



Pennant Walters

Mynydd Llanhilleth Wind Farm

Draft Design and Access Statement



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Document revisions

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Executive summary

Purpose of this report

This report has been produced for the purpose of describing the approach taken by the Applicant (Pennant Walters) to the design of the Proposed Development which is a wind farm for up to eight turbines located on Mynydd Llanhilleth on a site located mainly within the County Borough of Torfaen and County Borough, with the western part lying within the authority of Blaenau Gwent County Borough County Council.

The report identifies relevant planning policy relating both to design and to access at the national and local level. It explains the considerations given by the Applicant when selecting the site and also how the design has evolved in response to environmental and technical surveys, guided by appropriate planning policy.

The Proposed Development is then assessed against the standards for Good Design which are contained in Planning Policy Wales and which are consistent with the Welsh Government's guidance for Design and Access Statements (DAS).

Contents

1.	Introduction	6
1.1	Background	6
1.2	Purpose and structure of the report	6
1.3	Approach to the design	7
1.4	Onshore wind and national policy	7
2.	Summary of the Proposed Development	8
2.1	The location of the Proposed Mynydd Llanhilleth Wind Farm	8
2.2	The Proposed Development	9
2.3	Developments of National Significance	10
3.	Objectives	11
3.1	The objectives for the Proposed Development	11
4.	Site and Contextual Analysis	12
4.1	Site location and context	12
4.2	The Development Plan	12
	Future Wales	12
4.3	Local Development Plans	13
	Torfaen County Borough Council Local Development Plan policies	13
	Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council Local Development Plan policies	14
5.	Design Evolution	17
5.1	Introduction	17
5.2	Site selection	17
5.3	Design	18
	Design iterations	19
	Micro-siting	21
5.4	Public involvement and consultation	21
	Introduction	21
	Scoping Report	21
	Scoping Direction	22
	Consultation	22
6.	The Proposal	23
6.1	Introduction	23
6.2	Character	24
	Wind farm design	24
	Site context	25
	Cultural heritage setting	25
6.3	Access	26

	Site access	26
	Construction	26
	Operation	27
	Access for all	27
6.4	Movement	27
6.5	Environmental Sustainability	28
	Renewable Energy	28
	Agricultural land	28
	Landscape assessment	28
	Biodiversity	29
	Water environment	29
6.6	Community safety	29
6.7	Responding to the planning policy context	30
7.	Conclusion	31
7.1	Summary of the Proposed Development design	31
<hr/>		
	Table 4.1 Torfaen County Borough Council Local Development Plan policies	13
	Table 4.2 Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council Local Development Plan policies	14
	Table 5.1 Summary of main factors considered in site selection	17
	Table 5.2 Design Iterations	19
<hr/>		
	Figure 2.1 Site Location	8
	Figure 2.2 Site Layout	10
	Figure 6.1 Objectives of Good Design	23

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

- 1.1.1 This Draft Design and Access Statement (DAS) has been prepared by WSP E&IS UK Ltd (WSP) on behalf of Pennant Walters Ltd (the Applicant). The DAS forms part of a suite of documents supporting a planning application for the development of up to eight wind turbines located at Mynydd Llanhilleth, to east of Brynithel and Llanhilleth and west of Talywain, Pontypool (from here on referred to as the Proposed Development). The site is within the mainly within the authority of Torfaen County Borough Council (TCBC), with the western part lying within the authority of Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council (BCGBC) (referred to as the Proposed Development from here on). The application has been submitted to Welsh Government, via Planning and Environmental Decisions Wales (PEDW), to be considered as a Development of National Significance (DNS).
- 1.1.2 This DAS should be read in conjunction with the accompanying **Draft Planning Statement**, which sets out the planning policy context for how the application's design and access issues have been taken into account, and the **Draft Environmental Statement** (ES), which sets out an assessment of the likely significant environmental effects of the Proposed Development.
- 1.1.3 This DAS has been prepared in line with the Planning (Wales) Act 2015 which sets out the requirements regarding the contents of a DAS and reflects the objectives of good design set out in Planning Policy Wales (PPW) (Welsh Government, 2021)¹ and Technical Advice Note 12: Design (TAN 12) (Welsh Government, 2016)². The DAS is informed by the guidance in Design and Access Statements in Wales (Welsh Government, 2017)³.

