

From: Lewis McWilliam
Sent: 16 October 2025 10:49
To: Nathan Lockwood
Cc: Sara McGuire, Sophie Goughen
Subject: RE: enquiry re data centre ref 25/03878/PAN

Hi Nathan,

Some feedback:

The reason and decision for Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) screening opinion reference 25/03875/SCR in relation to Redheughs Avenue can be viewed on the planning portal online : <https://www.edinburgh.gov.uk/planningcomments>

Whilst the application is under consideration the council wouldn't be able to comment on specifics. An 'Energy and Sustainability Statement including Waste Heat Strategy' and 'Edinburgh Park - Energy & Utilities Strategy' have been submitted with planning application 25/04239/PPP (dated 18th August 2025) which can also be viewed online.

I am speaking to Sophie above on Monday at 10 am about how to manage the volume of correspondence / have some stock answers – not sure if you're in the same team but can send on the invite to you and Sara if suits.

Thanks

Lewis

Lewis McWilliam | Senior Planning Officer | Central and West Area Sustainable Development | Place Directorate | The City of Edinburgh Council | Waverley Court, Business Centre 02, 4 East Market Street, Edinburgh, EH8 8BO | lewis.mcwilliam@edinburgh.gov.uk | www.edinburgh.gov.uk

The National Customer and Stakeholder Satisfaction Survey undertaken by the National Planning Improvement Team is open from 1 October 2025 to 9 January 2026.

Take this survey at: [National Planning Improvement - Customer and Stakeholder Survey 2025](https://www.edinburgh.gov.uk/nationalplanningimprovement)



-
-
-



From: Lewis McWilliam <lewis.mcwilliam@edinburgh.gov.uk>
Sent: 15 October 2025 16:17
To: Sara McGuire <Sara.McGuire@edinburgh.gov.uk>
Cc: Nathan Lockwood <Nathan.Lockwood@edinburgh.gov.uk>
Subject: RE: enquiry re data centre ref 25/03878/PAN

Hi Sara,

Response below to these queries :

The Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) screening opinion (reference 25/03875/SCR) in relation to planning application 25/04239/PPP is reference 25/03875/SCR. This decision can be viewed on the planning portal online : <https://www.edinburgh.gov.uk/planningcomments>. The 2022 screening decision (22/03024/SCR) was in relation to a previous office / mixed use development on the site (22/06659/PL).

Similarly, the screening decision for 25/03878/PAN can be viewed on the planning portal – the reference is 25/03045/SCR. The reason for this decision can be found within the report dated 3rd July 2025.

There is no date yet for planning application 25/04239/PPP to go to the DM-Sub Committee which is still under consideration. When a date is confirmed, a report will be published on the relevant agenda for the DM-Sub Committee webpage : [DM-sub-committee](https://www.edinburgh.gov.uk/dm-sub-committee) in advance. Details of the public events held for this application can be found on the planning portal under reference 25/01968/PAN.

Regards,

Lewis

Lewis McWilliam | Senior Planning Officer | Central and West Area Sustainable Development | Place Directorate | The City of Edinburgh Council | Waverley Court, Business Centre 02, 4 East Market Street, Edinburgh, EH8 8BO | lewis.mcwilliam@edinburgh.gov.uk | www.edinburgh.gov.uk

The National Customer and Stakeholder Satisfaction Survey undertaken by the National Planning Improvement Team is open from 1 October 2025 to 9 January 2026.

Take this survey at: [National Planning Improvement - Customer and Stakeholder Survey 2025](https://www.edinburgh.gov.uk/nationalplanningimprovement)



From: Sara McGuire <Sara.McGuire@edinburgh.gov.uk>
Sent: 15 October 2025 15:23
To: Lewis McWilliam <lewis.mcwilliam@edinburgh.gov.uk>
Cc: Nathan Lockwood <Nathan.Lockwood@edinburgh.gov.uk>
Subject: RE: enquiry re data centre ref 25/03878/PAN

Hi Lewis,

I picked this up from Nathan today as I look after planning for the team and talked her through some of this. Some follow up questions below. I've started trying to answer them. Can you fill in the gaps. I'm copying in Nathan again in case this runs into tomorrow. If you could come back today would be really appreciated though. Thanks. Sara

First question

A City of Edinburgh Council spokesperson said:

"Whilst we're unable to comment on live planning applications, environmental impacts are always carefully considered as part of the decision-making process."

