

BLAENAU GWENT COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL	
Report to	The Chair and Members of Planning
Report Subject	Development of National Significance update: land to the west of Abertillery. Application ref: DNS/3270299.
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Directorate	Regeneration and Community Services
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1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To advise Members of the Welsh Minister's decision, following consideration of the Planning and Environment Decision Wales (PEDW) Inspector's report (IR), regarding the Development of National Significance (DNS) for the erection of up to 8 wind turbines and associated infrastructure on land to the west of Abertillery. Application ref: DNS/3270299.

2.0 Scope of the Report

- 2.1 The Council received notification of the valid DNS application on 23rd November 2022. A Local Impact Report (LIR) was submitted by the Local Planning Authority to PEDW for consideration on 6th March 2023. A hearing regarding the application was held on 30th August and 13th September 2023. The Welsh Minister's decision was received on 11th March 2024.
- 2.2 The Inspector, determined that the main issues to be considered were:
- The effect of the proposed development on landscape character and visual amenity.

- The effect of the proposed development on historic assets.
 - The effect of the proposed development on ecological interests.
 - The effect of the proposed development on the living conditions of the occupiers of neighbouring residential properties, having particular regard to noise and shadow flicker.
 - The effect of the proposed development upon traffic flows and highway safety, particularly through the construction phase and,
 - Whether any identified harm in respect of the above matters would be outweighed by the benefits and other matters in favour of the scheme, particularly the in-principle policy support for large scale wind farm development and the contribution towards renewable energy generation.
- 2.3 The Inspector accepts there would be an impact on landscape character and the impact on visual amenity would be significant, in conflict with policies of the Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council Local Development Plan (LDP). However, the Inspector notes this must also be considered in the context of Future Wales (FW) Policies 17 and 18, which clearly support wind farm development in Pre-Assessed Areas and concludes that the development could be accommodated within the landscape in acceptable manner.
- 2.4 With regard to visual amenity, when judged objectively and in the public interest, the Inspector notes, the visual effects of the development would be locally significant and adverse and affords this harm moderate weight. However, the Inspector concludes, whilst recognising there would be localised significant visual harm, the proposal would be consistent with the thrust of the LDP overall to support wind energy development (IR 139 and 188).
- 2.5 In relation to the effect of the proposed development on historic assets the Inspector notes the moderate to significant adverse effects of the proposed development upon the setting of a Scheduled Monument could not be directly mitigated and offsetting/ compensations measures are proposed. Whilst the Inspector concludes that the proposal would represent a minor conflict with LDP Policy SP11, considering the temporary and reversible nature of the development, the proposal is considered to be in accordance with Policy 18 of FW (IR 149 189).

- 2.6 Concerning ecological matters, the Inspector concludes the development would not have an unacceptable adverse effect on any internationally designated sites, alone or cumulatively. Furthermore, subject to conditions, the Inspector is satisfied there would be no unacceptable adverse impacts on nationally designated sites for nature conservation habitats or species. The Inspector also concludes that the proposal would have no effect on the integrity or conservation status of any SINCs, and is satisfied that ecological protection, monitoring and enhancement measures would be provided through relevant planning conditions (IR161).
- 2.7 The Minister concludes, based on the information available, the Inspector's assessment of ecological impacts and securing the mitigation, enhancements and management measures identified in the Habitats Management Plan and Construction Environmental Management Plan by condition, ensures the proposal complies with the requirements in national planning policy with regards to ensuring the proposal results in a net benefit for biodiversity and that the policy update to Chapter 6 of Planning Policy Wales does not have a material impact on the Inspector's assessment and addresses the Section 6 duty in the Environment (Wales) Act 2016.
- 2.8 Regarding the living conditions of the occupiers of neighbouring residential properties, the Inspector concludes that subject to appropriately worded conditions, requiring the submission and approval of the details of mitigation to prevent nuisance shadow flicker, the noise impact and shadow flicker would not cause material harm to the living conditions of the occupiers of nearby residential properties, in compliance with the aims of FW Policy 18, the guidance in PPW and is broadly consistent with the aims of the relevant LDP Policies (IR 165-168).
- 2.9 Concerning highway safety, the Inspector is satisfied that there would not be any unacceptable traffic or highway implications arising from the development and the proposal would be generally consistent with the aims of national and local planning policy relating to such matters (IR169-172A).
- 2.10 In terms of benefits the Inspector notes that the development represents a doubling of the installed capacity within Blaenau

Gwent. As such it is considered that the development represents a substantial and meaningful contribution to the production of energy from renewable resources and to the reduction in greenhouse gas emissions and would be significant in the context of Welsh Government targets and commitments to address the climate emergency. Furthermore, the estimated £13m regional investment during construction would have a moderately positive effect on the socio-economics of the area whilst acknowledging this must be balanced against any adverse impact. Overall, the Inspector gives the benefits of the scheme considerable weight considering the clear support for such contributions in Policies 17 and 18 of FW (IR 174-175, 187, 194).

- 2.11 The Inspector considered matters of ecology, noise, shadow flicker and highway safety to be neutral in the planning balance (IR191-193).
- 2.12 In relation to other material considerations, which include subsidence, movement, fissures, fault lines, land contamination, effects on public rights of way, minerals safeguarding and radar matters in relation to aviation and telecommunications, that could affect the proposal, the Inspector was satisfied that such matters can be dealt with by imposing conditions to ensure that investigatory works and any remediation measures necessary to ensure the safety and stability of the proposal and risks are mitigated, prior to development commencement (IR 176-177, 179, 181).
- 2.13 In relation to rail network safety, the Inspector is satisfied that an adequate distance from Network Rail's boundary would be achieved in the unlikely event Turbine 8 were to topple in the direction of the railway (IR 180).
- 2.14 Concerning flooding, the Inspector is satisfied that the proposal would not be subject to an unacceptable level of risk, nor would there be potential increased risk or any significant effects on the water environment (IR 182).
- 2.15 In summary, the Inspector is satisfied the proposed development complies with Future Wales which is the most recently adopted part of the development plan and contains the most directly relevant policies for renewable energy projects of national significance. The proposal would not conflict with the LDP.

- 2.16 Accordingly, the Inspector recommend planning permission be granted for the development, subject to conditions.
- 2.17 Following review of the Inspector's report the Minister confirms that they agree with the Inspector's appraisal, conclusions, and reasoning and accepted the recommendations and approved the application, subject to conditions accordingly.

3. Recommendation/s for Consideration

- 3.1 That Members note for information the Ministers Decision and the Inspector's report for DNS/3270299 as attached at Appendix A and B.