1.2 Purpose and structure of the report

- 1.2.1 The DAS explains the design rationale for the wind farm, providing an explanation of the design principles and concepts that have informed the Proposed Development (as described in **Draft ES Chapter 3: Scheme Need, Alternatives and Iterative Design Process** and **Draft ES Chapter 4: Description of the Proposed Development** of the ES), and how access issues have been taken into consideration. The DAS is structured as follows:
- **Section 1: Introduction** – provides background information on Design and Access Statements, the approach to design, and renewable energy policy background;
 - **Section 2: Summary of the Proposal** – provides a summary of the site location, Proposed Development, and the DNS regime;
 - **Section 3: Vision** – sets out the vision for the Proposed Development;
 - **Section 4: Site and Context Analysis** – sets out the site's context and the relevant planning policy;
 - **Section 5: Design Development** – summarises the factors that were considered in the design process; and

¹ Welsh Government (2021) Planning Policy Wales Edition 11

² Welsh Government (2016) Technical Advice Note 12 - Design

³ Welsh Government (2017) Design and Access Statements in Wales

- **Section 6: The Proposal** – shows how the Proposed Development responds to PPW's requirements for good design and highlights how the design process has produced an appropriate scheme in relation to the planning policy context.

1.3 Approach to the design

- 1.3.1 The design process involved in formulating the layout of the Proposed Development has been led by a combination of engineering requirements and environmental considerations in order to produce an appropriate layout in terms of function and energy yield, whilst trying to avoid or reduce environmental effects.
- 1.3.2 The Proposed Development has been developed with environmental considerations at the forefront of both site selection and design. This is demonstrated through the site selection process which ensures that technical, environmental and economic criteria are considered. Other factors that have guided the site design have included planning policy and existing infrastructure.
- 1.3.3 A detailed understanding of the existing environment (including land use, infrastructure, ecology, hydrology, ornithology, noise and archaeology) helped to ensure a holistic approach to the design of the wind farm. The design has also been informed by an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) which has considered the likely significant effects on a range of environmental receptors. The findings of the EIA are contained in the **Draft Environmental Statement**. Where relevant this DAS refers to the findings of the ES.

1.4 Onshore wind and national policy

- 1.4.1 The need to address climate change is embedded in law. The Climate Change Act 2008 (as amended) requires the UK to achieve a 100% reduction in greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, otherwise known as net zero, in 2050. Welsh Ministers are bound to deliver net zero in 2050 under the Environment (Wales) Act 2016, which also requires Welsh Ministers to produce a plan to show how Wales will meet the reductions in GHG required for each five-year period to 2050.
- 1.4.2 In September 2017 the Welsh Government Cabinet Secretary for Environment and Rural Affairs announced to the Welsh Assembly that it was setting a target of generating 70% of Wales' electricity consumption from renewable energy by 2030 and a target for one Gigawatt of renewable electricity capacity in Wales to be locally owned by 2030⁴. This target is embedded in PPW and Future Wales: The National Plan 2040⁵ (which is discussed in more depth in the following section). The Welsh Government's Energy Generation in Wales 2019 Report⁶ published in October 2020 assessed the percentage of energy consumption provided by renewables to be at 51% (against the target of 70%).
- 1.4.3 The Welsh Government recognises the importance of wind power in meeting the renewable targets for 2030 and to ensure that the necessary carbon reductions are achieved on the path to net zero in 2050.

⁴ Welsh Government (2020). Lesley Griffiths high on ambition for clean energy. (Online) Available at: <http://www.assembly.wales/en/bus-home/pages/rop.aspx?meetingid=4644&assembly=5&c=Record%20of%20Proceedings#C494225> (Accessed October 2022).

⁵ Welsh Government (2021) Future Wales: the national plan 2040. (Online) Available at: <https://gov.wales/future-wales-national-plan-2040> (Accessed October 2022).

