



Extraordinary Meeting of Aspatria Town Council held on Tuesday 9th July 2024 at 5pm at Aspatria Methodist Church.

PRESENT: Councillor S Maxwell (Chair)

Councillors: Cllr L Hunter, Cllr A Reay, Cllr J Marsh, Cllr R Gregory, Cllr A Maxwell, Cllr A Hankin, Cllr S Edmondson, Cllr C Macdonald

Also in Attendance: Mrs K Cooper (Town Clerk), Mr S Gough (Firstway Solar), Mr D Lines & Mrs E Lines (Castlemont)

Councillor Stephanie Maxwell opened the meeting and welcomed all Councillors, Mr Gough and Mr and Mrs Lines. The meeting was to discuss the Battery Energy Storage Site (BESS) with Steven Gough from Firstway Solar, the company who have submitted plans for the site. Questions from the council were previously sent across to Mr Gough to enable him to answer them in as much detail as possible.

Mr Gough informed the meeting of the protocol they follow before addressing the questions asked by the Council. Capacity for the site must be sought with good connection to the site. Following this, contact is made with the landowners and once agreed planning permission is submitted to the planning department. Potential operatives of the site, such as EDF Energy are liaised with to enter into a contractual agreement of the development. Mr Gough assured the Council, international companies would not invest such large amounts of funds and not take all precautions or maintain the site to the highest level.

The batteries they are expecting to install are Trina, which are manufactured in China and have been developed following 'lessons learnt' from previous battery storage sites. The batteries are said to have a life span of 10-15 years; however, operatives generally upgrade them every 5-10 years. Monitoring of these sites is key and the Aspatria site is said to be monitored remotely 24/7 via Wi-Fi connection or hard cable. Cllr Marsh enquired, should a catastrophic event occur what is the response time of help attending to the site. Mr Gough informed the meeting the batteries alert the remote operator early on, with warning signs which would shut down the batteries. It was advised Trina products have an intervention system which prevents the batteries from simply exploding. The safety issues and if enough research has been completed are what is concerning for Mr and Mrs Lines living in close proximity of the site. Mr Lines referred to a similar site in California, whereby the batteries exploded and due to the lithium making its own oxygen, residents were in danger of the hydrogen gases. Mr Gough confirmed the water hydrants on site would cool the batteries NOT extinguish fire.

Mr and Mrs Lines were not consulted on the planning development, even though Mr Gough was informed from Cumberland Council they had no objections. The Clerk contacted Mr and Mrs Lines following a previous meeting of Aspatria Town Council to ascertain their views on the development. Apologies were made by Mr Gough for the lack of contact and information provided to the residents of Castlemont.

The planning application is live on Cumberland Council website until September 2024. Decisions regarding planning conditions would be in place approximately mid/late August this year.

In response to numerous questions from the council regarding safety and maintenance, Mr Gough assured the meeting there would be a 2.4m high fence surrounding the site with CCTV cameras, which are remote activated, security lighting and working lights for operatives to carry out maintenance after dark.

Mr Lines felt the planning application should commence again and plans be submitted for an alternative field further away from their property. Cllr Reay asked Mr Gough why that particular field had been chosen, which seemed to be due to cost and the access to the field.

The Clerk raised concerns regarding the training our local fire fighters will receive to tackle any catastrophic events and has contacted the Chief Fire Inspector to voice those concerns on behalf of the Council, awaiting reply.

The site is said to be environmentally friendly when it comes to noise, only operating in 4 hours in a 24-hour period. Two hours to charge and two hours to discharge. Mr Gough explained charging for a two-hour period would generate enough power for houses covering most of the area of Cumberland. Cllr Gregory asked how many sites are currently in operation, to which Firstway Solar have 90 sites in their portfolio but none of which are in operation at this time.

The benefits of the site are non-specific to Aspatria. A Community Benefit Fund would be offered to the Council of £100k for the council to use how they wish. It was felt this payment would be preferred in one payment as opposed to annually due to inflation over the 40-year period. Councillors asked if jobs or apprenticeships could be offered for local people, however this may not be the case with the site being operated remotely. All in agreeance, the residents of Castlemont should receive some benefit whether it be financially or other. Mr Gough agreed to put thought to this and contact them in the near future.

The Clerk asked if property prices in the town would be affected should property owners wish to sell. Mr Gough assumes this would not be the case.

Meeting ended at 6.30pm