BLACKFORD
RENEWABLES LTD

BLACKFORD ENERGY PARK 500 MW BESS

DESIGN AND ACCESS STATEMENT

Date of issue:	12 May 2025
DOC Name:	DESIGN AND ACCESS STATEMENT
Version:	4.2
Transmission:	P - Public

Version History

Version Number	Transmission Marker	Author	Change Description	Effective Date	Sections Changed
0.1	I	B Wlad	Initial Release	5 Mar 2024	N/A
2.0	P	S Doll	Project Updated	17 Mar 2025	All
3.0	P	S Doll	Reviewed changes	25 Apr 2025	All
4.2	P	S Doll	Final review	12 May 2025	All

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1. Introduction

1.1. Background

This Design and Access Statement (DAS) has been prepared in support of the Section 36 application for the installation and operation of a battery energy storage system (BESS), PV (solar) arrays, associated infrastructure on land at Middleton of Blackford, Rothienorman, Aberdeenshire, AB51 8YL.

1.2. Scope and context

The DAS addresses the proposal's physical integration into the surrounding area through:

- Context Analysis: Evaluating the site, adjacent land uses, infrastructure and transport connections.
- Site Evaluation: Identifying development constraints and opportunities and detailing the design evolution.
- Design Description: Explaining the proposal's layout, scale, appearance, access, and landscaping.

1.3. Principles of a BESS

A key function of a BESS is to charge with electricity from the grid during periods of low demand or excess generation (especially from wind turbine generation) and then discharge that electricity during periods of high demand. Energy will be taken from existing generation sources connected to the grid, including renewables such as wind farms, solar and hydro schemes in the wider area. The existing Rothienorman substation then distributes nationally and to smaller sub-stations regionally to meet demand requirements.

In addition, the BESS will contribute to grid stability by offering services to the National Grid, such as frequency control and inertia.

Energy storage is a key enabler that will allow significant increases in intermittent renewable generation from wind and solar onto the UK electricity system by allowing rapid rebalancing of supply and demand, and critical stabilisation functions. Without these services, it is not possible to connect additional wind or solar to the electricity network. This project specifically, has had its grid connection date accelerated through the grid queue reform process due to its strategic size and location.

The proposed BESS project provides benefit by supporting the Scottish Government's transition to a low carbon electricity system by increasing the capacity of intermittent generation on the Scottish electricity network. Scotland's long-term climate change targets

will require the near-complete decarbonisation of the energy system by 2050, with renewable energy meeting a significant share of the needs.

The Scottish energy strategy published in December 2017 sets a 2030 target for the equivalent of 50% of the energy for Scotland's heat, transport and electricity consumption to be supplied by renewable sources. This is taken forward in the National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4) which identifies, as a National Development, Strategic Renewable Electricity Generation and Transmission Infrastructure to '*support electricity generation and associated grid infrastructure throughout Scotland, providing employment and opportunities for community benefit, helping to reduce emissions and improve security of supply.*
https://www.gov.scot/publications/national-planning-framework-4/

The primary benefits include:

1. Managing imbalance caused by short term discrepancies between intermittent renewable generation, and time variable demand, thereby facilitating improved decarbonisation of the electricity supply system.
2. Providing services to increase power flow capacity on the grid.
3. Increasing security of supply and grid stability.

2. Presentation of the project

This development is for a 500MW/1000MWh (two-hour) BESS, solar generation (2MWp), and associated infrastructure located at Land at Middleton of Blackford, Rothiernorman, AB51 8YN, on cultivated arable land. The land is approximately 16.13 Ha. The 500MW BESS is to be connected to the existing Rothienorman 400kV substation. The solar aspect of the proposed development will only provide auxiliary power for the systems rather than charging the batteries and is not for electricity generation to the grid.

