By: **Mark Dance, Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Economic Development**

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To: **Economic Development Cabinet Committee- 21 September 2012**

Subject: **Richborough Energy Park**

Classification: Unrestricted

Summary: This report details the emerging proposals for the development of an energy park at the site of the former Richborough Power Station. Some initial thoughts are offered on the economic benefits of this development to the local and wider Kent community.

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1. Introduction

1.1 The original Richborough Power Station in East Kent operated from 1962 to 1996, with final demolition being undertaken earlier this year. It originally burnt coal, but later converted to oil and bitumen. The station was also the site of an experimental wind turbine in 1989, which at 1MW was the biggest then installed anywhere in the UK. There is still an interconnector from the original power station in place which is now the grid link for the Thanet Offshore Wind Farm.

1.2 Since 2000, ownership of the site has rested with a company called Richborough A Ltd. In 2007 Richborough A appointed BFL Management Ltd (BFL) to be the masterplan developers providing the expertise, infrastructure and services to bring the site back into use as a green energy park. When fully operational, the park could employ up to 100 full time staff.

2. The proposed development

2.1 Biomass Combined Heat and Power (CHP)

A proposed biomass CHP plant (20-30MW) capable of producing enough electricity to power the equivalent of 20,000 homes together with heat for local businesses and agriculture. It would be fuelled using a sustainable woodchip source requiring approx. 300,000 tonnes per annum. The current wood resource annually available in Kent is approx. 60,000 tonnes per annum. There is potential to utilise some of this resource and to grow more. However, the availability of cheaper woodchip resources from Europe suggests the bulk of this requirement would need to be imported.

2.2 Anaerobic Digester

A proposed anaerobic digester plant (3MW) capable of producing enough electricity to power the equivalent of 1500 homes. Anaerobic digestion is the process whereby green wastes can be converted into useful products by micro-organisms in the absence of air. Biomass is put inside sealed tanks and naturally occurring micro-organisms digest it, releasing methane that can be used to provide

clean renewable energy. The residue material left over at the end of the process is rich in nutrients and can be used as a fertiliser. Almost any biomass can be used including food waste, crop residues, slurry and manure. The proposed plant would require 40,000 tonnes of green wastes per annum which it is anticipated could be sourced from the local area.

2.3 Peaking Plant

A proposed gas or diesel fired peaking plant (20-30MW). A peaking plant is a backup power station that operates when there are high levels of demand for electricity (peak demand) or shortfalls of electricity supply. Due to the increase in renewable technologies in the UK such as wind, it is important that the National Grid secures a supply of backup power when these technologies cannot produce the required output. It is anticipated that a peaking plant at Richborough would operate between 100 and 300 hours over a year.

2.4 Electricity Interconnector with Belgium

National Grid plans to use part of the site for an electricity interconnector with Belgium. The interconnector is a joint project between National Grid and Elia, the Belgian transmission system operator, and would be the first electricity link between the two countries. The link would allow power to flow in both directions and would be the third electricity interconnector connection between Kent and Europe after France and the Netherlands.

3. Planning considerations

3.1 The proposals have not yet been formalised into a planning application(s). However, the brownfield nature of the site, its long association with power generation, its allocation for waste separation and transfer and energy from waste proposals suggest the development is consistent with local planning policy. Notwithstanding this, there will be issues to resolve around traffic impact, emissions and ecology. In the case of transport, while the local highway network is much improved, there is potential to import fuel stocks via the Port of Ramsgate and by rail.

3.2 BFL have been working on the development of proposals and a masterplan for the site. They have undertaken a series of public consultations to inform this, most recently in June when BFL held two local exhibitions. Further consultation has been on going with various stakeholders including officers from Kent, Thanet and Dover. It is not known at this stage whether a single planning application will be made for the whole park which may place it within the remit of the Planning Inspectorate, now the agency responsible for operating the planning process for nationally significant infrastructure projects. A phased approach bringing forward proposals on a technology by technology basis would see applications dealt with by the local planning authorities with KCC handling the energy from waste proposals.

4. Economic benefits and opportunities

4.1 The development of an energy park is consistent with the County Council's economic strategies as expressed through the 'Bolds Steps for Kent' and 'Unlocking Kent's Potential' the framework for regeneration. It also supports

objectives set out in the 'Kent Environment Strategy' and 'Low Carbon Opportunities for Growth'. Locally it can strengthen the vision put forward by Laura Sandys, MP for Thanet, that East Kent has the potential to become a leading hub for green energy technology and engineering. Alongside the existing offshore wind farms, solar farms and potential in other offshore renewable technologies, the proposed energy park adds further critical mass to this idea.

4.2 The energy park will regenerate and bring back into use a 60 acre brownfield industrial site creating up to 100 local jobs and a further 500 during the construction phase. It has the potential to be a UK exemplar for new green energy technologies and a source of local renewable energy generation reducing both carbon emissions and reliance on fossil fuels. The energy park can also support the growth of allied businesses in the locality consistent with the objectives of the East Kent Expansion scheme. The marketing company, Seven Hills, have been made aware of this opportunity for inclusion in their inward investment campaign for East Kent.

4.3 The presence of an energy park will also be good from the perspective of local skills and training opportunities. Thanet College has a growing interest in green energy skills and will be opening a new Centre for Environmental Technologies in 2013. The potential for a visitor exhibition centre as part of the energy park has also been mentioned. This could help to raise awareness of new renewable technologies as well as providing an information point for advice and support linked to domestic and business energy efficiency.

5. Recommendation

That the Cabinet Committee notes the emerging proposals for an energy park at Richborough and without prejudice to KCC's position on future planning applications acknowledges the economic benefits for Kent linked to this development.

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