

The battery site: fire, water and who regulates it

Xlinks' letter to residents of 25 July 2026 said the energy storage system "would be subject to strict regulation and to conditions set through the planning process," and that Xlinks "would develop a detailed fire plan with Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Service." The Council's pre-application advice of 6 November 2025 records what the fire service, the water company and the flood authority actually said.

1. Fire: what Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Service said

- DSFRS is "not a statutory consultee in relation to this project."
- On the state of knowledge: battery sites "pose specific hazards in the event of fire that are still not fully understood or researched. As a result, regulations, enforcement, and best practice to mitigate the risk from BESS is still in development."
- A Fire Safety Management Plan must be submitted. Without one, "DSFRS will not pass comment on the application and will send it back."
- DSFRS recommends automatic gas detection, water drenching suppression inside containers, "adequate space between containers or thermal barriers," explosion venting, alternative access for fire appliances, and, citing National Fire Chiefs Council guidance, firefighting water of **no less than 1,900 litres per minute for at least two hours**.
- The Council itself notes the scale "has the potential to result in fire-related concerns" but "cannot determine whether this is the case due to the lack of information provided."

Xlinks told the Group on 10 August 2026 that the final layout, "including separation distances between units and boundaries, has not yet been fixed." The Group has put on record that the nearest site boundary is under 50 metres from homes. Xlinks has not disputed this.

2. Water: what South West Water said

- No water demand figures were supplied with the enquiry: "No details of proposed water demands are included with this enquiry."
- The existing mains can supply a maximum of **2.8 litres per second**, which is "sufficient for domestic use purposes and to support a fire supply tank."
- "Large fire supply demands could not be provided without significant upgrades to the water network." South West Water recommends on-site storage "equivalent to 24 hours worth of fire flows" refilled gradually from the mains.

The Group's own arithmetic: the fire service's figure of 1,900 litres per minute is nearly 32 litres per second, more than eleven times what the mains can deliver, and amounts to about 228,000 litres over two hours. Even on the lower minimum in the National Fire Chiefs Council guidance revised in December 2025 (25 litres per second, about 180,000 litres over two hours), the mains could not come close. **Twenty-four hours of fire flow, which South West Water recommends holding on site, is between 2.2 and 2.7 million litres.**

3. Drainage

- Devon County Council, as flood authority, records the site is "partially at high to low risk of flooding from surface water, specifically following the watercourse which runs through the centre of the site."
- The submitted plans "do not appear to make specific allowances for SuDS features," and "it is unclear how the water from the roof of the buildings and housed battery storages will be routed towards drainage features."

4. Who regulates it

The Council's advice records that the Health and Safety Executive "has no comment to make" because the site "does not fall within any HSE consultation zones," and that Natural England "is not a statutory consultee at the pre-application stage." Fire safety for battery sites currently rests on National Fire Chiefs Council guidance, not regulation.

Key point: Residents were told the scheme would be strictly regulated and that a fire plan would follow. **The fire service says the hazards are "still not fully understood" and the rules "still in development."** The water company says the mains cannot supply the firefighting water the fire service asks for. The HSE has no role at this stage. **The only binding safeguards would be whatever conditions the Council attaches, and no application has yet been made.**

Sources: Torridge District Council pre-application advice (ref FPDM/0587/2025, 6 November 2025), including the consultee responses quoted above, released by Torridge District Council under the Environmental Information Regulations 2004 (ref #11154, response dated 18 August 2026); Xlinks letter to residents, 25 July 2026; Action Group letter to Xlinks, 27 July 2026, and Xlinks reply, 10 August 2026; National Fire Chiefs Council grid scale battery storage planning guidance for fire and rescue services, Version 1.0 (November 2022) and revised edition (December 2025), nfcc.org.uk. Pre-application advice is not a formal decision of the Council.