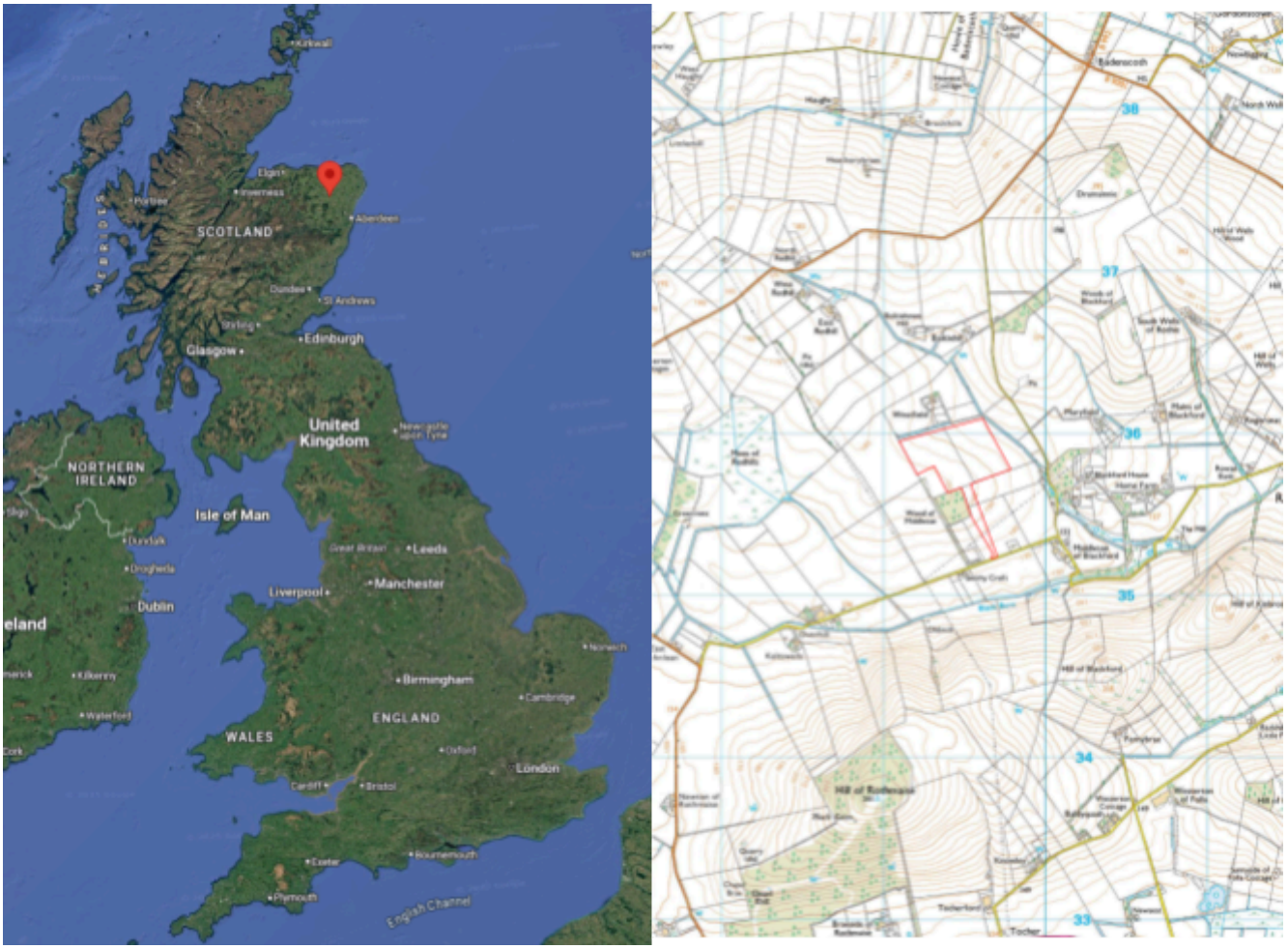
The proposal includes:

- Installation of a BESS facility.
- Green palisade or close-boarded timber security fencing and acoustic screening, ranging from 2.4m to 3m in height around the site
- Rows of battery containers units, 332 total (20ft ISO container size; 6.03m (L) x 2.48m (W) x 2.95m (H))
- Power Conversion System (PCS), 138 total (20ft ISO container size; 6.03m (L) x 2.44m (W) x 2.88m (H))
- Battery units and PCS units are RAL Colour 6007 (Green)
- Emergency Auxiliary Generator (2.08m (L) x 1.78m (W) x 2.4m (H))
- Welfare cabin (2m (L) x 2m (W) x 2.5m (H))
- Electrical Switchgear building (9.55m (L) x 2.48m (W) x 3.72m (H))
- Super Grid Transformer, 12m tall.
- Solar PV Panels, 4608 in number and rated for 2 MW of peak power.

- Access track with a passing bay, connecting the unnamed road to the south of the BESS site, with all construction traffic approaching from the west, as specified in the Construction Traffic Management Plan (CTMP).
- Hard-surfaced site access and foundation slabs for units, with uncompacted gravel within the compound, and asphalt surfacing for at least the first 10 metres from the public highway.
- Landscaping measures, including the retention of all existing trees, the planting of native tree belts, woodland blocks, and species-rich grass verges along the access road and around the site.
- Infiltration pond which slowly releases water into the stream to the East.
- An underground cable connection to the adjacent substation.
- Buffer Tanks, 7 in number.
- Fire Water Tanks, 3 in number.