Second

Can you answer this one?

Third

Sorry we don't have a date for the application going to committee yet?

Fourth

??

From: lewis.mcwilliam@edinburgh.gov.uk

Sent: 15 October 2025 15:26

To: Sara McGuire <Sara.McGuire@edinburgh.gov.uk> ; Media <Media@edinburgh.gov.uk>

Subject: RE: enquiry re data centre ref 25/03878/PAN

Hi Sara,

Thanks for your time today. I'm following up on more specific points with a view to writing a story:

1) You may have already seen the [page in the agenda](https://www.edinburgh.gov.uk/planningcomments) about the proposed data centre at South Gyle, and that the council officer Adam Glosier made the decision not to request an EIA from the company (25/04239/PPP). This was in 2022, according to docs in the portal. My question here is: given what we've learnt in the last few years about massive energy and water consumption, and the disadvantages to physical and mental health of living near these centres, is the council changing its approach to asking for an EIA?

2) On the same note, the second proposed data centre in the portal, near Wester Hermiton (25/03878/PAN), which I wrote about a couple weeks ago, also apparently isn't needing to submit an EIA. Can I please ask where are the docs relating to this decision and why was it made?

(These two centres, when combined, require as much energy as all the homes in Glasgow and Edinburgh, twice over.)

3) Can I also please confirm that the first data centre 25/04239/PPP is 'awaiting assessment' in the portal. Does that mean an officer is looking at it now and it will be coming to Development sub-committee any day now?

4) Can I enquire whether the first data centre 25/04239/PPP held public meetings? I know the other one did, as I went to it!

Thanks

On Wed, Oct 15, 2025 at 11:07 AM, lewis.mcwilliam@edinburgh.gov.uk wrote:

Hi Sara,

Freelance writer and editor

Portfolio

On Wed, 15 Oct 2025, 10:31 Sara McGuire, <Sara.McGuire@edinburgh.gov.uk> wrote:

Hi Sara,

Can you send me your number and I'll ring you this afternoon about this. I look after planning media and social media for the council.

Sara

From: lewis.mcwilliam@edinburgh.gov.uk

Sent: 16 October 2025 11:30

To: Lewis McWilliam <lewis.mcwilliam@edinburgh.gov.uk> ; Planning <Planning@edinburgh.gov.uk>

Subject: enquiry re data centre ref 25/03878/PAN

Hi Lewis,

I hope you're well. I'm following a development on the portal with interest - REF 25/03878/PAN.

I wrote [an article about the proposed AI data centre in the Scotland](https://www.edinburgh.gov.uk/planningcomments) over the weekend. (See attached image if you can't access it behind the paywall.)

I'd like to ask you or a colleague to please let me know the next steps / rough timeframe for Aputura's proposal - they were allowed to engage with the community, when do you think they will submit their planning application? And can I include any evidence in terms of community view? Or would it only be from the company? For example, will my above article be considered as part of the view from the community? I attended their public meeting in August.

Lastly, I'd like to know if this decision will be made by planning officers / the planning department, or whether it will be made by a committee of councillors. I'd like to ensure that all relevant decision-makers can read my article on the plan if they choose.

Many thanks

Hi Sara,

Freelance writer and editor

Portfolio

On Wed, 15 Oct 2025, 10:31 Sara McGuire, <Sara.McGuire@edinburgh.gov.uk> wrote:

Hi Sara,

Can you send me your number and I'll ring you this afternoon about this. I look after planning media and social media for the council.

Sara

From: lewis.mcwilliam@edinburgh.gov.uk

Sent: 16 October 2025 11:30

To: Lewis McWilliam <lewis.mcwilliam@edinburgh.gov.uk> ; Planning <Planning@edinburgh.gov.uk>

Subject: enquiry re data centre ref 25/03878/PAN

Hi Lewis,

I hope you're well. I'm following a development on the portal with interest - REF 25/03878/PAN.

