



FROM THE LORD WILSON OF SEDGEFIELD
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Dear Anne

Thank you for your valuable contribution to the Grand Committee debate on energy National Policy Statements EN-1, EN-3 and E-5 on 9th July.

I promised to write to you on the concerns you raised in relation to the safety of battery storage plants and how the stored energy from such plants will be transported. These matters are addressed below.

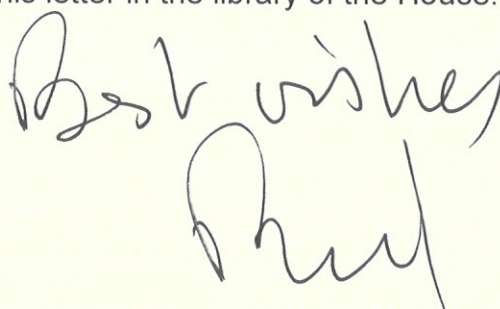
While fires have occurred at battery sites in Great Britain, these are rare and are mitigated by a robust regulatory framework overseen by the Health and Safety Executive. This framework requires responsible parties to take measures to ensure health and safety throughout all stages of a battery system's deployment. Battery developers and operators, who have the most detailed understanding of the risks involved in this technology, and who face the costs of repairing and replacing units in case of damage, have a duty to manage risks. They work closely with fire services to draw up emergency response plans.

To complement this framework, government has committed to consult on the principle of including grid-scale batteries in the Environmental Permitting Regulations (EPR). EPR requires battery sites to demonstrate to the Environment Agency that risks are avoided or controlled (e.g. through specific fire prevention and emergency plans). EPR will also provide for ongoing regulatory inspections.

The government has updated Planning Practice Guidance to encourage battery storage developers to engage with local fire and rescue services, and for local planning authorities to refer to guidance published by the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC). This is so that issues relating to the siting of battery storage sites are considered before a planning application is submitted. NFCC guidance recommends that battery sites are located a minimum of 25 meters from occupied buildings, however this distance could be reduced where appropriate fire mitigation measures are in place.

Turning to the Government's position on overhead lines, it is our view that these should generally be the starting presumption for transporting energy to where it is needed, except for in nationally designated landscapes, where undergrounding should be the starting presumption. While overhead lines cause less environmental damage than undergrounding, the presumption in favour of undergrounding in nationally designated landscapes is due to visual impacts rather than environmental protections. In addition, overhead lines are much quicker and easier to build, maintain and interconnect with existing circuits. Undergrounding costs an estimated four and a half times more than overhead lines, according to a study published in April by the Institution of Engineering and Technology. The cost of building this infrastructure is borne by electricity bill payers and it is paramount that we keep costs down.

I will place a copy of this letter in the library of the House.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Best wishes' followed by a stylized signature.

LORD WILSON OF SEDGEFIELD

The Baroness McIntosh of Pickering
House of Lords