2.1. Location

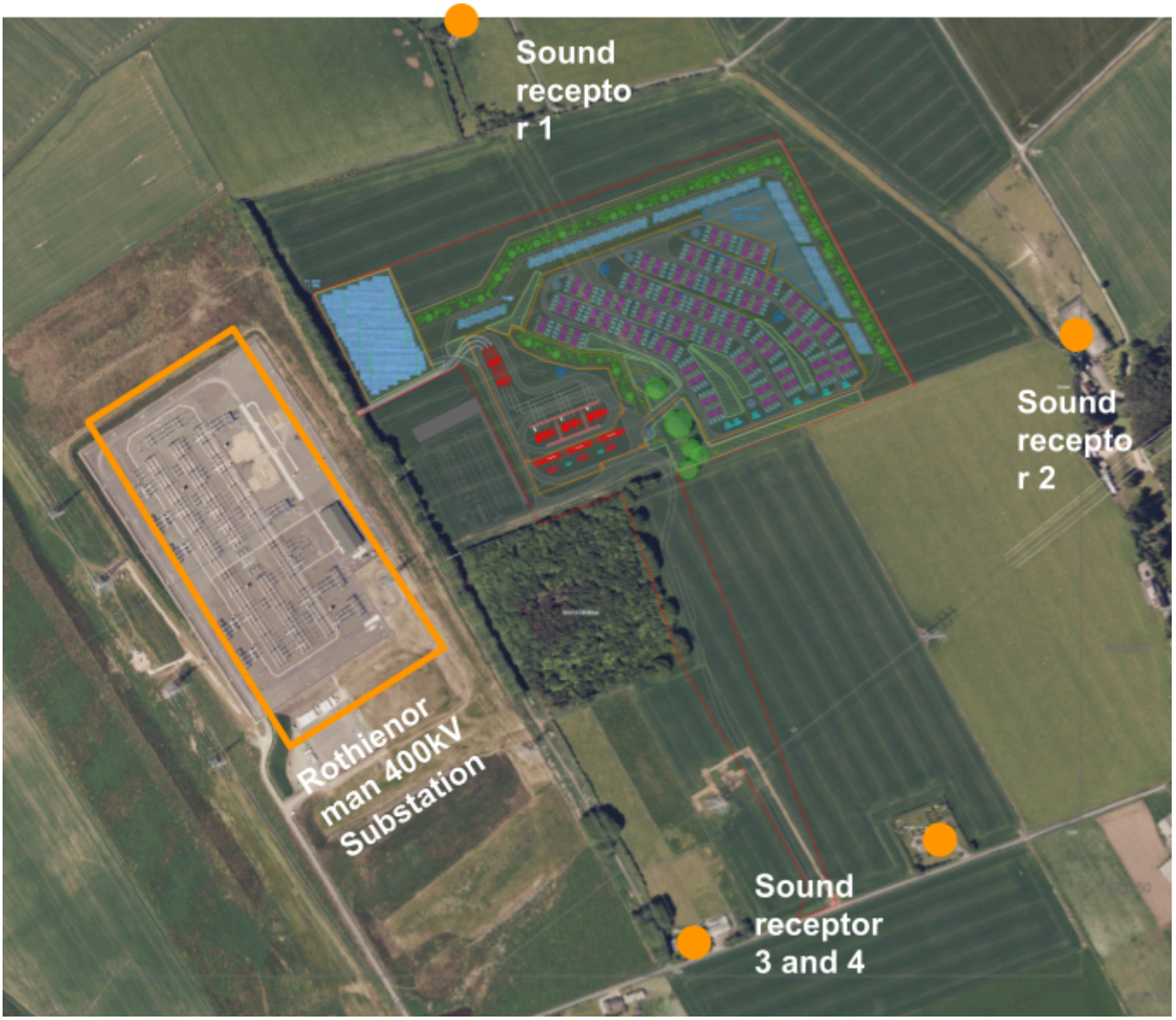
The project is located 2.4km West of the town of Rothienorman, Aberdeenshire, in a rural area.



Location: Blackford, near Rothienorman, Inverurie, Aberdeenshire.

Existing trees and woodland constitute a natural visual barrier to the South and West. The site is in an agricultural landscape with features of electrical infrastructure in the surrounding area such as the adjacent existing substation, grid stability facility, overhead pylons, and distant wind turbines.

The site slopes downhill towards the North Eastern corner where there is a natural drain before sloping uphill again beyond the site boundary to a public unnamed road running north south.



Location and size of the land for the BESS

There are no residential properties immediately next to the site, but several in proximity to the site, circa 200m away.

2.2. National Grid connection offer

A grid connection offer from National Grid has been accepted by Blackford Renewables Ltd with a 2033 connection date, and recently this has been accelerated to 2029 through the accelerated storage program run by NESO. The accelerated storage program was part of the connections reform which aimed to increase the speed that energy storage projects are connected to the grid, especially in strategic places such as Rothienorman where a new substation has been built, and capacity is available.

Reference: A/SHETL/ROTH/22/ROTH-EN(2)

Grid Supply Point/Connection Site: Rothienorman 400kV Substation

- **Connection Entry Capacity**: 500MW
- T**ransmission Entry Capacity**: 500MW
- **Demand Limit**: 500MW

Connection Date: 30 June 2029

2.3. Land availability

We use desktop tools, local contacts, land agents and database registers to search for suitable land close to substations. When suitable land is found, we reach out to landowners to investigate if they are open to dialogue for land lease and purchase options.