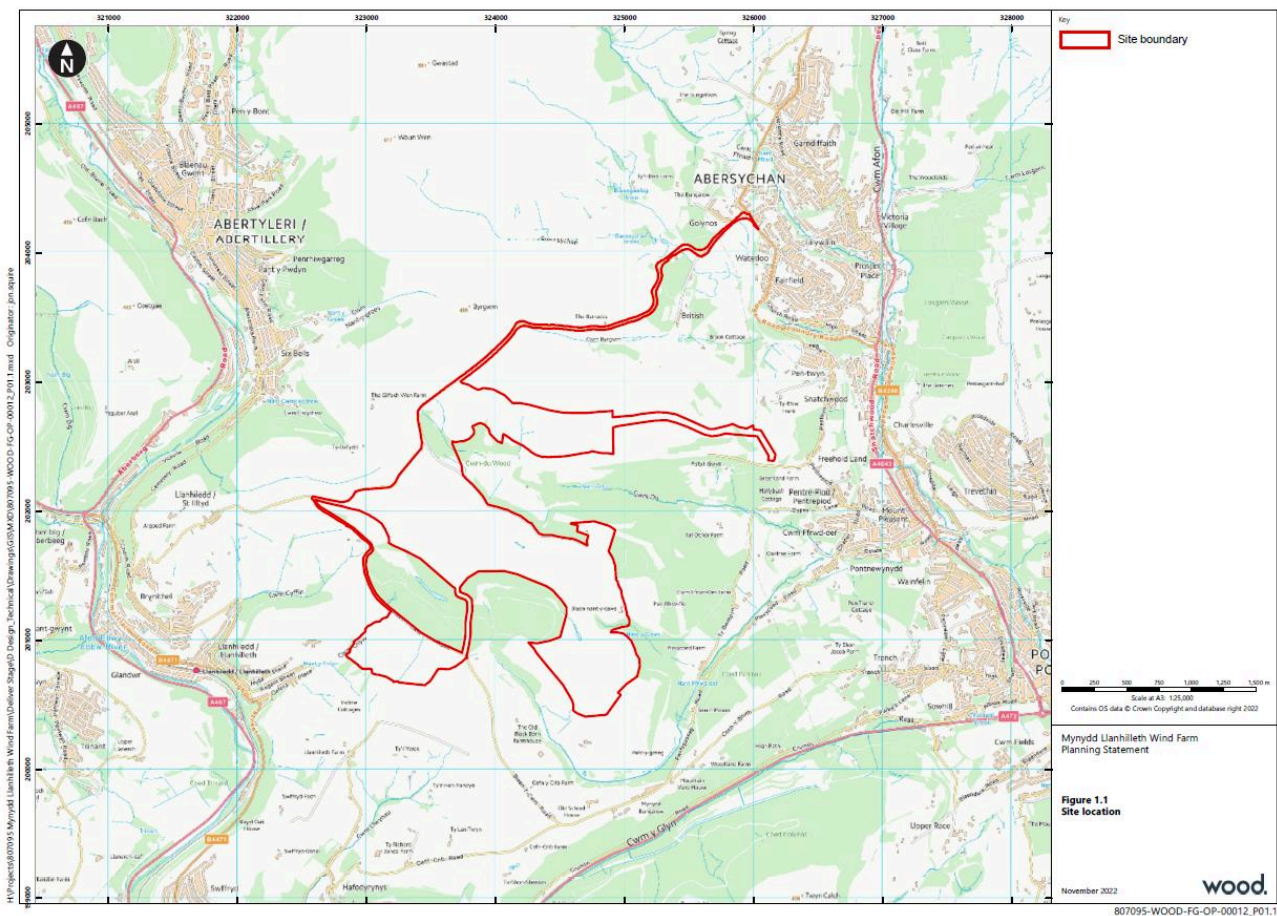
⁶ Welsh Government (2020) Energy Generation in Wales 2019

2. Summary of the Proposed Development

2.1 The location of the Proposed Mynydd Llanhilleth Wind Farm

- 2.1.1 The Site is approximately 300m east of Llanhilleth. The village of Brynithel is located approximately 500m to the south west of the Site at its closest point at Blaencuffin Road.
- 2.1.2 The Proposed Development would be located on the summit and upper slopes of Mynydd Llanhilleth and comprises a former quarry and associated area of coniferous woodland across its southern extents and intensively managed species-poor grassland, located within the high ground between the Afon Valley to the east and the Ebbw Fach Valley to the west.
- 2.1.3 The site location is shown in **Figure 2.1** Site Location below.