I wrote [an article about the proposed AI data centre in the Scotland](https://www.edinburgh.gov.uk/planningcomments) over the weekend. (See attached image if you can't access it behind the paywall.)

I'd like to ask you or a colleague to please let me know the next steps / rough timeframe for Aputura's proposal - they were allowed to engage with the community, when do you think they will submit their planning application? And can I include any evidence in terms of community view? Or would it only be from the company? For example, will my above article be considered as part of the view from the community? I attended their public meeting in August.

Lastly, I'd like to know if this decision will be made by planning officers / the planning department, or whether it will be made by a committee of councillors. I'd like to ensure that all relevant decision-makers can read my article on the plan if they choose.

Many thanks

Hi Sara,

Freelance writer and editor

Portfolio

On Wed, 15 Oct 2025, 10:31 Sara McGuire, <Sara.McGuire@edinburgh.gov.uk> wrote:

Hi Sara,

Can you send me your number and I'll ring you this afternoon about this. I look after planning media and social media for the council.

Sara

From: lewis.mcwilliam@edinburgh.gov.uk

Sent: 16 October 2025 11:30

To: Lewis McWilliam <lewis.mcwilliam@edinburgh.gov.uk> ; Planning <Planning@edinburgh.gov.uk>

Subject: enquiry re data centre ref 25/03878/PAN

Hi Lewis,

I hope you're well. I'm following a development on the portal with interest - REF 25/03878/PAN.

I wrote [an article about the proposed AI data centre in the Scotland](https://www.edinburgh.gov.uk/planningcomments) over the weekend. (See attached image if you can't access it behind the paywall.)

I'd like to ask you or a colleague to please let me know the next steps / rough timeframe for Aputura's proposal - they were allowed to engage with the community, when do you think they will submit their planning application? And can I include any evidence in terms of community view? Or would it only be from the company? For example, will my above article be considered as part of the view from the community? I attended their public meeting in August.

Lastly, I'd like to know if this decision will be made by planning officers / the planning department, or whether it will be made by a committee of councillors. I'd like to ensure that all relevant decision-makers can read my article on the plan if they choose.

Many thanks

Hi Sara,

Freelance writer and editor

Portfolio

On Wed, 15 Oct 2025, 10:31 Sara McGuire, <Sara.McGuire@edinburgh.gov.uk> wrote:

Hi Sara,

Can you send me your number and I'll ring you this afternoon about this. I look after planning media and social media for the council.

Sara

From: lewis.mcwilliam@edinburgh.gov.uk

Sent: 16 October 2025 11:30

To: Lewis McWilliam <lewis.mcwilliam@edinburgh.gov.uk> ; Planning <Planning@edinburgh.gov.uk>

Subject: enquiry re data centre ref 25/03878/PAN

Hi Lewis,

I hope you're well. I'm following a development on the portal with interest - REF 25/03878/PAN.

I wrote [an article about the proposed AI data centre in the Scotland](https://www.edinburgh.gov.uk/planningcomments) over the weekend. (See attached image if you can't access it behind the paywall.)

I'd like to ask you or a colleague to please let me know the next steps / rough timeframe for Aputura's proposal - they were allowed to engage with the community, when do you think they will submit their planning application? And can I include any evidence in terms of community view? Or would it only be from the company? For example, will my above article be considered as part of the view from the community? I attended their public meeting in August.

Lastly, I'd like to know if this decision will be made by planning officers / the planning department, or whether it will be made by a committee of councillors. I'd like to ensure that all relevant decision-makers can read my article on the plan if they choose.

Many thanks

Hi Sara,

Freelance writer and editor

Portfolio

On Wed, 15 Oct 2025, 10:31 Sara McGuire, <Sara.McGuire@edinburgh.gov.uk> wrote:

Hi Sara,

Can you send me your number and I'll ring you this afternoon about this. I look after planning media and social media for the council.