The main factors in considering a location include, but are not limited to, the following criteria:

- Connection capacity to the national transmission grid and associated connection offer
- Land availability close to the substation for lease/purchase
- Availability of connection cable routes
- Siting the BESS away from adjacent residential properties, as far as possible to minimise visual and noise impacts
- Setting the proposed BESS into the landscape, to reduce visual impact
- Ecological impact and special protection areas
- Topography and geotechnical conditions
- Site access and construction traffic impact
- Drainage and flooding impacts
- Local heritage/archaeology and historic environment
- Special Protection Areas, National Scenic Areas, Scheduled Monuments

We have determined that the land that we have secured, approximately 50 metres from the existing substation, offers the best combination of availability, proximity to the connection point, avoidance of utility servitudes, access and importantly, lowest impact to the surrounding population and environment.

It is worth noting that a major connection node such as Rothienorman would be expected to have several energy and infrastructure projects connected to it as we transition to a renewable grid, and situating development in close proximity to existing infrastructure avoids ad hoc development across a wider landscape resulting in a greater cumulative impact. This

is particularly achievable in this case because although there are several energy infrastructure projects within 1km of the site, the rolling hills and valley landscape with patches of mature woodland break up direct lines of sight.

2.4. Site access

Site access has been considered in the CTMP attached with this application. This has investigated the access from the A96 to the site. There is a well-established route from the nearest ports and motorways to the site. There are no issues for normal deliveries to and from the site. There are 3 oversized loads required to deliver the 3 transformers. The local road network was recently adjusted for the delivery of super grid transformers to the substation and Grid Stability Facility, by locating this project along the same access routes it will also be able to benefit from these updates such as the widening and reinforcing of roads. It was highlighted that there could potentially be temporary reinforcement works required for the bridge on the A920 approximately 300m from where it meets the A96 for the delivery of any oversized loads. This would likely be a temporary overbridging system.

2.5. Proximity to existing energy infrastructure and landscape

Statutory Designations

Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI): The Site is not covered by any SSSI's. There are also no SSSI's within the 2km study area of the Site.

Conservation Areas: There are no Conservation Areas on the Site or within the 2km study area of the Site.

Scheduled Monuments: There are no Scheduled Monuments on the Site or within the 2km study area of the Site. The closest Scheduled Monument is some 4.0km to the north west: Ythan Wells, Roman camps 1000m WSW of Logie Newton Farm.

Listed Buildings: There are no Listed Buildings on the Site, although there is one listed building within 2km of the Site, Home Farm of Blackford Dovecot approximately 1.0km to the east of the Site.

Gardens and Designed Landscapes: There are no Historic Gardens and Designed Landscapes on the Site or within 2km of the Site.

Public Rights of Way (PRoW): There are no Public Rights of Way across the site itself or within 2km of the Site.

Environmental Designations: Environmental designations in the local context of the Site are limited to regularly or recently cultivated agricultural, horticultural and domestic habitats, grasslands and woodlands.

Proximity to existing energy infrastructure

This site is adjacent to the Rothienorman substation, connected to it are several other smaller BESS sites, a Grid Stability Facility, and wind power generation sites. There are several overhead powerlines transmitting the power to and from Rothienorman.

By bordering the substation, it eliminates the need for underground cables along road networks to connect the BESS to the substation. The transition to net zero will require substantial integration of infrastructure all over the UK but it makes sense to co-locate key elements of the infrastructure together where possible.

The proposed location is not constrained by any special landscape designation. The landscape has elements of existing energy infrastructure although generally being rural and greenfield in nature. The BESS results in an overall moderate adverse visual impact over the longer term and impacts quickly diminish as distance from the scheme increases. Further information is provided in the LVIA.

2.6. Local impact

Assessing any impacts on the local community plays a key part of the site selection process, and we take every effort to reduce and mitigate any impacts. The immediate location of Blackford is rural and has a low density of residential and farming or business premises. As detailed in the pre-application consultation report, there are a number of local issues which we have addressed as well as local benefits this project could bring.

The impact over both the construction phase and the operational phase has been considered. Due to the nature of many infrastructure projects, the local benefits are often minimal while the wider social benefits are well reported and outlined through the fundamental requirement for the infrastructure.

We have taken care to develop a sensitive design, holding public consultations, and adapting our proposal based on the feedback received; see pre-application consultation report (PACR) for further details. We have sought to mitigate community concerns wherever possible through design and in the construction and operational phases.

