

Stornoway Community Council

Minute of Meeting held by Zoom on Mon 30 Sep 2024 at 7:00 pm

Present	Robert Doig (Chair) Josh Gibbens (Treasurer) Betty Jappy	Kenneth Burns (Vice Chair) Mike Macleod (Secretary) Cameron Thompson
In Attendance	Calum Macdonald (Point & Sandwick Trust)	Martyn Bentley (The Greenspan Agency)
Also present	3 members of the public	
Apologies	1 Ian Minty Cllr Duncan Macinnes	Morag Smith Cllr Rae Mackenzie
Welcome	2 The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and invited the Point & Sandwick representatives to give their presentation.	
Point & Sandwick Presentation	3 Martyn Bentley (Head of Flexible and Future Generation, The Greenspan Agency) explained their history - 16/17 years ago they began as a developer and went on to build Windfarms, Solar, Battery Energy Storage Systems, also Hydro and Anaerobic. They now develop on their own account and with clients. Calum Macdonald (Point & Sandwick Project Lead) explained the background to the Newton project. They had been looking at the possibilities of BESS for some time, but the deciding factor was the 2021 outage on the Skye electricity interconnector, which resulted in an 11 month shut-down of all the community windfarms on the island, since the variable-rate electricity renewables output is not compatible with diesel generation. Insurers will no longer cover island-based windfarms for outage. The intention is that the BESS scheme will allow the variable-rate windfarms to work with the diesel generators. Martyn remarked on the symbolism that we were having this discussion on the day the UK's last coal-fired power station is switched off. Calum explained that the reason from choosing Newton was the proximity to the SSE Power Station there. A different location would have been sub-optimal. P&S had gone ahead to reserve space on the grid - it's now impossible to get another such space as the full 1.8 GW Interconnector capacity is oversubscribed. P&S now propose paying £1k per MW to Stornoway Port Authority as their landlord, that is £25k pa, and the same to Newton Ward Community Association. If they chose, Newton Ward Community Association could become part-owner of the bespoke company that will be set up to manage the project, without needing to put up capital.	
Question & Answer Session	4 A member of the public asked why does the space on the grid have to be given up, if a different location is chosen? Martyn explained that the Grid system is very strictly licenced, and is tied to the project location. Calum stated that you cannot change technology either. The difficulty is that Lewis is swamped by big projects from big companies. The Secretary asked for some clarification on how the project will be paid for.	

**Question &
Answer Session
(contd.)**

- 4 Calum explained that it will be through providing services to both the local and national grids, and arbitrage services, buying electricity at night and offloading during the day. The battery system will be able to supply demand on a millisecond to millisecond basis. Their grid date is 2027, and costs will depend on battery prices at that time. Martyn mentioned that having such a facility will be very helpful in keeping the Lewis & Harris voltage stable.

The Secretary asked who will provide the finance. Calum explained that 70–80% will come from a bank on commercial terms, this is considered the 'senior' debt. The remaining 20–30% higher risk or 'junior' debt would normally be provided by the Developer themselves, so they have some skin in the game. For their existing windfarm P&S obtained the junior debt funding (at a higher interest rate) from the Scottish Investment Bank. This is now the Scottish National Investment Bank.

The Chair asked about connection to the Grid. Martyn explained that the connection would go to the Battery Point substation, there would be no direct connection to the SSEN Interconnector site. Calum said that P&S had put their application in early, several years ago, to get a fixed place in the grid queue. The big companies, Northland etc., piled in once they were sure the big Interconnector was to go ahead. If the Battery project does not proceed, the only way P&S can get more space on the grid is if there is a second big Interconnector (Ofgem is unlikely to authorise this) or if one of the large projects fell by the wayside.

The Secretary pointed out that any P&S financial loss, or loss of their place in the Grid queue from the Battery project not going ahead, are not matters Stornoway Community Council can take into consideration – our only concern has to be whether this development is suitable for the area or not. In this regard the safety concerns raised by residents are of great significance. A member of the public asked for clarification of the chemicals which are to be in those batteries. In particular, in the latest information provided, there is a mention of "Lithium-ion" and then "Lithium-iron". Martyn clarified that "Lithium-ion" refers to the whole class of such batteries, and "Lithium-iron" refers to Lithium-ferro-phosphate batteries, which are considered relatively safer.

