The Westerhill AI Energy Campus: A Survey of Local Opinion

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Introduction

In July 2026 a public survey was launched to gather information on the views of the constituency in relation to the proposed Westerhill Data Centre and Battery Energy Storage System(BESS). The scheme as proposed by Apatura consists of a 300MW data centre campus alongside a 500MW battery energy storage system located at Crosshill Road between Bishopbriggs, Cadder and Lenzie.

The proposed systems are set to be connected to the Lambhill substation and are to use a closed loop water cooling system with surplus heat being offered as a possible source for a district heating network. The goal of the survey was to understand the sentiment of local residents, including which aspects of the scheme create the greatest concern and what community benefit would be expected to ensure the impact on the community is adequately compensated.

Method

The survey was hosted online and promoted through the office's digital channels including Facebook and the weekly newsletter. Fieldwork ran from 2 to 27 July 2026, and 1,555 responses were received. the survey consisted of seven questions: four on specific aspects of the scheme (BESS safety, construction impacts, roads and traffic, and employment), one on the priorities a community fund should support, one asking for an overall view, and one inviting free-text comment. Additionally, residents were asked to include their postcodes to allow for mapping of community sentiment in relation to site proximity.

Of the 1,555 responses, 1,441(92.7%) came from residents of the constituency. A further 108(6.9%) came from postcodes outside the constituency and 6(0.4%) could not be classified. For the purpose of this report non-constituency and non-classified responses have been excluded with all assessment being carried out using the 1,441 constituency responses unless stated otherwise.

Regarding the dataset provided, it is worth noting the potential for self-response bias. Respondents opposed to a proposal are significantly more likely to raise their concerns than those who hold a favourable view. This negativity bias is likely to have been intensified by sharing of the survey in anti-data centre groups online.

Results

Opposition was close to uniform. Asked for an overall view, 1,295 respondents (89.9%) opposed the proposal, 85 (5.9%) were undecided and 61 (4.2%) supported it. Opposition exceeded 89 per cent in both postcodes nearest the site, G64 and G66, and was lower – though still around three-quarters – in Bearsden and Milngavie.

Table 1: Responses to the four specific questions ()

Question	Response	Constituents	%
Q1 Safety of the BESS	Strong concerns	1,261	87.5
	Do not know enough yet	74	5.1
	Comfortable	54	3.7
	Minor concerns	52	3.6
Q2 Main construction concern	Loss of natural habitat	779	54.1
	Noise pollution	467	32.4
	Increased traffic	147	10.2
	No concerns	48	3.3
Q3 Roads and traffic	Very concerned	1,212	84.1
	Somewhat concerned	142	9.9
	Slightly concerned	50	3.5
	Not concerned	37	2.6
Q4 Jobs	Not enough benefit to outweigh other concerns	1,060	73.6
	A negative impact on the area	273	18.9
	Welcome growth in the local economy	68	4.7
	A major benefit	40	2.8

The most uniform response was in relation to the safety of the BESS system. However, this failed to surface as a primary concern within the freeform section of the survey with just 8.4% of responses highlighting this as a primary concern. Instead, the subjects recurring most often were noise (34.5% of comments), water consumption (32.0%), wildlife and habitat loss (17.4%), employment (15.6 per cent), traffic and roads (14.5%), electricity demand and household bills (12.3%), health and wellbeing (9.9%).

Following the safety risk of the BESS the roads and traffic concerns see the most uniform concern with 84.1% of constituents stating that they are “very concerned” about the impact. The question about jobs follows the road and traffic concerns with 73.6% of responses stating that there was not enough benefit to outweigh the other concerns. Interestingly the category with the second most votes in the jobs section was the response that suggested the jobs created would have a negative impact on the community, yet only 2 written responses come close to this stating the jobs are unnecessary as unemployment in the area is low.

It appears when assessed alongside the other questions this set of responses comes from a group that oppose the suggestion that there can be any positives to arise from the development of the site. Those who stated the jobs created would create a negative impact were three and a half times more likely to reject the community fund outright and were the most consistently oppositional group including in the written response section with 66.2% leaving a written response as opposed to the 49.9% average.

Of those who did not reject the community fund outright, 680 (47.2%) selected green spaces, nature and local woodland, 326 (22.6%) youth activities, 132 (9.2%) community groups and 99 (6.9%) local

transport. A further 204 (14.2%) selected "other", with many of those rejecting the premise, describing a community fund as a bribe or a sweetener.

The 108 non-constituency responses were more strongly opposed still: 100 (92.6%) opposed, 4 supported and 4 were undecided. This would be indicative of the self-response bias with those more likely to be involved in opposition to data centres more widely being more likely to be exposed to the survey.

Discussion

There are three primary trends that stand out when analysing the dataset. The first is consistency across questions. Concern is not concentrated in one issue that a design change might resolve: 87.5% hold strong safety concerns, 84.1% are very concerned about traffic, and 89.9% oppose the scheme overall. The simplest explanation is a pre-determined view of the proposal as a whole rather than a set of separable objections.

