

## **FRIENDS OF DUCHESS WOOD**

### **COMMENTS ON PLANNING APPLICATION 23/02472/PP – CONSTRUCTION AND OPERATION OF A BATTERY ENERGY STORAGE SYSTEM WITH ANCILLARY INFRASTRUCTURE DATED 22 DECEMBER 2023**

The role of the FODW is to assist in the management of the Duchess Wood, to safeguard its benefits to the community in terms of biodiversity and quiet enjoyment – including recreational and educational use. Our comments with respect to this application are focussed on this purpose. Duchess Wood is designated as a Local Nature Reserve as recognised by NatureScot (site code 8149), is an Open Space Protection Area, a Nature Conservation Site and a Woodland of long-established plantation origin on the NatureScot inventory.

The Trustees of the Friends of Duchess Wood (FODW) would like to raise their concerns regarding a proposal to construct an industrial facility (Battery Energy Storage System) close to the Wood. This proposal will have an adverse impact on:

- Views from the Wood.
- Noise pollution.
- Light pollution.
- Drainage.
- Pollution during construction phase.
- Safety.
- Helensburgh Green Belt.

Comments are in three parts; firstly, potential impact on the Wood during the operational phase of the facility, secondly additional concerns raised by activities during the construction phase and lastly other areas of concern.

## **OPERATIONAL PHASE**

### **Visual Impact**

The application acknowledges that the facility will be visible from the Wood and, despite a screening barrier (2.4m high), the battery units (3m), switch room (4.4m) and lighting columns (5m) will be visible. It is also unclear as to what will be the character of the proposed acoustic fence (wooden or acoustic panels) and how aesthetically appealing these will be.

**Specific proposals for the acoustic fence should be documented before any planning decision is made.**

### **Noise Pollution**

Noise emissions from the site will impact on the amenity value of the Wood and its wildlife; particularly bats where human generated noise has an adverse impact. It is disappointing that Duchess Wood was not included as a receptor of the Noise Assessment data provided.

**It is therefore requested that, prior to any planning determination, an additional Noise Impact Assessment is carried out in Duchess Wood, taken from the footpath directly below the proposed development.**

In the event these exceed the postulated plant operating noise levels as permitted by the planning consent, modifications to the proposed acoustic screen should be made to mitigate the impact.

### **Light Pollution**

The FODW can confirm there are active bat populations in the Wood.

**It is strongly recommended that prior to planning determination a Bat Survey be carried out around the wood closest to the site of the development.**

We are concerned about the impact of light pollution on the bat population; especially if it intrudes on commuting and/or foraging routes. Duchess Wood is not listed in the application as a recipient of the Lighting Impact Assessment. However light pollution does impact on wildlife, disturbing circadian rhythms, so it is disappointing the FODW were not included as part of this work.

**Planning consent (if given) conditions should include:**

- **In winter the site lighting at the end of the working day should be turned off.**
- **Given the proximity of the site to Duchess Wood and that the Wood has specific ecological designations, the standard of lighting policy should be higher: ie National Park level rather than Rural. (As per Guidance Notes for the Reduction of Obtrusive Light; GN01/21 (2021): The Institution of Lighting Professionals (ILP).)**

### **Drainage**

Other than light and noise pollution mentioned above, the FODW are concerned about the potential harm to the Wood from both waterborne and airborne pollution. Borehole data, in the Drainage Impact Assessment, is all pre 2002 and we can see no evidence of any current local borehole data. It is noted that the site will include a drainage system and holding tank, but it is unclear where the system will drain to when full/if overloaded.

Several streams and a large burn enter the Woods from the vicinity of the proposed development, and these will carry drainage water from the site. Although drainage mitigation measures are proposed it is not known how these measures will impact on flows in these watercourses. If the measures prove inadequate and watercourses overflow, resulting in damage to footpaths in the Wood, the site operator should be held responsible for remediation of any damage.

**The FODW ask that before any planning determination is made a survey and visual record of watercourses and footpaths, in the area below the development, is carried out.**

## **CONSTRUCTION PHASE**

### **Construction Traffic**

The Outline Construction Traffic Management Plan acknowledges that there will be significant traffic and the need to consider the interface with pedestrians and horse riders. FODW are concerned with the maintenance of safe access / egress to the Woods at the Paterson Drive entrance noting that there are a large number of walkers, many with dogs, that use that route.

**As a matter of public safety during the construction phase there should be a physical barrier between traffic and pedestrians at the Paterson Drive entry point.**

## **Pollution**

A source of pollution quoted in the application is dust produced during the construction phase. The application does specify measures taken to mitigate against spread of this dust but there are significant concerns about how effective these measures will be in protecting the Wood from contamination. Likewise there is a legitimate concern that spoil will contaminate water runoff into the watercourses in the Wood.

## **Noise**

There is no doubt that construction of the facility will cause noise, disrupting the peaceful nature of the wood. It is also noted that there is an inconsistency in what the working hours of the construction site will be. For example the Outline Environment Management Plan quotes the locally adopted hours in Argyll and Bute Council that normally apply to construction works as being 07:00 – 18:00 on Monday to Friday whereas the Outline Construction Traffic Management Plan sites proposes 07:00 – 20:00 working hours for Monday to Fridays during the summer months (Apr – Sep). Which is correct?

**From the Wood's amenity point of view a 18:00 finish during the summer months would reduce the adverse impact on users' enjoyment of the wood.**

Also, the Outline Environmental Management Plan quotes English Bank Holidays as non-working days whereas it is believed the use of Scottish/local holidays would be more appropriate.

## **OTHER RELATED ISSUES OF CONCERN**

### **Preliminary Environmental Impact Assessment**

The application acknowledges that the facility will have a “*localised effect on the character of the very northern parts of Duchess Wood*”. The development size is above the threshold for a full Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) and is next to an area having specific ecological designations being a Local Nature Reserve, a woodland of Long Established Plantation Origin on the NatureScot inventory, a Nature Conservation Site, Open Space Protection area and a much valued local amenity.

**The FODW request that, before any planning determination is made, a full EIA be carried out despite the case being made in the Preliminary Ecological Appraisal Report that one is not required.**

### **Documentation**

A significant number of the documents are classified as “*preliminary/outline/proposed*” and not specific in what is being installed and what the risks are – these factors to be determined during the construction phase. This seems to give the developers a remarkable degree of freedom.

**The FODW would like some assurance that recommendations in the documentation will be made mandatory if planning approval is given and that appropriate oversight of the construction will ensure any constraints/requirements are adhered to.**

It is also noted some documents incorrectly refer to English agencies where a Scottish one has jurisdiction (the Planning Statement (para 95) refers to the EA for Flood Zone information where SEPA should be consulted).

### **Connection to National Grid**

There is no mention of how the plant will be connected to the substation in Glen Fruin and so no comment can be made on this fundamental aspect of the application (although from attending consultation events in 2023 it is understood this will be by laying a cable along Paterson Drive, Duchess Drive, Queen Street and Sinclair Street to the host substation which will cause significant local disruption).

### **Greenbelt**

The Helensburgh Greenbelt is one of eleven in Scotland. Its main purposes are to:

- Protect and enhance the character, landscape setting and identity of the settlement.
- Give space to nature to enhance biodiversity and to benefit physical and mental wellbeing.

NPF4 allows greenbelts to be used for potentially more intrusive developments, eg those associated with renewable energy, but only where the proposal is compatible with the surrounding countryside and landscape character and why the development cannot be located on an alternative site out with the green belt.

**It is the view of the FODW that no compelling argument has been made as to why the development needs to be located inside the greenbelt and so close to a site with specific ecological designations.**