The member of the public then asked how the 4-metre acoustic barrier will stop noise pollution. Martyn stated that the angle of noise from the site will be intercepted by having the acoustic fencing so close to the batteries. This is confirmed by the noise model assessment and no objections were raised by the Environmental Health department. The member of the public asked about the Fire Safety Plan, and explained that since the prevailing wind is from the South-East, the proposed second access route for emergency services could also be impacted. Martyn mentioned that the adjacent land, used by SSE, is also owned by Stornoway Port Authority. There are alternative access routes. The member of the public referred to the guidance from the National Fire Chiefs Council – this states there should be six metres between battery modules – and the guidance hasn't changed. Martyn stated the guidance refers to a report by an insurance company called GM Global. This report has since been updated and the recommended distance between modules has now reduced to 1.5 metres. For the Battery Point BESS the distance between modules is over 3.5 metres, more than double the recommendation.

**Question &
Answer Session
(contd.)**

- 4 The Treasurer said, given that the inspiration for the battery project went as far back as 2019, why does the 1.8 GW Interconnector affect your scheme? Calum explained that they had started well before the 2021 outage. All the island windfarms were getting switched off twice a year so SSE could do maintenance – often on Skye and the mainland, which had nothing to do with the Western Isles. Their space was booked long before lots of new companies came in.

The Chair asked what stopped them from choosing an out-of-town location. The Secretary pointed out that the Community Council had received advice that there was no technical reason why the Battery had to be chosen. Our concern was that the reason P&S are now trying to shoehorn this development into a space that is not suitable for it, was simply that Stornoway Port Authority were compliant as a prospective landlord, and that if they had gone for the Arnish Road End location, they would instead have had to negotiate with the Stornoway Trust. Calum admitted that the Stornoway Trust can be difficult to negotiate with. He would prefer to say that Stornoway Port Authority were very go-ahead, this was a plus. However the technical advice received was that the battery should be located as close as possible to the Battery Point Power Station diesel generators to maximise the efficacy of the battery's response. Calum then detailed the long negotiations which they had had with SSE – only after the long outage in 2021 did SSE really take the project seriously. SSE is not the fount of wisdom, in some ways it is old-fashioned.

The Chair said that he agreed with the need for renewables. His concern is location – that CNES is potentially allowing another industrial development within the town. Calum stated that he understood this concern. The Treasurer asked why the P&S Minutes had not been published after 2022. Calum stated that this seems to have fallen by the wayside. He undertook to go back and provide these. Another member of the public asked, surely when planning, you would have had a contingency in place – and given that you said at an earlier consultation meeting, that if there was any opposition you would go elsewhere. After some discussion on this point, Calum confirmed that he had said the application may be withdrawn if there were significant local objections to the scheme. As a small community outfit, they cannot make multiple applications.

The Chair stated that our purpose in meeting with you was to get the reason for choosing this location. He surmised that it all depends on Planning Permission going ahead. An independent Fire Assessment would help alleviate the concerns of residents. The Secretary stressed the importance of having Scottish Fire & Rescue at a national level do the assessment, since they would be able to draw on expertise from other services in the UK. He raised two additional points – given the construction traffic is planned to go along Newton Street, which relies on a 200-year old retaining wall built on shingle, it would be best to consider an alternative route. Martyn confirmed this will be examined. Calum stated that CNES normally demand a traffic plan for construction and afterwards. Martyn said, CNES will ask us to make good.

**Question &
Answer Session
(contd.)**

- 4 The Secretary also suggested a bund, to trap any leak of coolant from the modules. Martyn said that a bund would not be necessary – the coolant is glycol – he doesn't see this as hazardous – but it would be considered by geotechnical consultants in the course of the development. Calum confirmed that SEPA had not raised this with them.

A member of the public asked what will happen when the new interconnector cable is introduced and the existing one is retained. Martyn explained that they will still need a contingency for the local network – this is being engineered for the Shetland grid – the need to bridge the gap when there is an outage, before diesel generators kick in.

Close

- 5 The Chair thanked Calum and Martyn for their presentation and explanations, and everyone for attending, and closed the meeting.