The second is the treatment of mitigation/the benefit to the community. The jobs and community fund questions were both framed around benefits, and both were largely rejected. Community benefit packages are a standard mechanism for securing consent for infrastructure, and the survey suggests that for those who responded to the survey this mechanism has limited sway. The third is what the free text adds: water consumption was raised in almost a third of comments although no question asked about it, and because respondents could name only one construction concern, the closed questions understate the number holding several concerns at once.

Before going further, it is worth noting that the survey records what people believe, and does not take into account whether the beliefs held are grounded in the facts of this particular application. Several responses mention unfounded claims, or claims that do not pertain to this particular site.

With that in mind the survey demonstrated that the greatest concern was noise pollution. Data centres run continuously, and complaints elsewhere note the disruption caused by fan cooling systems, the type of system that the Westerhill site will be reliant on due to the closed cooling system. Apatura has also failed to provide information on the noise pollution expected to be produced by the site which undoubtedly raises concerns.

In contrast to concerns about noise, water concerns appear to have been driven by external examples, largely from the US, rather than the information provided by Apatura on the Westerhill site or other comparable Scottish sites. The figures circulating online derive from evaporative-cooled facilities in hot, water-stressed American states. In contrast Scotland's thirteen operating data centres together use roughly 0.006% of total supply, and Scottish Water actively promotes closed-loop designs. The concern is nonetheless unresolved rather than unfounded, since "closed-loop" is a description rather than a regulated standard and no water figure has been published for this site.

Battery safety shows the largest gap between perceived and measured risk. Only 0.3 per cent of grid battery projects experienced a fire-related failure in 2024, and failure rates have fallen by more than

98 per cent over six years while installed capacity rose more than twentyfold, against 87.5 per cent of respondents reporting strong safety concerns.

The objection to building on green belt is partly right, and the more useful argument lies just behind it. The Westerhill Regeneration Area masterplan was approved in August 2024 as planning guidance under the adopted Local Development Plan 2. It allocates roughly 51.2 hectares across eleven parcels for business, general industrial and storage use, anticipates around 1,000 jobs over ten years, sets building heights between 8m and 12m, requires a minimum 10% biodiversity net gain, proposes a 67.3-hectare Local Nature Reserve at Low Moss and High Moss, and directs development away from identified peat. Much of the area is thus allocated employment land, although Apatura accepts that the site partially lies within designated green belt.

The most subjective question is that about job creation. Apatura cites 1,730 "ongoing annual jobs", a figure stated to include indirect as well as direct roles. Industry benchmarks put hyperscale operational staffing at one to two people per megawatt. A 300MW campus is therefore likely to support a few hundred direct operational roles. As 92.5% of responses stated that the jobs created would not offset the negatives it may be worth quantifying what number of jobs would offset such a development, if any.

The results of the Westerhill survey sit well outside of the general trends of national polling. Public First, polling 2,023 UK adults in March 2026, found 35% would support a data centre within three miles of their home against 25% opposed; Focaldata's separate poll of 1,000 adults returned almost identical figures at a five-mile radius. In Mid Dunbartonshire opposition runs at 89.9% and support at 4.2%. This places support for the Westerhill site at 8.5x lower than the national average and opposition at 4.1x higher. Further, the polling recorded by Focaldata demonstrates that only 20% of Brits can explain what a data centre is. This aligns with the 37% of written comments that raise concerns regarding water usage despite the limited impact and closed loop network proposed indicating that, potentially due to a lack of available information on the Westerhill site, some proportion of negative engagement has been driven by information derived from non-comparable examples.

The limitations of the survey are clear, yet the strong opposition remains undeniable. While it appears clear that there is a self-selection bias the nearly 90% of responses that oppose the proposal represent 1,295 voices with serious concerns, many of which remain unanswered.

Conclusion

The survey records a settled and near-uniform view. Of 1,441 constituents, 1,295 (89.9%) oppose the proposal and 61 (4.2%) support it, and concern is spread almost evenly across safety, noise, water, habitat and traffic rather than concentrated in any single issue a design change might resolve.

Self-selection will have influenced these figures, and it would not be fair to present them as a representative poll of the constituency. But the opposition they record is not marginal. 1,295 constituents made it clear that they do not want this development, and 771 of them set out why in

their own words. Whatever weight is placed on the percentages, a body of objection on that scale demonstrates a clear requirement for further engagement with the community from the developers.

Much of what was raised is answerable. What the cooling system will draw and from where, what noise the plant will produce at the nearest homes, how many permanent jobs the site will support and how many will go to local people. All reasonable and answerable questions.

Moving forward there is a clear need for information. To form opinions on the development constituents require a full and clear understanding of the benefits, detriments and impacts of the project. As it stands there is a clear lack of communication with constituents being forced to form opinions based on information that may or may not apply to this particular project.

Source List

The proposal

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12. "Data Centres Have a Black Box Problem", Focaldata, 1,000 UK adults - local siting attitudes and public awareness. https://www.focaldata.com/blog/data-centres-have-a-black-box-problem