

22 May 2024

PRIOR NOTIFICATION OF A FORESTRY BUILDING

APPLICANT

This application has been prepared by Wharfe Rural Planning on behalf of the applicant, Broad Oak Properties.

SITE ADDRESS

Land off Leek Road, Stoke-on-Trent ST10 2EJ.

PROPOSAL

The purpose of the development sought under the prior notification is for the erection of a forestry building with a track. The building will be used for the processing of timber to produce biomass fuel.

FORESTRY UNIT SIZE

The applicant owns 127 acres of land, with over 40 acres of this being woodland.

FORESTRY USE

Broad Oak Properties is a professional arboricultural contractor and biomass producer working across Stoke-on-Trent. The company specialises in the following sectors.

Biomass Production

The company seeks to expand and diversify its existing biomass production. The main source of woodchip received is from the removal of dangerous trees/debris and low branches from roads, the product is dried and then sold for biomass.

Tree Plantation

Broad Oak Properties maintains a dedicated tree plantation as part of its commitment to environmental sustainability. In recognising the impact of its activities and, in a conscious effort to mitigate it, the business is dedicated to a 'cut one, plant two' philosophy.

Natural Flood Defences

Natural resources such as timber logs are used to hold back water to slow the flow of surface water runoff created after heavy rainfalls, into the surrounding towns using specialist machines. Natural flood management reduces the impacts of flooding by using natural methods such as planting trees, restoring peatland and creating leaky barriers/dams.

Arboricultural and Forestry Services

In addition to the above, the applicant works with various forestry businesses and contractors to provide the following:

1. **Tree Pruning and Trimming:** This includes pruning trees to maintain their health, shape, and structure. This includes removing dead or diseased branches, reducing canopy density, and shaping trees for aesthetics and safety.
2. **Tree Removal:** When a tree is dead, diseased, or poses a threat to property or safety, tree removal is carried out. This involves safely cutting down and disposing of the tree while minimising impact on the surrounding environment.
3. **Diagnosis and Treatment of Tree Diseases:** Identifying and treating various tree diseases and pests. Including recommendations and administering treatments such as insecticides, fungicides, and nutrient supplements to enhance tree health.
4. **Emergency Tree Care:** During storms or other emergencies, assessing and addressing tree damage may be necessary. They may provide emergency tree removal services and take measures to stabilise damaged trees.
5. **Cabling and Bracing:** This involves the installation of cables and braces to support weak or structurally compromised trees. This helps prevent branch or trunk failure and extends the life of the tree.

FORESTRY CONTEXT

Forestry is the art and science of protecting, conserving and managing forests, woodlands, tree plantations and natural resources. Since forest ecosystems are incredibly important to the planet, the field of Forestry is just as crucial for the environment as it is for our communities and economy.

Forestry is a multi-disciplinary and complex profession that involves the management of many values in addition to timber, including: biodiversity, wildlife habitat, water quality, recreation, employment, and community stability.¹

The scope of forestry is extensive, covering everything from large-scale forest management and policy development to specialised practices aimed at maintaining the health and safety of individual trees.

The applicant specialises in a range of arboricultural services focused on the protection of forests and woodlands. Arboriculture, a particular branch of forestry, focuses on the care, maintenance, and management of a group of trees or individual trees. Arboriculture is concerned with the health and well-being of trees in various environments, including urban and suburban settings.

The applicant's expertise includes managing tree health, conducting environmental impact assessments, implementing conservation strategies, and advising on sustainable land use practices. By employing advanced techniques and knowledge in arboriculture, the applicant ensures the preservation and enhancement of natural habitats, contributing to the overall health and sustainability of forest ecosystems.

In addition to the above forestry services provided by the applicant, they are also involved in afforestation. Afforestation involves the process of creating new forests by planting trees on land that has not previously been forested. This practice contributes to the expansion of forested areas, enhancing biodiversity, improving air quality, and providing new habitats for wildlife.

