

4.0 BACKGROUND

- 4.1 The Scottish Government, working with the UK Government, has identified Hunterston as a potential location for a carbon capture and storage project and considers that, as a general principle, new generating plants should be sited adjacent to existing thermal power stations to make use of supporting infrastructure.
- 4.2 The proposed power station would be located within the designated area allocated for industrial purposes at Hunterston and in that respect the proposal is in accordance with the Development Plan of North Ayrshire. This planning policy position fulfils the existing National Planning Framework, which recognises that Hunterston's deep water assets should be realised. Notwithstanding, development proposals are subject to an integrated transport study and require to be subject to an environmental impact assessment.
- 4.3 The proposal is 'national' in scale and the decision on the application will be made by Scottish Ministers under Section 36 of the Electricity Act. North Ayrshire Council's role is to deal with the details of the application in relation to policies in their Development Plan and make representations to the Scottish Ministers.
- 4.4 The power station, while multi-fuelled, would use predominantly coal and potentially up to 15% biomass. On coal alone, it is claimed current technology would reduce carbon emissions by up to 25% compared to conventional power stations, although the proposal is based on the development of carbon capture technology to further minimise environmental impact. According to the applicants, this technology will be installed once 'technically and commercially viable'. The power station is expected to be open and operational in 2017, with a 3-year construction period commencing 2014.

5.0 PROPOSALS

- 5.1 The proposal being major in scale and having potential wider implications in terms of impact required North Ayrshire Council to formally consult Inverclyde Council as a neighbouring local authority. The submission of supporting documentation for the development proposal has been examined by relevant officers and the following main issues have been identified as having potentially an impact on Inverclyde: traffic, environmental (predominantly air quality) and employment.

Traffic Impact

- 5.2 The principal road connection between Inverclyde and Hunterston is the A78 trunk road along the coast. This road is the responsibility of the Scottish Government key agency, 'Transport Scotland', and given a Traffic Assessment has been submitted in support of the proposal and Transport Scotland is required to be consulted in relation to the trunk road, this issue is largely outwith our hands and will be part of the consideration given to the development proposal by North Ayrshire Council and in turn, Scottish Ministers.
- 5.3 Consideration has been given to the potential likely effect of estimated increased traffic flows on the A78 for local roads within Inverclyde. The TA provides estimates for both the Construction Phase and the Operational Phase.

(a) Construction Phase

- 5.4 There is an estimated 70-month construction period with the peak design year being 2014. Deliveries are sustainable, predominantly being by rail and sea. There will be a peak workforce of 1,620 per day with on-site living quarters for 750. Those who will travel to work daily are more likely to travel by car due to the distance to the nearest railway station at Fairlie, and the timetable of buses, especially on a Sunday between the nearest settlement (Fairlie) and the site, determined the trip distribution model and showing traffic originating in the rest of Ayrshire, Inverclyde and Renfrewshire. The junctions assessed between Hunterston and the south, including Kilmarnock, all operate within capacity, while the number of trips from within or passing through Inverclyde was

not considered to be significant.

- 5.5 It should be noted however, that it was not possible to consider junctions within Inverclyde in detail due to the lack of information on distribution of estimated trips north of Largs, from the junction of the A78 and A760 (Haylie Brae). Equally of note, in the event of the Inverkip Power Station site being granted planning permission for a mixed use development in accordance with the adopted Local Plan, issues concerning traffic impact on local roads off the A78 arising from this development will have been addressed prior to the opening of this development at Hunterston.

(b) Operational Phase

- 5.6 The majority of transport to the site will continue to be as sustainable as practicable, by rail and sea, with potential to extend the railhead further into the site for the purposes of goods traffic. It is estimated that there will only be two HGV trips per day to the site. 160 staff, working in shifts, will be employed on the site. It is expected that the majority of those employed will travel by car and are expected to originate from Ayrshire, Inverclyde and Renfrewshire. However, it is not considered that those trips originating from within or passing through Inverclyde will cause a significant problem within Inverclyde because of the relatively small number involved.
- 5.7 Irrespective of these findings, and acknowledging the sustainable transportation intentions of the developers, further encouragement should be given to travelling by train to the site. To assist with this, it is recommended that a shuttle bus service be considered between Fairlie railway station and the site, to coincide with train times, and that this be introduced from the outset by the developer during the construction phase.

