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You may have seen a news article recently about the plans for a power station built on land adjacent to RSPB Saltholme. Over the past 10 years, we have, with the support of landowners Teesside Environmental Trust, created a haven for nature in the heart of one of the UK's most industrialised areas. Here are some of the facts relating to this proposed development:

- There is currently a planning application with Stockton Borough Council for a gas peaking plant to be built on land adjacent to RSPB Saltholme. A gas peaking plant uses compressed natural gas to generate power at peak times when there is a high demand for electricity. For example at half time during an FA cup final when everyone goes to make a cup of tea.

- The land involved in the proposed development is owned by Teesside Environmental Trust (TET) - the RSPB's landlord at our Saltholme reserve - and it is low-grade agricultural land outside of the main reserve boundary. It currently doesn't provide any significant benefits for the important wildlife at Saltholme and does not fall under the Special Protection Area (SPA) designation.

- Detailed ecological studies have been undertaken, which indicate that the development will not have a negative impact on protected wildlife. We will only allow the development to go ahead if we are certain that it won't have an adverse impact on local wildlife.

- The predicted noise level of the gas peaking plant is 55dB, which is around the same as a normal spoken conversation, and is unlikely to have any adverse impact on the protected areas of the nature reserve

- During the construction phase of the project, there will be a noise level of 75dB and this would be at the site of construction. To put this into context, a lawnmower will register at around 90dB. The noise levels lower with distance from the construction site, so when the noise reaches the protected area of the nature reserve, it will be below the acceptable level of 55dB and we believe this will not have a negative impact on the wildlife here at the reserve

- The size of the peaking plant covers 2.8 ha or just over 2 ½ football pitches, whereas an actual power station is in the region of 28ha or 28 football pitches. The actual building size housing the gas engines is only around 75m x 30m (around ¼ of a football pitch) similar in size to the adjacent sub-station building (though lower in height).

- All rental income will go directly to TET as the Landlord.

Why aren't the RSPB fighting this development and what exactly is being proposed?

As the UK continues the transition towards a low carbon economy, renewable energy is ever more prominent as the lowest cost, cleanest form of electricity generation. But with a higher proportion of our energy sourced from renewables, it is becoming increasingly challenging to balance the UK grid and keep the lights on, particularly when there is little wind or during times of peak demand.

During the transition period of starting to use more renewable energy there will be periods when there is a gap in the supply and demand, typically at peak evening and morning activity times.

Currently, this extra demand is supplied by large gas turbine power stations running at low load, which when used like this are very inefficient and have a relatively high carbon footprint as they take a long time to start and stop when the extra electricity may only be needed for a very short time. In contrast, modern, gas reciprocating engines like the ones proposed at Saltholme, are far more efficient and produce a lot less carbon as they can be started and stopped very quickly. It has been estimated that using one of these peaking plants to provide the peak demand cover in place of a big gas turbine power station could cut carbon emissions by the equivalent of 10,000 cars annually.

Although the RSPB is fundamentally against the further use of fossil fuels for providing our country's base load electricity generation, this type of facility could actually help reduce carbon emissions during the period of transition towards a true low carbon, renewable energy economy by reducing the amount of gas used by large inefficient powerplants designed to be running at full power being used as a stop start backup.

If anyone would like any further information about this proposed development, please do contact the reserve on 01642 546625 or saltholme@rspb.org.uk.

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RSPB Saltholme

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