¹ <https://www.aefuc-aufsc.ca/what-is-forestry/>

RENEWABLE ENERGY CONTEXT

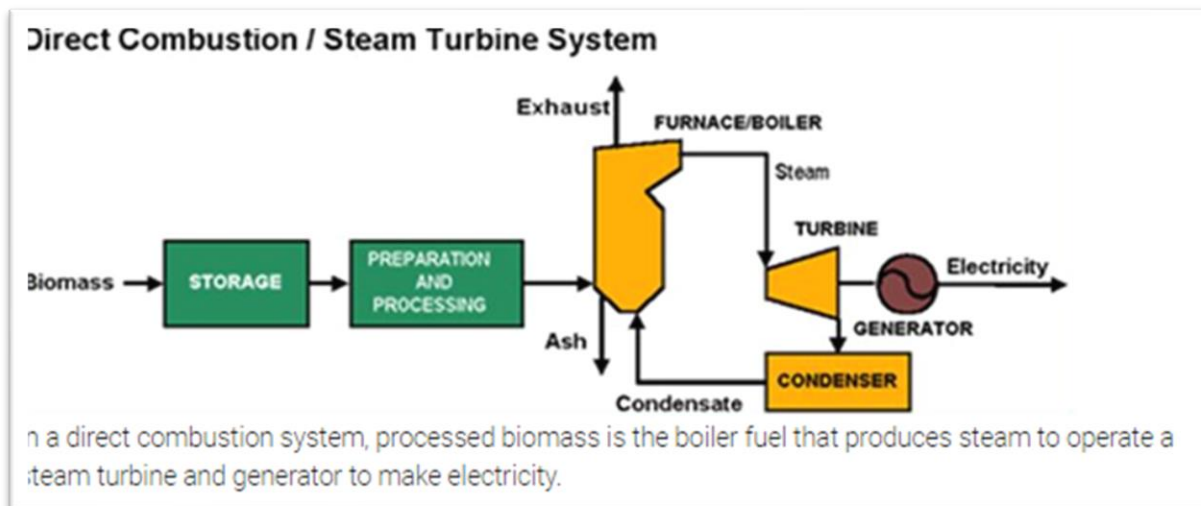
Renewable energy

The world's climate is changing, and it is widely understood that the reliance on fossil fuels needs to shift. The development and implementation of renewable energy sources are one of the ways it can be addressed. Using sustainable fuel sources for heat and power is one way to tackle climate change; it is a hot topic in many strategy and policy papers. Bringing the technology forward requires investment and the appetite to enter the growing market.



Biomass from timber

Biomass from wood uses the plant material for energy production, electricity or heat. Biomass is classified as a renewable energy source in the EU due to the cycling of CO₂ back into new crops. Raw timber from logs cannot be processed efficiently by a wide range of users, such as the domestic setting. Therefore, processing raw forestry materials is required to make it suitable for efficient use.



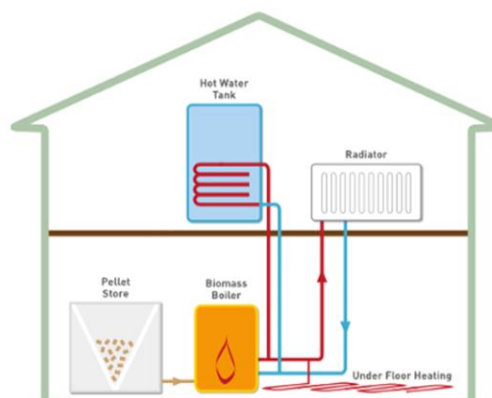
The image above shows the end to end process of biomass production and how it is used to generate electricity. The processes highlighted in green would produce a suitable size of dry biomass material, which can then be provided to the end-users for their biomass boilers. One common product type is wood chips, which are used in a biomass boiler as shown in the image below.



The image below provides visual representation of how the biomass system is used in a domestic setting. It is much the same as a typical gas or oil-fired system, but through replacing the fuel source with renewable biomass pellets.

How Biomass Boilers work

A Biomass Boiler works just like an oil or LPG boiler – it burns fuel to heat your water and your home. It will produce just as much heat as an equivalent oil or gas boiler but use a much cheaper, carbon-neutral fuel; such as wood pellets which are fed automatically into your boiler. Replacing your existing boiler is a straight-forward process and your new carbon-efficient boiler will require very little maintenance.



(Energyway.co.uk)

REASONABLY NECESSARY

In order to allow for the continued growth and expansion of the business, a suitable sized building is required for the production of biomass. The applicant intends on creating a plantation of trees within the site, making it a self-sustainable long term project that will increase efficiency and scale.

The applicant has multiple partnerships through which they source the woodchip, including contracts with Stoke City Council to ensure that trees removed for safety reasons from the roads of Staffordshire can be used for biomass to power boilers in Staffordshire. The business is growing and is currently proposing to supply Stoke City Council who have several biomass boilers in municipal buildings to fulfil their chip requirements.

The Biomass is then sold to companies and individuals who own biomass boilers. The business has seen an increased demand as biomass has become a favourable carbon-neutral alternative to traditional electricity or gas heating for properties.

As per legislation requirements under Part 6, Class E of the GPDO, the fuel for the proposed boiler under this application, would be provided from the existing tree stock on the application site only, and wood brought into the building from off-site locations would be dried in the building by the biomass boiler. Trees would also be replanted on site to mitigate any tree loss on site.

SITING, DESIGN AND EXTERNAL APPEARANCE

The proposed building is a modern, purpose-designed forestry building, utilising a steel portal frame and box profile roofing. The building has been designed for the purposes of the biomass production operation, and will contain a dry and wet store, drying floors and a biomass burner.

The building will measure 1,000 sqm, and will have an eaves height of 6.5m and ridge height of 9m. The proposed building will be sited immediately adjacent to the tree line so that it is well-screened.

There is an existing access into the site from Leek Road, this will not be altered under this proposal. The proposed new track will lead to the proposed forestry building, however this will not be within 25m of Leek Road, in order to comply with legislation requirements under Part 6, Class E of the GPDO.

ASSESSMENT AGAINST LEGISLATION

Part 6 Class E of the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (England) Order 2015 (as amended) sets out the limitations of development permitted by the Order. A response to each of the restrictions is provided below.

Development is not permitted by Class E if:

PARA	THE ORDER	RESPONSE
E.1(a)	It would consist of or include the provision or alteration of a dwelling;	COMPLIES
E.1(b)	The height of any building or works within 3 kilometres of the perimeter of an aerodrome would exceed 3 metres in height;	COMPLIES
E.1(c)	Any part of the development would be within 25 metres of the metalled portion of a trunk road or classified road; or	COMPLIES
E.1(d)	Any building for storing fuel for, or waste from, a biomass boiler or an anaerobic digestion system would be used for storing waste not produced by that boiler or system or for storing fuel not produced on land which is occupied together with that building for the purposes of forestry.	COMPLIES The fuel for the biomass boiler would be sourced from the wood from the application site only, and the only

		waste stored within the application building would be from the biomass boiler within it.
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CONCLUSION

The building is reasonably necessary for the operation of the holding, and the application complies with all the criteria and conditions of the legislation.