Figure 2.1 Site Location



2.2 The Proposed Development

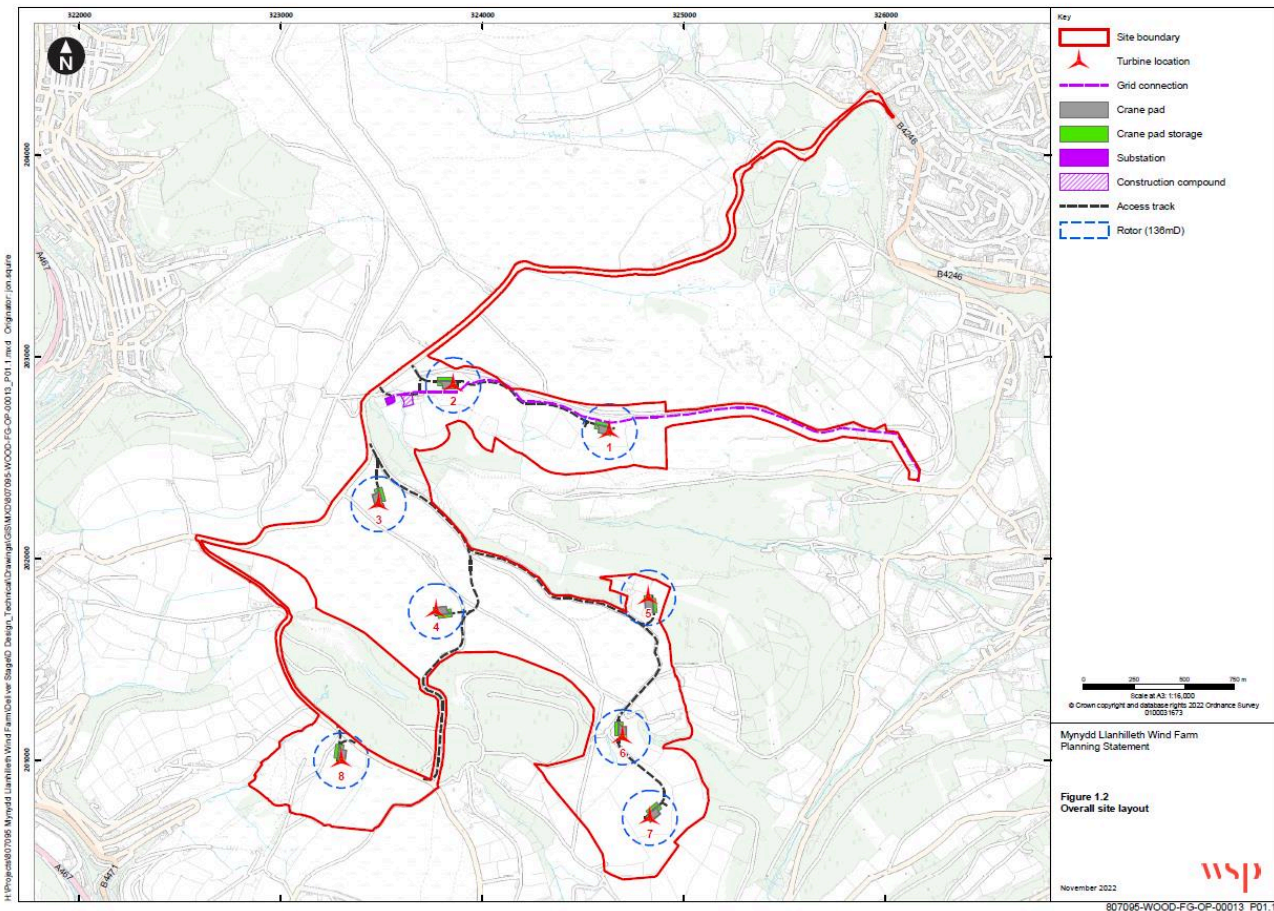
2.2.1 The Proposed Development is a wind farm consisting of a maximum of eight wind turbines, each with a three-bladed rotor with a diameter of up to 150m, a hub height of up to 122m and maximum height to blade tip of 180m. It will comprise:

- substation and control building;
- temporary construction compound, including temporary site offices;
- crane pads at each turbine location;
- turbine foundations, laydown and storage areas;
- underground power cables linking the turbines and the on-site substation;
- internal access tracks;
- upgraded access from the B4246;
- a grid connection consisting of underground cables which will intersect with the existing WPD overhead line network via a H-pole to the east of the Site near Tal-Ochor Farm to the west of Pontnewynydd; and
- other construction enabling works.