When selecting a site, factors such as project economics, ecology and environment are important criteria but so is the potential impact on people who live and work in the immediate area, principally due to visual impact and noise. Selecting land away from population clusters, holding open dialogue about the project with local people and their representatives, and minimising impact by using considerate construction techniques and management, helps to build confidence with the local population. Creating new habitats and enhancing existing ecological areas brings benefits to the local ecology and compensates for harms as discussed in the Biodiversity Net Gain Feasibility Report.

We will host community drop-in sessions where local residents can attend to ask questions or raise concerns and complaints directly to the project/development manager; this could

include car/window washing to tackle dust, road litter picks, repairing of damaged road surfaces et cetera.

2.6.1. Construction

The local benefits during the construction phase will include significant bookings to hotels and BnBs, use of restaurants and pubs, and local shops. The local impacts have been further assessed in the consultant reports who have advised on ways to mitigate impacts as much as possible.

2.6.2. Private water supplies (PWS)

From early in this project's development, we have been made aware of the importance of avoiding impact on private water supplies. Local residents do not have access to a mains water supply and therefore rely on private systems. In response to this we commissioned a Private Water Supply Assessment which would highlight if our proposal would impact any of the PWS in the area. During the consultation it became clear that any chance of contamination to the local water supply would be a catastrophic event. Although the chance of a local fire is very unlikely, the severity could be significant, so we updated our design to include the catchment of all surface water runoff from the battery terraces. Although not a common approach for smaller BESS sites this is becoming more common practice for developments of this scale, where PWS and the wider downstream environment could be at risk. The drainage report was updated to reflect this change and it was shown to not affect PWS nor have a negative impact on the downstream waterways, as long as the water discharge rate was equivalent to the current natural drainage. A detailed drainage strategy will be developed during the detailed design stage which will confirm this.

By using the naturally sloping hillside, water will return through drainage channels to buffer tanks before being returned to the lake, and then released in a controlled manner, equal to current discharge rates, into the stream. The downstream waterways would be unaffected by this design. The interceptor buffer tanks serve to protect the environment in the event of an emergency by stopping water flows of affected water until it can be sampled and dealt with.

2.6.3. Landscape

The landscape impact is from the conversion of an agricultural field into electrical infrastructure. The site slopes to the North East. The Southern boundary is mostly obscured by mature woodland, the Western boundary is lined with mature trees and then the connecting Rothienorman substation, the project is relatively open to the Northern and Eastern viewpoints. The extended visibility of the site is limited by the rolling hills and valleys. There are a limited number of properties to the North and East which could be affected. Our landscape-led design approach to the site follows the principle of blending into the existing landscape, with shallow terracing, utilising the natural topography of the land and ensuring that additional tree planting matches the existing landscape. This ensures that the visual impact is strongly mitigated.

3. Involvement

3.1. Pre-application

A PACR is submitted in support of this application.

Aberdeenshire Council and their technical consultees have reviewed the proposals and baseline assessments and provided advice on technical and design matters. These have been addressed and updated with the full application.

3.2. ECU

This project was considered to constitute a Schedule 2 development in terms of the EIA Regulations. In adopting a screening opinion as to whether Schedule 2 development is EIA development, the Scottish Ministers must in all cases take into account such of the selection criteria in Schedule 3 of the Regulations as are relevant to the proposed development, and the available results of any relevant assessment.

Scottish Ministers have taken the selection criteria in Schedule 3 and all the information submitted in respect of the screening request into account and taken account of the views of the Planning Authority. Scottish Ministers adopt the opinion that the proposal does not constitute EIA development, and therefore, the application submitted for this development proposal does not require an EIA Report.

3.3. Public consultation

There have been two public consultations (6th March and 3rd April 2025), and one community council presentation (25th March 2025). A public website blackfordenergypark.com has been live since 25th February 2025 with a public feedback form and contact information.

As mentioned in the meeting, Blackford Renewables Ltd have been one of the only BESS developers, to date, which has accepted and attended the invitation to present our project to the local Fyvie, Rothienorman & Monquhitter Community Councillors.

Furthermore, our project manager and engineers, who know the project intimately attended the consultations in person rather than through PR Consultants. This meant the quality of discussion was high and concerns were properly understood by the team developing the proposals. Technical and detailed answers were given to questions.

The matters raised by the public have been closely assessed and updated the plans where possible. The changes were clearly displayed at the second public consultation event and mostly affected, visual impact mitigation, layout and drainage changes.

4. Design approach

BESS projects are built in a modular fashion and consist of battery units and other infrastructure, the majority of which are similar in size to the shipping container sized units. The exception to this is the high voltage switchgear element that connects the site to the grid. These are 12m in height. The modest size of individual plant limits its landscape impact, especially with respect to the existing pylons and existing large high voltage substation adjacent to the site. This BESS facility is designed to operate at 500MW power with approximately 2 hours of energy storage.

Site layout

After the first public consultation organised in Rothienorman, we paid attention to the local community feedback, where some residents expressed their concern regarding the visual impact, risk to private water supplies, construction disruption, and fire risk management.