Sara

From: lewis.mcwilliam@edinburgh.gov.uk

Sent: 16 October 2025 11:30

To: Lewis McWilliam <lewis.mcwilliam@edinburgh.gov.uk> ; Planning <Planning@edinburgh.gov.uk>

Subject: enquiry re data centre ref 25/03878/PAN

Hi Lewis,

I hope you're well. I'm following a development on the portal with interest - REF 25/03878/PAN.

I wrote [an article about the proposed AI data centre in the Scotland](https://www.edinburgh.gov.uk/planningcomments) over the weekend. (See attached image if you can't access it behind the paywall.)

I'd like to ask you or a colleague to please let me know the next steps / rough timeframe for Aputura's proposal - they were allowed to engage with the community, when do you think they will submit their planning application? And can I include any evidence in terms of community view? Or would it only be from the company? For example, will my above article be considered as part of the view from the community? I attended their public meeting in August.

Lastly, I'd like to know if this decision will be made by planning officers / the planning department, or whether it will be made by a committee of councillors. I'd like to ensure that all relevant decision-makers can read my article on the plan if they choose.

Many thanks

Hi Sara,

Freelance writer and editor

Portfolio

On Wed, 15 Oct 2025, 10:31 Sara McGuire, <Sara.McGuire@edinburgh.gov.uk> wrote:

Hi Sara,

Can you send me your number and I'll ring you this afternoon about this. I look after planning media and social media for the council.

Sara

From: lewis.mcwilliam@edinburgh.gov.uk

Sent: 16 October 2025 11:30

To: Lewis McWilliam <lewis.mcwilliam@edinburgh.gov.uk> ; Planning <Planning@edinburgh.gov.uk>

Subject: enquiry re data centre ref 25/03878/PAN

Hi Lewis,

I hope you're well. I'm following a development on the portal with interest - REF 25/03878/PAN.

I wrote [an article about the proposed AI data centre in the Scotland](https://www.edinburgh.gov.uk/planningcomments) over the weekend. (See attached image if you can't access it behind the paywall.)

I'd like to ask you or a colleague to please let me know the next steps / rough timeframe for Aputura's proposal - they were allowed to engage with the community, when do you think they will submit their planning application? And can I include any evidence in terms of community view? Or would it only be from the company? For example, will my above article be considered as part of the view from the community? I attended their public meeting in August.

Lastly, I'd like to know if this decision will be made by planning officers / the planning department, or whether it will be made by a committee of councillors. I'd like to ensure that all relevant decision-makers can read my article on the plan if they choose.

Many thanks

Hi Sara,

Freelance writer and editor

Portfolio

On Wed, 15 Oct 2025, 10:31 Sara McGuire, <Sara.McGuire@edinburgh.gov.uk> wrote:

Hi Sara,

Can you send me your number and I'll ring you this afternoon about this. I look after planning media and social media for the council.

Sara

From: lewis.mcwilliam@edinburgh.gov.uk

Sent: 16 October 2025 11:30

To: Lewis McWilliam <lewis.mcwilliam@edinburgh.gov.uk> ; Planning <Planning@edinburgh.gov.uk>

Subject: enquiry re data centre ref 25/03878/PAN

Hi Lewis,

I hope you're well. I'm following a development on the portal with interest - REF 25/03878/PAN.

I wrote [an article about the proposed AI data centre in the Scotland](https://www.edinburgh.gov.uk/planningcomments) over the weekend. (See attached image if you can't access it behind the paywall.)

I'd like to ask you or a colleague to please let me know the next steps / rough timeframe for Aputura's proposal - they were allowed to engage with the community, when do you think they will submit their planning application? And can I include any evidence in terms of community view? Or would it only be from the company? For example, will my above article be considered as part of the view from the community? I attended their public meeting in August.

Lastly, I'd like to know if this decision will be made by planning officers / the planning department, or whether it will be made by a committee of councillors. I'd like to ensure that all relevant decision-makers can read my article on the plan if they choose.

Many thanks

Hi Sara,

Freelance writer and editor

Portfolio

On Wed, 15 Oct 2025, 10:31 Sara McGuire, <Sara.McGuire@edinburgh.gov.uk> wrote:

Hi Sara,

Can you send me your number and I'll ring you this afternoon about this. I look after planning media and social media for the council.

