Devon Data Campus
Devon Data Centre+Bess Action Group
General Presentation Script

1

Good Evening
Thank you for this opportunity to talk to you tonight about the Devon Data Campus.
My name is (Stephen Boulton) and I am a member of the Devon Data Centre and BESS Action Group Steering Committee and I'm joined this evening by (our Chair, Emily Clark).
Can I just say before I start, that we have carried out several of these presentations over recent weeks and obviously there is a huge difference in knowledge of the proposals within our communities, so I apologise in advance if any of you have already heard, or are aware of some of what follows.

2

The plan this evening is to just give you a brief recap of the proposals as we understand them, this includes what we were told by Xlinks at their one and only public meeting held in June, and also what we've been able to ascertain from our Torridge District Council Freedom of Information Requests.
Following this, I'd like to give you a quick update on where we are as a campaign group and then take and try to answer any questions that you may have.
I hope that's ok with everyone.
So, in summary this is what we know about the proposal, the Developer Xlinks, also known as Status Data Development Ltd, or Valeon, and their plans to date.

3

The site is approximately **850 acres** of predominantly Grade 3b of Devon's best and most versatile pasture land located between Great Torrington and the hamlet of Huntshaw Water.
The land is significantly undulating and has long distance views towards Dartmoor, north towards Torrington and Bideford and west to Monkleigh and Hartland.
The site falls within Local Authority Landscape Character 3A, and
I'll actually read you the designation, it's categorised as **Upper Farmed Wooded Valley Slopes with High Culm Ridges, rolling pastoral landscapes and is valued for open vistas, sunken lanes, species rich hedgerows, dark skies and a strong sense of remoteness.**

4

Now, of this **850** acres, around **100** is presently allocated for **1.8 GW** of battery energy storage, or BESS. That's potentially some **16 million** Lithium Ferrous batteries stored in somewhere between **1700 and 2000** shipping containers.
The other **750** acres of the site will be home to five main data halls which will house data servers and process equipment. In total we believe that there could be as many as **18** separate buildings along with significant infrastructure, extensive cooling plant, one new **400** and **5** new **132 KVA** substations.

5

From Xlinks briefing to Torridge District Council, we believe that the **total building area** is going to be around **61 hectares or 150 acres.**

The two largest buildings each have a footprint of around **22 acres and are 40 metres** in height. To give that some context, each of these buildings could house Exeter Cathedral **18 times ?????** over.

There appears to be a further 3 other significant buildings but we don't need to worry about those as they are only **15 metres** high.

6

Now Xlinks maintain and as they reiterated at their one and only public meeting in June, that they were unable to publish any details of the scheme because it was 'still at an early stage'. They actually offered a couple of generic AI generated images indicating a few buildings sat within a flat landscape.

However, from our Freedom of Information request to Torridge District Council, it is quite clear that substantially well-developed proposals were put before Torridge DC as part of pre planning application discussion as early as **March 25.**

7

Clearly we appreciate that these were early confidential discussions, however, from the information that we have obtained, the proposals were significantly well detailed at that stage and Xlinks and their consultants, contrary to what they subsequently stated about being too early to show to the public, clearly at that stage had an extremely good ideal of the scope and scale of their development.

Notwithstanding Xlinks economy with the truth, I think that one of the single most concerning things to come out of our investigation, is that Torridge District Council, before any environmental statement or public consultation had taken place, told Xlinks in writing that they were **'in principle support'** of the scheme.

8

Now Xlinks have told us that they are proposing to submit two separate planning applications.

The first will be seeking Full planning approval for the battery element BESS, 1.8 GW in total. The second will be for the Data Centre and will be in Outline form only.

They have stated that the two applications are completely independent of each other and neither relies upon the other in terms of viability of the scheme as a whole.

Now why are they doing this? Strange because they appear to be trying to sell the DEVON DATA CAMPUS to everyone as a single unified development.

Digressing slightly, but talking of Devon Data Campus, did you know that it was actually Torridge District Council that came up with the name.

9

So why are Xlinks pursuing the batteries as a full planning application and the data centre in outline form only?

They have already told us how wonderful for the local area and for North Devon their Data Campus proposals are going to be, some **600 to 1200** permanent jobs, up to **3000** construction jobs and around £3 billion or so for our communities and local economy.

Oh, and I think that Great Torrington is going to get a new dental surgery!

Absolute nonsense.

In my personal opinion, I don't believe that Xlinks themselves are particularly interested in the Data Centre element of the scheme. I believe that they are effectively using the Data Centre as a smoke screen to gain approval for what they really want, and that's the battery energy storage system BESS.

10

The data centre will be used to promise jobs and financial benefits to local economy. But the BESS is the real money earner.