Ecological consultants Blackhill Ecology have reviewed the BESS site layout, as captured by the associated Biodiversity Net Gain Feasibility Report. Following recommendations detailed within the report, the scheme shall incorporate additional neutral grassland area (within the existing site boundary) in order to meet the desired and necessary Biodiversity Net Gain.

Noise impact has been mitigated by berms and acoustic fencing, which provides both acoustic benefits and associated landscaping visually softens the scheme, as it is located between and around the different equipment terraces.

The proposed development will be accessed primarily by improving the access approved under Aberdeenshire Planning Application ref: APP/2022/2252 associated with the 49.9MW development adjacent to the site. In addition, there is an existing access to the field's west boundary which will only be available to the emergency services in case the primary access is blocked, or for the continued use by the farmer to access their lands to the North.

To minimise traffic movements during construction, and assist with biodiversity enhancement, we decided to use the topsoil removed from terracing to create earth bunds on the north and east sides of the site, providing additional visual screening. This topsoil is then also available for reinstatement works at the end of life, once again minimising future traffic movements. Topsoil removal is normally one of the largest contributors to HGV construction traffic for a site of this type.

4.1. BESS equipment

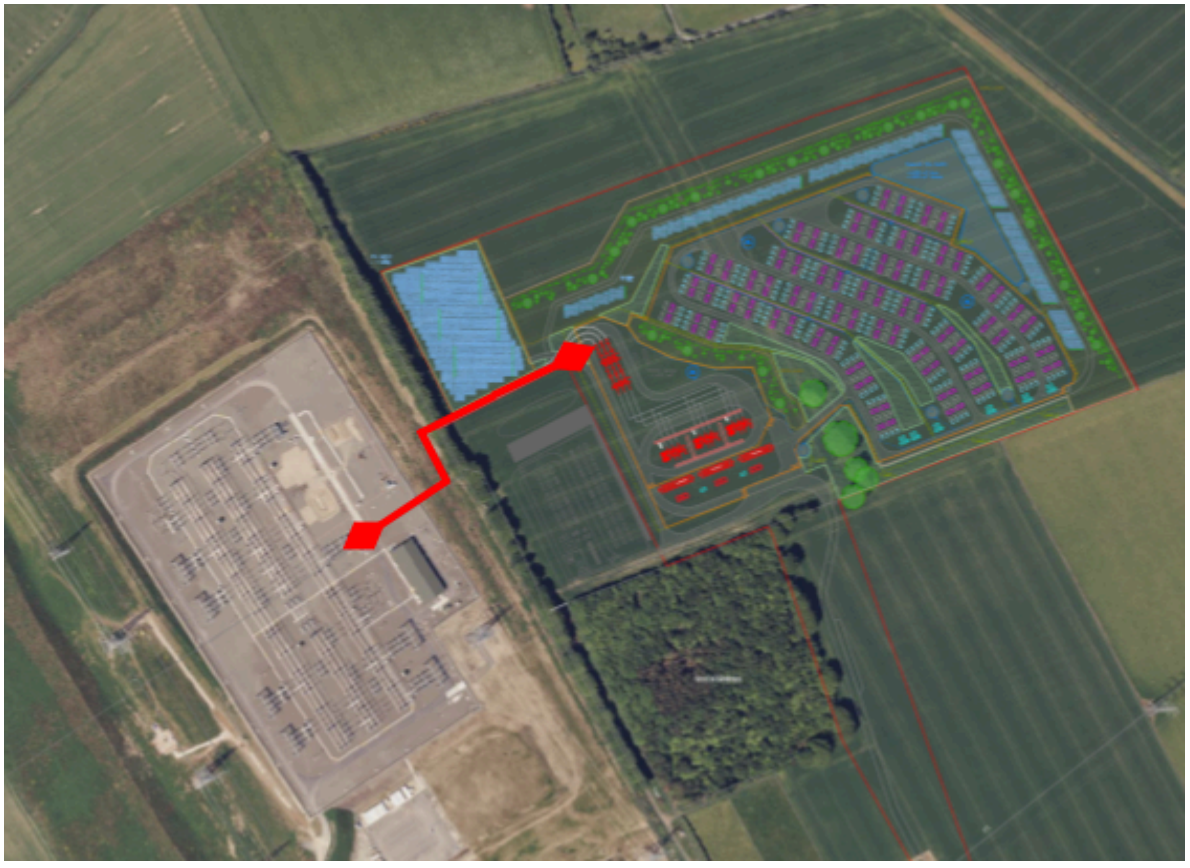
The following equipment, as tabulated below, is to be utilised on-site.