Sara

From: lewis.mcwilliam@edinburgh.gov.uk

Sent: 16 October 2025 11:30

To: Lewis McWilliam <lewis.mcwilliam@edinburgh.gov.uk> ; Planning <Planning@edinburgh.gov.uk>

Subject: enquiry re data centre ref 25/03878/PAN

Hi Lewis,

I hope you're well. I'm following a development on the portal with interest - REF 25/03878/PAN.

I wrote [an article about the proposed AI data centre in the Scotland](https://www.edinburgh.gov.uk/planningcomments) over the weekend. (See attached image if you can't access it behind the paywall.)

I'd like to ask you or a colleague to please let me know the next steps / rough timeframe for Aputura's proposal - they were allowed to engage with the community, when do you think they will submit their planning application? And can I include any evidence in terms of community view? Or would it only be from the company? For example, will my above article be considered as part of the view from the community? I attended their public meeting in August.

Lastly, I'd like to know if this decision will be made by planning officers / the planning department, or whether it will be made by a committee of councillors. I'd like to ensure that all relevant decision-makers can read my article on the plan if they choose.

Many thanks

Hi Sara,

Freelance writer and editor

Portfolio

On Wed, 15 Oct 2025, 10:31 Sara McGuire, <Sara.McGuire@edinburgh.gov.uk> wrote:

Hi Sara,

Can you send me your number and I'll ring you this afternoon about this. I look after planning media and social media for the council.

Sara

From: lewis.mcwilliam@edinburgh.gov.uk

Sent: 16 October 2025 11:30

Idon't buy data centres' claims to be green

◆ Rachael Revesz finds the temperature a little too warm at a public meeting to discuss a new site planned for Edinburgh



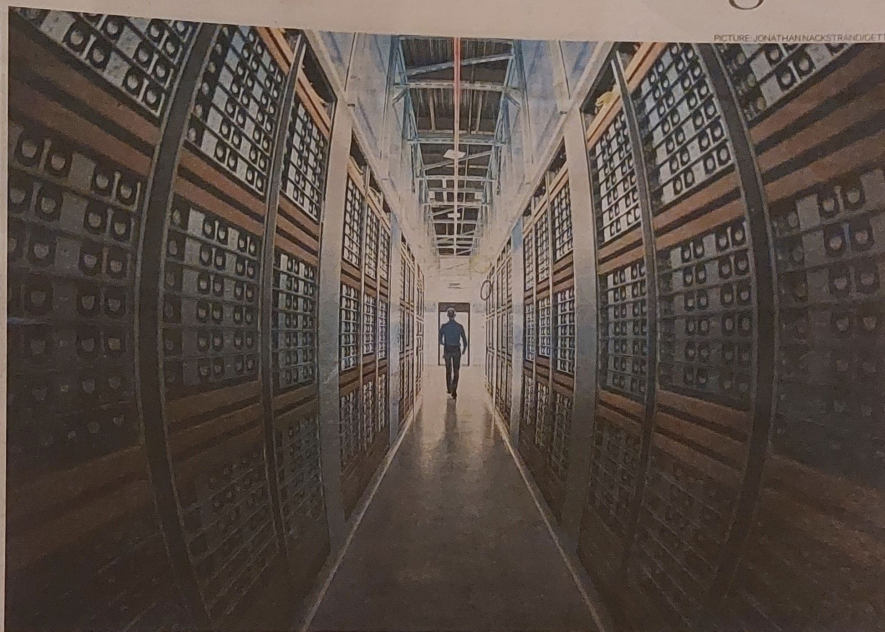
How green can an AI data centre be? Very, according to the company that has applied for planning permission to build several of these centres across the Central Belt. The first is next to Heriot-Watt University at Wester Hermiston.

Apatura's website reads: "The project would deliver a major investment in a hyperscale green data AI centre, helping to power Scotland's digital economy, while supporting local ambitions for a fairer, greener, more prosperous future."