Environmental Impact

- 5.8 Consideration has been given to the potential impact of the development proposal on two aspects of air quality: from emissions from the power plant when operational and pollution from the estimated additional vehicle traffic through Inverclyde.
- 5.9 Having examined the relevant information submitted in support of the planning application, it is officers' opinion that this development proposal would have a negligible impact on air quality standards in Inverclyde, both in terms of additional vehicle movements through the area and also because of the regulatory regime governing levels of emissions that will have to be complied with before any such multi-fuel power plant would be granted planning permission. This latter consideration would apply to the plant before and after having installed the technology that may be developed for carbon capture and made operational at this plant.
- 5.10 With respect to other environmental impacts, for example the visibility of the highest building (115 metres) and the chimney stack (expected to be some 152 metres high), from viewpoints along the coast in Inverclyde or from the Regional Park, the distances involved, even at the southern boundary of the authority, mean that this impact would also be negligible. In terms of other visible impacts, it can be expected that plumes of water vapour will become a new feature in the sky and given the prevailing winds, these could potentially spread across the southern border of Inverclyde, but again not unduly so, and should rapidly disperse before affecting the settlements of Wemyss Bay and Inverkip. Climatic conditions would clearly determine the impact of these trails and their permanence above Inverclyde.

Economic Impact

- 5.11 As indicated above, there is the prospect of employment opportunities for Inverclyde residents during both the construction phase and once the power plant is opened and operational. These new job opportunities are relatively small in number and therefore it is concluded would have little impact for Inverclyde.

- 5.12 An additional consideration that is worth noting in relation to potential future employment growth and job opportunities at Hunterston relates to the identification of the site for the development of renewables technology and its manufacture. In this respect, the site can be seen along with Inverclyde's waterfront location at Great Harbour/Inchgreen as being complementary in the drive for future growth and development of new jobs in this industrial/business sector on coastal sites in west central Scotland.

6.0 IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 There are no financial, legal or personnel implications arising from this report, nor any implications for other Services of the Council, other than as reported above in relation to the consultation undertaken in the preparation of the report.

- 6.2 **Equalities:** the report has no impact on the Council's Equalities policy.

7.0 CONSULTATION

- 7.1 **Chief Financial Officer:** no requirement to comment.

- 7.2 **Head of Legal and Democratic Services:** no requirement to comment.

- 7.3 **Head of Organisational Development (HR) and Performance:** no requirement to comment.

- 7.4 Consultation has been undertaken with Environmental Services, Roads and Transportation Service, and Safer and Inclusive Communities, with regard to their respective responsibilities. Paragraphs 5.2 to 5.10 are based on the comments received from these two services, following a meeting held to discuss the Hunterston proposals.

8.0 CONCLUSIONS

- 8.1 Having examined the documentation and the information that is available supporting this planning application, it is the view of the officers involved across the relevant services, that there are no significant potential adverse impacts and/or disbenefits likely to arise from this proposal for Inverclyde. On the assessment undertaken, it is suggested that there are no grounds for recommending an objection be submitted to North Ayrshire Council on the proposal.

- 8.2 However, given the scale of the development and the potential for further amendments to be made as this proposal is progressed by North Ayrshire Council, and subsequently Scottish Ministers, it is proposed that North Ayrshire be recommended to keep the Head of Regeneration and Planning informed of future developments and that this Committee be kept informed, as appropriate.

9.0 BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 9.1 The planning application and all the relevant supporting documentation submitted to North Ayrshire Council for consideration can be viewed and/or downloaded from the Council's web site:

<http://www.eplanning.north-ayrshire.gov.uk/OnlinePlanning/applicationDetails.do?action=showSummary&caseNo=10/00369/CON>

Head of Regeneration and Planning
Cathcart House
6 Cathcart Square
Greenock