Equipment	Number
33kV / 400kV Supergrid Transformer	3
Air Insulated Switchgear ● 400kV busbars, surge arrestors, disconnectors, circuit breakers, insulator posts, etc.	1
33kV Switchgear Building ● 2 x Switchgear Units each	3
Main Control Room	3
Emergency Diesel Generator (Main Control Room) *Only used during grid failures for critical functions.*	3
Medium Voltage Power Station (MVPS) Skid ● 1 x Inverter ● 1 x 0.66/0.33kV Transformer	138
20ft ISO Battery Containers	332
Solar Panels	4608
Water tanks (Buffer tank)	7

Equipment	Number
Water Tank (Emergency supply)	3
LV Control & Switching Room (Auxiliary)	6
Emergency Diesel Generators (Auxiliary) *Only used during grid failures for critical equipment auxiliary loads.*	6
Transformer 33kV/400V (Auxiliary)	6
Amenity Building	1
Storage Container	4

In addition to the proposed development, Blackford Renewables Ltd will be responsible for the installation of the underground cable connections between the BESS substation and the existing Rothienorman substation.

Electricity would be imported and exported between the BESS substation and the existing substation.



400kv proposed cable route

The cables will be installed underground and are not visible after installation. They will be laid at an appropriate depth so that agricultural vehicles will be able to drive over them to access the fields to the North.

4.2. Landscaping

The full landscaping strategy and an LVIA has been undertaken to assess the suitability of the site and inform the design. It has been submitted with this application.

Landscape Strategy

In common with all projects of this nature it is necessary to remove the topsoil in areas where access tracks or equipment is located. The topsoil will be stored on site to reduce road movements and project wastage, the topsoil will be used to create berms As already described.

Due to the natural slope of the terrain, it is necessary to create terraces to provide level ground to mount the equipment, and this technique also minimises the visual impact on the landscape, especially to the North Eastern viewpoints. Instead of the usual lattice of batteries and associated equipment, the battery rows will follow the contours of the hillside which will greatly reduce the amounts of earthworks required and allow for greater visual screening by berms and planting.

Local quarries will be used when possible, to provide stone material for groundworks, some internal roads, dressing, and gabion baskets.

Each battery terrace will be lined with an impermeable layer to catch and channel any water towards the buffer tank. Each terrace will have a buffer tank with an automatic penstock.

The site was designed, in discussion with the landowner, to ensure that other areas of the farm can continue in their current operation without impact. A specialist landscape team will be contracted to ensure that the long-term wellbeing of the site is maintained and that features such as the lake are inspected frequently.

4.3. Noise receptors

When planning large scale BESS sites, noise is one of the primary concerns both during construction and when operational. When searching for suitable land, close to substations, sensitive noise receptors are a major factor of site location. As it is almost impossible to fully resolve the issue through site selection alone within the UK, the engineering design typically also incorporates other mitigations including constructing noise barriers, acoustic attenuators or baffles, orientation, earth works, and physical spacing.

The proposed land offers separation from receptors, natural topography of the land and proximity to the existing substation.

Extensive acoustic modelling work has been carried out to create an acoustically optimised layout to ensure that noise from the BESS site will not have a detrimental impact on sensitive receptors and meets the requirements. Noise impact on visitors to the area is not a significant issue as there are no known attractor facilities (for example, tourist areas, natural beauty locations or core / cycle paths in close proximity to the site), and the noise produced by the site is unlikely to be perceptible to a casual visitor during daylight hours. The full Noise Impact Assessment accompanies the application.

4.4. Ecological site surveys

Extensive ecological surveying has been conducted over the last few years for this general site area. Specifically for this development the following reports have been commissioned to ensure the site is suitable for the project and that any habitats are protected or enhanced.

- Initial Habitat Survey
- Tree Survey
- Protected Habitat and Species Survey
- Tree Constraints Plan
- Tree Protection Plan
- Protected Species Plan
- Biodiversity Net Gain strategy

The site design was also adjusted by the ecological consultant who advised on re-rerouting an internal road between existing trees, updating the planting and landscape strategy to ensure grasses were the correct seed mix, and trees were appropriate to the local area.

4.5. Construction traffic and access

A construction traffic management plan has been developed to assess and advise on managing the construction traffic. The construction period is approximately 18 months and during this time there will be a significant number of deliveries to the site. Fortunately, there is already a well-established route to and from the site that avoids Rothienorman village and maximises the use of main roads. Overall, the proposed construction access route can accommodate the expected volumes.

Traffic during the operational phase will be minimal, as the maintenance and control of equipment will primarily be conducted remotely. During the operational period there is expected to be biweekly visits for landscaping and equipment maintenance. Consequently, the impact on the surrounding road network and environment will be negligible.

4.6. Air quality

The construction phase will involve the use of HGVs and plant equipment for approximately 18 months. Without mitigation, this could lead to temporary dust accumulation. To minimise these impacts, the following mitigation measures will be implemented:

- Wheel-washing equipment will be used to prevent dirt from being transferred onto public roads.
- Water spraying to settle any excessive dust as advised by the construction manager.
- Dust-generating activities will be reduced during dry and windy conditions.
- Soil stockpiles left for extended periods will be covered to prevent wind dispersion.