If a 1.8GW BESS scheme is approved, it gives them an instant income via arbitrage, (buying and selling), in other words manipulating their electricity grid connection to maximise revenue, it also gives them a reason to resurrect their previously failed Moroccan cable scheme which they have just recently reiterated, is not off of the table, and more worryingly, it opens up a market to the whole of North Devon for uncontrolled renewable energy schemes.

Just a little bit about Arbitrage, which I'm sure most of you already know, but in summary it is where BESS Developers take energy from the grid during off peak low cost periods, store it for a few hours and then sell it back to the grid at peak times of high demand and high cost.

11

Consumers pay for this energy 'management' and developers such as Xlinks and their overseas investors reap the reward from our higher electricity bills and the subsidies that they receive through our taxation.

Please don't get me wrong, I'm not saying that the Data Centre element is not an equally important and unimaginable threat, but as we can ascertain from the documentation available to date, it is not going to be Xlinks building out the Data Centre, but a third party.

And this is why Xlinks have said that they will only be seeking outline planning permission for the Data Centre because this allows them to obtain a planning approval in principle and then the scheme can be negotiated, shaped and developed to suit whichever particular end user comes along.

12

That way, all of the negotiation is with Torridge DC therefore removing any real opportunity for the public to comment or express any opinion on the design.
Keeping the two elements completely separate, allows Xlinks to obtain approval for the BESS, but avoids them making any real commitment on job numbers or financial benefits to the economy that may result from the data centre.
Now Developers such as Xlinks, argue that BESS is a key component of the Government's renewable energy strategy, but did you know that the current Government 2030 Net Zero target for batteries is **23 to 27 GW** and the National Energy Systems Operator (NESO) is suggesting that **50 GW** could be required by 2050.

13

To date, the Government has achieved just over **7 GW** with a further 2 GW coming on line by the end of 2026. However, most notably cumulative and consented projects now actually surpass **95 GW**.
Why do you think that this target is already oversubscribed?
Maybe, and just as a suggestion, that it's such a lucrative money making scheme, developers are falling over themselves to get a piece of the action.

14

Now coming on to the programme, we understand that Xlinks will be holding their rearranged public consultations over the next few months with a view to submitting planning applications in spring 27.
We also understand that they are trying to set up behind closed door briefings for local organisations including parish councils.
I don't know if you have been contacted by them, but if so, I'm sure that you will have quickly come to the same conclusion that we did, the only response being an outright refusal to entertain such a thing, thereby ensuring that open and transparent dialogue with the general public is maintained.

15

Just quickly, I'd like to update you on our Devon Data Centre and Bess Action Group campaign which we are jointly running with Devon CPRE.
Clearly, until we get sight of a finalised scheme from the Developer, we are unable to provide definitive comments, however, from what we know to date, we understand the location and can certainly ascertain the general scale and scope of the proposals.
Our Action Group comprises of a main steering committee which coordinates the campaign and then we have a number of bespoke technical sub groups who answer to the main committee.
Our groups are presently researching topics, such ecology, archaeology, legal, technical issues. This is not a definitive list and will be adapted / expanded as necessary.

16

I can say though, that we've been astonished by the abundance of technical and local knowledge found within our communities and the offer of help and assistance that we've received.
Our fund raising activities will primarily go towards meeting the cost of procuring any additional specialist technical expertise that we need.
The majority of our fund raising is through CROWDFUNDER.CO.UK which is then channelled through a bespoke account managed by our partners CPRE Devon. CPRE's charitable status allows us to take advantage of Gift Aid.
Now I could stand here all night and talk about this scheme but I'm sure you have other things to discuss, but hopefully, I've given you an adequate summary and maybe a few things to ponder.

17

I'd just like to hand you over to Emily to talk about a couple of up and coming events and then if anyone has any questions, we'll do our best to answer them.
Thank you

18

Sir Geoffrey Cox is running Open Surgeries on Saturday 12th Sept at Great Torrington Town Hall.
There are two sessions, the first commencing 10.30, the second an hour later at 11.30.
Numbers are limited to 75 maximum for each session so it's first come, first serve.
Sir Geoffrey is then going to continue with his normal one to one surgery afterwards
Devon Data Centre & BESS Action Group will be there to provide support and answer questions where we can.

19

The second event has been organised by CPRE and will be at the Alverdiscott Village Hall commencing 7.30pm on the 24th September.
This is a seminar on Battery Energy Storage and the state of the Electricity Grid in South West England.
Unfortunately at this time due to restrictions on numbers, it will be limited to local councillors, council officials and technical officers, but if enough members of the public express an interest, we'll be looking to find a bigger venue and throw out a general invite.
Finally, I would just like to say that you can keep up to date with matters by visiting our Facebook page or visiting our website NO DEVON DATA CENTRE.CO.UK and obviously all donations will be gratefully received. CROWDFUNDER.CO.UK