

# Alex Cunningham MP

## Stockton North



Ms Elaine Atkinson  
Senior Planning Officer  
Planning Development Services  
Stockton on Tees Borough Council  
Church Road  
Stockton on Tees TS18 1LD

Monday, 31 July 2023

Dear Elaine,

### **16/1978/FUL High Middlefield Farm Durham Road**

Thank you again for attending the public meeting I arranged for the people of Thorpe Thewles and the surrounding area on Friday evening to answer planning related questions on the application to now build a “battery backed inverter system” on land at Middlefield Farm. I know local people welcomed your participation.

I noted, as did local people, that the new proposal is a very different proposition to the original gas fired power station that was proposed for the site – though I understand the considerable concerns of local people over the scale of the development in a rural setting. During his own answers to questions, Mr Andrew Troupe, gave the categorical assurance that there would not now be any application for the gas fired power station – and I was pleased to hear you confirm to local people that if there was, it would be a completely new application and would require a full assessment of the environmental and other impacts. Similarly he gave the undertaking that the proposed building was the maximum size likely to be required and he would not seek any amendments to the planning application to make it bigger.

Clearly that will be of some reassurance to local people though with the company able to switch from one type of application to another of considerably less impact so quickly makes me question what their original intention really was. Not a planning consideration I know.

I would rather not see such a huge development in a rural setting but I know there are limits to the Planning Authority’s powers to reject it. I would however reflect the comments made by members of the community at and before the meeting.

The issue of potential noise remains very much of concern as does the visual impact of such a development. I would hope that if the Committee was mindful of approving the application, they would first satisfy themselves that the claims made about noise by the company are robust – and that they will not be allowed any variation in noise levels beyond that in the current application. You will know more than me that it is all too common for companies to be granted approval for one type of development only for, sometimes a series, of amendments being sought after a Committee decision.

I think it is also important that the Committee considers any knock on effect at the National Grid sub-station which is already noisy according to local residents. Similarly I know they will consider whether the company ought to consider alternative non rural sites on Teesside or even elsewhere given that the new complex is simply a battery electricity storage facility rather than a power station and the connection requirements to the National Grid would probably be quite different.

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I referred earlier to the scale of the building and the undertakings given by Mr Troupe that it was already at a maximum size and there would be no need for an amendment to the application for anything larger. Again if the Committee was mindful of approving the application I would hope the conditions would make it clear that no application for a bigger complex would be supported.

Again assuming the Committee are content to approve such a development in a rural setting local people and I would see the need for robust measures being put in place by the local authority to minimise disruption to the village during the construction phase and keep local people safe.

Many people at the public meeting made the point that they feared large numbers of large vehicles passing through the village during the construction phase, the impact on local infrastructure and on their homes and families. I share their concerns – particularly as Mr Troupe couldn't clarify exactly what the vehicle flow would be - and hope the construction traffic plan will reduce or even eradicate the flow of such traffic through the village through a temporary access to the site through an existing farm road or a temporary route through from the bus stop on the main road.

Mr Oliver Troupe suggested at the meeting that even if a temporary access could be arranged, he would still see fully loaded vehicles pass through the village to the site and then leave by an alternative route. I personally do not accept this. All construction traffic could approach the site from the south towards the temporary route and leave the site by the same route by then heading north.

I would very much hope that the plan agreed with the company could simply take the construction traffic away from Thorpe Thewles altogether but in the worst case scenario of traffic having to travel through the village I would hope to see local people consulted and clear restrictions put on the timing and speed of vehicles entering the area. In such circumstances, consideration also needs to be given to safe road crossing points for local people and appropriate signage for them and drivers.

Finally I understand that as part of the process the company have pledged a £10,000 community bond. Whilst it is not compulsory, I would hope not only to see it confirmed but would go further and hope it would be increased somewhat given the multi million pound development and the substantial returns it will achieve for whoever ends up owning the asset.

Thank you again for attending on Friday evening. I am sorry I cannot attend the Committee in person but know you will ensure they have an opportunity to read my letter.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Alex Cunningham', written in a cursive style.

Alex Cunningham MP