Once operational, the development will not emit pollutants under normal circumstances. Several emergency backup diesel generators will be installed on-site, operating only in the

unlikely event of a major equipment failure or a power outage affecting the national grid. This generator will enable the operations team to remotely monitor and interact with site equipment during such events and potentially use the site to help stabilise or restart the National Grid.

As BESS facilities produce zero emissions under normal operating conditions, this project makes a significant contribution to Scotland's net-zero targets while ensuring minimal environmental impact. Compared to other forms of energy generation, this development will have a negligible effect on air quality, making it a sustainable and environmentally responsible addition to the local energy landscape.

4.7. Sustainability

The development will generate economic and employment benefits, creating contract opportunities for local and regional contractors during both the construction phase and throughout the project's supply chain whilst increasing renewable generation on the grid and supporting the addition of further renewable generation sources to the grid. This investment has the potential to support local businesses through employment opportunities, procurement of construction materials, and increased local spending. Additionally, it will provide the landowner with a more diverse income stream, delivering further economic benefits.

The key social and economic benefits of the development include:

- Employment opportunities during the construction phase.
- Permanent jobs related to landscape and arboreal management during operation.
- Indirect employment opportunities created within the supply chain, as companies provide services to the development during construction.
- Increased local economic activity driven by additional wage expenditure.

These benefits are considered primarily in relation to the construction phase, with similar effects expected during decommissioning. During operation, the facility will be largely managed remotely, although specialist roles will be required for site maintenance. A Community Wealth Building Plan accompanies the application.

Construction contracts will be awarded for services and materials, with local sourcing prioritised where feasible. However, procurement will be subject to competitive tendering and the specialised nature of some equipment. Direct opportunities for local contractors may include, but are not limited to:

- Accommodation services for workers
- Significant procurement of local stone and construction materials
- Surveying and environmental enabling works
- Excavation and groundworks
- Concrete and aggregate supply
- Machinery and Plant hire
- Security and landscaping services

- Mechanical, electrical, and supervisory services

Maintenance of the development will be carried out by qualified contractors, who will visit the site as needed, typically twice per month. General site maintenance will be performed mainly during the summer months, while safe access will be maintained year-round.

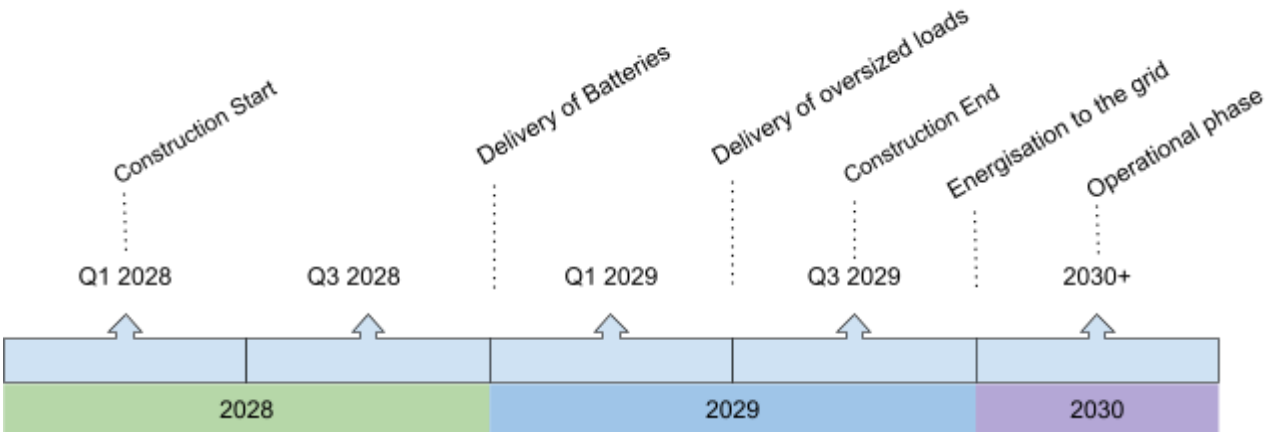
In terms of environmental sustainability, the project contributes to an increase in biodiversity as specified in the Biodiversity Net Gain report.

5. Restoration plan

The project has an expected operational life of between 25 to 40 years, after which it will be returned to its current condition of agricultural land of grade 3.2. All plant, equipment, foundations and cables up to a depth of 1.5m will be removed and reused or recycled where possible. All aggregates and materials, foundations will be removed, the site will be relevelled to its current topography and then the top soil from the berms will be spread around the site again. It should be noted that to restore the site to its current condition, all of the planting in the landscaping strategy, except pre-existing trees, will need to be removed unless otherwise agreed with the local authority.

6. Timeframe / Key dates

Proposed programme:



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