

Record of the Public Meeting hosted by Nelson Community Council on 15th June 2022 to discuss proposed developments including windfarm and synchronous condenser

Present:

Bute Energy (BE): M Haughton, R Emmitt

Nelson Community Council: E ap Llwyd Dafydd; A Gray, G Davies, B Miles, S Morgan, A John, L Dufty, R Powell, B Jenkins

L Green- Community Engagement Officer to Hefin David MS.

Apologies were received by WP Power, CCBC Planning, D Jewell

Invited but not responded: NRW, National Grid, Wayne David MP,

The purpose of the meeting was shared. It was suggested that Nelson residents are keen to understand the full extent of the developments in the area and the processes so that they can fully engage in it.

Projects and project design

Bute Energy stated that:

- They have no involvement with the synchronous condenser project.
- The windfarm project involves 14 turbines (which is a change to the original proposal).
- The energy will be connected directly to Cilfynydd substation via cable.
- The site will be open access.
- The project will have an impact but should be assessed alongside the merits of the project.
- It has been designed to limit the impact on residents as much as possible.
- All water sources have been considered and priority has been given to protect water sources. Planning permission would not be given to develop on a water table.
- All stakeholders will be formally consulted on during the planning process by PEDW.
- CCBC and RCT are statutory consultees and their impact assessments are seriously considered.
- Run off is carefully considered in design in hydrology report. The design was referred to including the soakaway. The design is heavily scrutinised throughout the process.
- Consultation started in 2021 with initial designs with multiple consultation processes.
- The Civil Aviation Authority are consulted as part of the process, the feedback for which can be shared.
- It is difficult to determine how much the project has cost so far but the Finance team at Bute Energy will know.
- The power generated will be enough to sustain 81,000 homes per year.

- Independent studies have conflicting findings in relation to house valuations. The majority state there is not a link between development and valuation.
- The turbines have not been ordered yet. The procurement process will commence alongside wider development.
- The planning application quotes a calculation around the impact from turbine development and delivery and is thought this will be offset within 2 years of the project start.
- Current optimum turbine design stipulates the proposed height.
- Ideally, components would be sourced locally but many are not available in this country, Construction companies will be sourced from the local area. The aspiration is for 80% of the project and the development to be sourced locally.
- The plan is to create a development that enhances quality of life.
- A suggested timeline was provided:
 - o Planning process should take a year
 - o Construction is planned to commence in the 4th quarter of 2024
 - o There will be a phased development of 14 months.
 - o Consideration of the local environment will be considered for construction and vehicle movements
 - o The plan will be shared as soon as PEDW have accepted the application.
- The process will be pro-actively communicated as soon as the application has been formally accepted. PEDW will formally write to statutory consultees. Bute Energy will reach out to local communities. Bespoke plans will be created to communicate progress and impact throughout development.
- There is scope for submitting additional information through the PEDW process. PEDW provides clear guidance on the process on their website.
- The project has its own website with draft proposals.

Residents stated that:

- There was disappointment that not all of the developers were represented at the meeting
- National Grid also have no involvement with the synchronous condenser project.
- It is unclear whether other organisations have acquired more local land.
- The substation has increased a number of times recently.
- The National Grid have permitted development rights to ensure the security of the national electricity system.
- A planned solar panel farm will also have a negative impact.
- A specified water source was not included on the planning application. The development will have a significant impact on the water source which is required for a farm and residence.
- It is unclear whether Commoners are supportive of the project.
- They are concerned about the size of the turbines and the impact on drainage.
- There were concerns about how land has been acquired without apparent legitimate sales processes.

- The height of the turbines may have an impact on flight paths.
- The project will devalue local houses.
- The development and delivery of the turbines will have a big environmental impact.
- The height of the turbines has a negative visual impact- there is concern that they are bigger than others.
- Communication needs to be much clearer from the developers.
- Bute Energy should consider a subscription service on their website so residents can keep informed.
- There are no plans to acquire any more land.

A County Councillor stated that:

- CCBC Planning Committee will consider the planning application for the synchronous condenser when it is received. CCBC will form a considered view for the Committee to consider.

Community benefit

Residents stated that:

- Community benefit proposals amount to £30 million across different communities
- The money is small compared to the planned profit
- A guarantee is needed that the contribution will be received in cash and will be ongoing in the event of a change of company ownership.
- Residents asked that role of distributing is allocated to an independent body to decide how the cash is spent
- They would like a binding agreement prior to project commencement to ensure the amount and guarantee of, community benefit.
- It was understood that discussions would take place prior to the planning application.
- Wealth retention is very important for the area.

Coalfields Regeneration Trust offered to facilitate the

Bute Energy stated that:

- Feedback will be given to the Community Benefit team who will engage with the Council.
- The decisions relating to community benefit will be increasingly important as the planning progress develops.
- A formal committee will work with Bute Energy to decide on the mechanisms and decision making. The governance structure for which is to be confirmed.
- There is a firm commitment to provide community benefit.

Renewable energy

Residents stated that:

- Wales is already self-sufficient in terms of renewable energy. The energy produced will be exported to England.
- Others suggested there is a website demonstrating amount of renewable energy generation and Wales create about 6% of renewable energy currently.
- There is a wider climate emergency and on-balance they are in favour of the development.

Bute Energy stated that:

- The National Grid website shares the carbon intensity of regions of the UK.
- South Wales is the single most carbon intensive region in Wales. The vast majority of energy comes from Pembroke power station which runs on natural gas. It is suggested that if you build as much offshore technology in theory Wales can become self-sufficient.
- Development takes at least 10 years. WG solution is to decarbonise Wales by using lots of technology which includes solar, off shore, tidal, waves. On shore wind is a well understood technology.
- It is very hard to say that electricity generated here is used here because of the national grid.
- Reference was made to a climate change report published last week- Wales deployment of renewable energy has plateaued since 2016.

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Environmental concerns

Residents stated that:

- They have concerns around wildlife including bats and birds.
- The bridleways will become limited in use to allow horse-riding
- There be a significant impact from both a visual and audio perspective
- There are doubts about the credibility of the ecological assessments as there were not many boxes provided and many were removed.
- The development will affect the water quality from water sources.
- They want water monitoring to continue for a significant period after development.
- Residents were invited to walk around the area to observe the development that has taken place in the area already.

Bute Energy stated that:

- The Environmental Impact Assessment will be available with planning documents.
- The ecological assessment took place over 2 years and included consultation from NRW.
- The EIA considers the potential for impact on water sources.
- The environmental plan will consider the hydrological monitoring plan. Monitoring will take place throughout the development.
- Water quality is a key priority and development can be halted by regulatory authorities in the event of negative impact.

Project plan and planning process

Bute Energy stated that:

- They have considered feedback provided at the pre-application stage and adjusted the project accordingly.
- The planning application has been submitted and is being considered for acceptance by PEDW. This process can take up to 6 weeks. Once accepted the timeline of the planning process will be clarified and the EIA documents will be available for review.
- The draft proposals are available on Bute Energy website.

Residents stated that:

- WP Power staff have suggested to them that the planning permission is a foregone conclusion.

Company funding and ownership

Bute Energy stated that:

- This is their first windfarm development
- They have recruited very experienced people in this area (between them have been responsible for developing over 8 gigawatts of energy in other projects).
- They are self-funded through private ownership. Although, it is anticipated to increase investors in the future.
- They are a Welsh company based in Cardiff.

Residents stated that

- Ownership of the company could be questioned given how new they were to the area and the origin of their owners. Online evidence suggests control and ultimate benefit of the company lies outside of Wales.

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