

Why has the council withdrawn from the Hybont project?

Bridgend County Borough Council has had to make the very difficult decision to withdraw its financial support from this project because of the very challenging budget situation the authority is now facing, in common with many other local authorities in Wales and the UK. In this difficult financial situation, the council must now prioritise its resources on essential service delivery, so as part of this it is reviewing its involvement in a range of projects, including HyBont.

Will the project continue?

The HyBont project is a proposed partnership to develop a green hydrogen demonstrator initiative between Marubeni Europower Limited (MEL) and what is informally known as 'Team Wales' which comprises of Welsh Government, Cardiff Capital Region (CCR) and Bridgend County Borough Council (BCBC). The council has been working alongside all of these organisations to develop this project and look at the potential benefits of using green hydrogen to decarbonise part of our refuse collection fleet.

At this stage, MEL, Welsh Government and CCR are looking closely at the project to understand if it can be reshaped to continue without the involvement of BCBC. At this point, it will not include the proposed heat network as that was to be funded via BCBC.

Will the planning application for the Hybont proposal still go ahead?

Yes, the determination of the planning application submitted by Marubeni Europower Ltd, based on the individual merits of the application by officers of the local planning authority, will continue. Once Welsh Government have decided whether or not they wish to call the application in for national determination, a special planning committee will be called at an appropriate time in the autumn.

A planning application can only determine if the proposed land use is appropriate for the location, looking at matters such as use, design, siting, and transport issues. It is not for the planning application to determine whether the proposed operation is e.g. safe – that would be determined via an application for a Control of Hazardous Substances licence (see below).

Also, this planning application does not include any details for the proposed heat network as that would be subject to a separate planning application. However, now that BCBC have withdrawn financial support from the project, at this stage it is unlikely that this will proceed.

What does 'the Welsh Government can call in the planning application' mean?

Welsh Government have the right to call in any planning application that it feels requires national determination. In line with this, it has reserved the right to call the Hybont planning application in.

This means that BCBC will send the planning officers' report on the project and the proposed recommendation (i.e. to approve or refuse the application) to Welsh Government. Once they have reviewed the report, they will decide whether they wish to determine the application by taking all the planning officer comments and recommendations into consideration, or whether the application will be sent back to the council to determine as the local planning authority. It is anticipated that the officer report will be sent to Welsh Government in early October, and that we will wait to hear back from Welsh Government on what the next step will be.

What official assurances will be sought regarding the safety of the project?

All proposals that involve industrial processes of this nature are required to submit a Control of Hazardous Substances licence - they cannot operate without this. While it is a matter for the council as local planning authority to grant a licence via the Development Control Committee, they must also consult with statutory operators such as the Health and Safety Executive and Natural Resources Wales. A licence application will only be granted if they deem the proposal to be safe and compliant. Marubeni Europower Ltd are intending to submit this licence application to BCBC later this autumn.

Why is the application for a 'demonstrator' project?

While the project has been classed as a demonstrator, it is not intended to establish how hydrogen is produced using an electrolyser - this is not new technology, and is currently in use across 16 other locations in the UK as well as being widely used across Europe and the world.

Existing examples of how hydrogen is both produced and used include Aberdeen City Council and their bus fleet, Wright Bus in Northern Ireland and HydroFLEX in Birmingham, which is a ground-breaking partnership between the University of Birmingham and Porterbrook. Supported by a £750,000 grant from UK Government, this is seeking to develop a hydrogen-powered application that can be retrofitted into current in-service diesel trains to help decarbonise the rail network.

With the Hybont project, the demonstrator component is the software that is planned to be used. It will assess the demand for hydrogen, match it to times when it is cheapest to produce, and lower the costs of producing and reducing waste and making the process more efficient. This, not the production or application of hydrogen, is what is being funded for demonstration via the proposed Hybont Project.

What does green hydrogen mean?

This simply means that hydrogen is produced using renewable energy, such as from wind or solar farms. As these are completely sustainable energy sources, they produce 'green hydrogen'.

Where can I find further information about the Hybont project?

There is more detailed information available on this project on www.hybont.co.uk.

