

[REDACTED]
Planning, Architecture and Regeneration Directorate
The Scottish Government
Victoria Quay
Edinburgh
EH6 6QQ

23 March 2026

Dear Fiona

Planning Committee Request for Definition of Green Data Centre

I write on behalf of the City of Edinburgh Council's Planning Committee. The Committee has asked that I write to Scottish Ministers to seek a definition of what constitutes a "Green Data Centre".

By way of background, on 28 January 2026, the Planning Committee approved an adjusted addendum for a report on [Data Centres and AI](#). I have appended the adjusted addendum to this letter for your information.

The Committee understands that National Planning Framework 4 identifies Green Data Centres as national development where these would otherwise be major development. The Committee is also aware of the [parliamentary answer of October 2025](#) to a question on this where the response was:

'To be considered a green data centre, planning authorities may wish to consider criteria such as the extent to which the data centre is powered from renewable energy sources; makes use of energy efficient technologies; seeks to minimise water consumption; and supports the re-use of excess heat.'

The Committee suggests that these criteria may be a starting point for a definition.

I would be grateful if you could please relay this request regarding provision of a definition, to Scottish Ministers for Ministerial consideration. Provision of a definition would assist the City of Edinburgh Council and other Planning Authorities throughout Scotland in determining applications of this nature.

I would be happy to discuss this letter with you, if this would be helpful.

Yours sincerely,

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

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Appendix 1 – Adjusted Addendum

Committee notes:

1. That “there is no single, legally defined ‘green data centre’ standard in UK or Scottish law”
2. the potential for connecting data centres to heat networks, and the challenges arising from Edinburgh not currently having an agreed delivery model for taking forward heat networks
3. that there is currently nothing in City Plan 2030 or NPF4 governing water usage in data centres

Therefore, Committee

4. Agrees a definition is required and requests that officers create write to Scottish Ministers for a better definition of what a constitutes a ‘green data centre’, using the Scottish Government’s suggested criteria for local authorities as a starting point.
5. Requests that work continues between planning officers and those working on heat networks and energy strategy to ensure that opportunities for using excess heat are realised
6. Further requests that, while these conversations are ongoing, consideration is given to the heat emitted into the local environment from applications
7. Agrees that consideration of whether an Environmental Impact Assessment is required for an application for a data centre is an important matter, recognising that the final decision around this sits with Officers and that reports on applications to the Development Management Sub-Committee set out the relevant policy and considerations on a case-by-case basis.
8. Requests that that consideration is given to whether policy is needed within City Plan 2040 in respect of future land, energy and water use for data centres.
9. Finally, requests that updates on all of these points are included in the business bulletin going forward.