction of the proposed Gigaplant (Application Reference 21/000818/FULES)
Land East of Sleekburn Business Centre, West Sleekburn, Northumberland**

J Murphy, South East Area DM Area Manager introduced the application to the Committee with the aid of a power point presentation. Attention was drawn to the additional condition which was proposed and had been circulated on the update emailed to Members of the Committee and uploaded to the Council's website in advance of the Committee.

Councillor Flux proposed acceptance of the recommendation to approve the application subject to the conditions outlined in the report and additional condition as highlighted above which was seconded by Councillor Stewart.

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A vote was taken and it was unanimously

RESOLVED that the application be **GRANTED** subject to the conditions as outlined in the report with the inclusion of the additional condition as outlined on the additional information circulated.

17 **APPEALS UPDATE**

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

18 **S106 AGREEMENTS UPDATE REPORT**

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

CHAIR.....

DATE.....

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