I went to the first public meeting in late August to ask some questions. First, I wanted to know about the promise of thousands of jobs. The project manager told me that most jobs would be in construction and once operational, there will be 245 permanent on-site roles. In follow-up emails, Apatura claimed the on-site number would in fact be 343 staff. A big Tesco employs around 450 people. I also wanted to know whether the AI centre would consume any water from the canal running alongside the site. The project manager was adamant: "Absolutely not." Yet this claim was disputed by her colleague in the same room, who later told me "positive conversations" had been had with the canal authority.

In emails after the event, Apatura and Scottish Canals told me it was unlikely the canal would be used and that it was too early to comment, but they would continue to engage with each other. This was not the shut door I had hoped for. The project manager reassured me that the centre would use a closed-loop cooling system, meaning a fixed amount of water will be re-circulated to cool the servers, and the water itself would be cooled by condensing units.

But how much water will be needed, given that around 2 per cent would evaporate every month? Scottish Water told me it was investigating whether treated sewage water could be used to cool down the servers, but did not confirm how much would be required. I went back to Apatura for a third time to ask about the amount of water. I was told the site would require 725,000 gallons for its "first fill". This is well over the amount of water required for an Olympic-sized swimming pool. The developer claimed this was 7,000 times less than traditional data centre systems.



PICTURE: JONATHAN HADSTRUP/GETTY

The increasing use of artificial intelligence is leading to an explosion in the number of vast data centres

Back to the public meeting. I sidled over to the site map. A man who lived nearby was concerned about the constant light and noise from the site, even after construction. An Apatura rep said the three 75ft data halls would be hidden by a 100ft high mound of earth. A veritable cliff of dirt. Once the neighbour had taken a breath, I asked the rep, what exactly made the project green? He explained that the data centre would be connected to the National Grid, which mostly provides renewable energy. "But by that logic, my flat is green, too," I said. "I see your point," he said.

Apatura's website and press office argues, in a roundabout way, that the centre will have a positive impact by using renewable energy that otherwise would have gone to waste. When the grid cannot cope with the amount of electricity being generated, some producers are paid to stop, with the consumer footing the bill. This seems like spin: Apatura is a consumer of energy.

In fact, the Wester Hermiston centre alone would consume more than 2 per cent of Scottish Power's entire electricity generation in central and southern Scotland. Presumably, by that logic, if Apatura were to build five centres across the Central Belt, that would be 10 per cent of our existing network snapped up.

Apatura mentions the potential to capture the data centre's waste heat

and transfer it for use within the local community. Unfortunately, there is no such district heat network in the area – any such development could be years, if not decades, in the future.

Apatura also said it would work with local colleges and universities to get more people into STEM subjects – science, technology, engineering and maths – although its nearest neighbour, Heriot-Watt, told me no conversations had taken place yet. By this point, I was sweating in the meeting room. Was it the 15 or so people in attendance, or the screens displaying info about the project? The project manager said she'd asked for the air conditioning to be put on several times. The irony was not lost on me.

Of course, there's another reason why

“The project manager said she'd asked for the air conditioning to be put on several times. The irony was not lost on me

companies like Apatura want to build these centres in Scotland. We have more land, we have a more temperate climate (for now), and we have more water.

We could argue for days about our increasingly digital world, data security and the need for such infrastructure. But let's not greenlight a project without scrutinising it. Even with proposed features such as 'attenuation basins' to collect rainwater, a closed-loop water system and a roof covered in plants, the AI centre is not green, or even low carbon. Furthermore, the proposed 'hyperscale centre' means the building will likely be bought by one company – say, a tech firm – that then leases out extra space to clients like the NHS and the government. It seems the developer, construction company and end client will make a profit, but at whose expense?

Recent headlines claim that the increasingly likely collapse of an Atlantic current will see UK winter temperatures fall by around 20 degrees. I guess at least data centres will be kept cool that way. Apatura's second public meeting is on October 2, at the National Robotarium, Heriot-Watt University, from 3pm to 8pm. Do go along and ask your own questions. It's a subject we can't afford to ignore.

Rachael Revesz is an editor and freelance journalist