2.2.2 A full description is provided in **Draft ES Chapter 4: Description of the Proposed Development**.

2.2.3 The layout of the site is set out in **Figure 2.2** Site Layout below.

Figure 2.2 Site Layout



2.3 Developments of National Significance

2.3.1 Due to the potential generating capacity being over 10MW the Proposed Development constitutes a DNS. The DNS category was established under the Planning (Wales) Act 2015 to ensure timely decision making on applications of national significance for Wales. As a DNS the application for development is submitted to the Welsh Government for determination by PEDW rather than being submitted to the local planning authority. Following submission, a Planning Inspector will be appointed who will consider the application and supporting evidence before recommending to Welsh Ministers whether or not planning permission should be granted for the application.

3. Objectives

3.1 The objectives for the Proposed Development

3.1.1 Underpinning the design of the Proposed Development is the intention to provide a wind farm that will provide a source of renewable energy to support the energy needs of Wales without having significant effects on the environment. This means that the Proposed Development has been located and designed to:

- ensure carbon emissions are reduced;
- provide the most appropriate locations for wind turbines to ensure that the maximum amount of wind energy can be utilised from the site;
- ensure that visual impacts on the surrounding area are minimised;
- ensure that the public access to the site is maintained, in a safe manner; and
- ensure the residential and the environmental amenity of features in and around the site are protected.

3.1.2 The design process reflects the vision for the Proposed Development.

4. Site and Contextual Analysis

4.1 Site location and context

- 4.1.1 The site encompasses an area of approximately 267.59 hectares (ha) and is located on the summit and upper slopes of Mynydd Llanhilleth and comprises a former quarry and associated area of coniferous woodland across its southern extents and intensively managed species-poor grassland, located within the high ground between the Afon Valley to the east and the Ebbw Fach Valley to the west.
- 4.1.2 There is no built development within the Site. An overhead electricity transmission line supported by double pole pylons is located approximately 2km to the east of the site.
- 4.1.3 There is a Public Rights of Way (PRoW) network within and across the Site which includes a bridleway and several footpaths. Further details are set out in draft ES **Chapter 16: Socio economics**. In addition, a substantial part of the Site is within Mynydd Llanhilleth Common which is designated as common land.
- 4.1.4 There are several Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINC), designated within both the TCBC and BG CBC Local Development Plans (LDPs), which are partly present within the Site. Additionally, three SLAs are located within or adjacent to the Site and Proposed Development, including access routes, and would experience direct effects (including Blaenau Gwent SLA D- Eastern Ridge and Mynydd James, and SLA E - St Illtyd Plateau and Ebbw Eastern Sides; and TCBC's SLA H – Western Uplands). The site is 3.75km to the south of Blaenavon Industrial Landscape World Heritage Site (BILWHS) and approximately 25km from the Brecon Beacons National Park (BBNP).

4.2 The Development Plan

Future Wales

- 4.2.1 Future Wales: The National Plan 2040 (Future Wales from here on) was adopted in February 2021. Future Wales sets out national policy and is the highest tier of the development plan against which DNS applications are assessed. Future Wales includes a range of high-level policies which are intended to shape local authority development plans and inform decision making on applications for DNS.
- 4.2.2 There are two specific policies on renewable and low carbon energy:
- **Policy 17 – Renewable and Low Carbon Energy and Associated Infrastructure** sets out the Welsh Government's support for the development of all renewable and low carbon technologies in principle. It states that in determining planning applications for renewable and low carbon energy development, decision-makers must give significant weight to the need to meet Wales' international commitments and target to generate 70% of consumed electricity by renewable means by 2030 in order to combat the climate emergency. It has already modelled the likely impact on the landscape of wind turbines in Pre-assessed Areas and has found them to be capable of accommodating development in an acceptable way. The policy sets out the presumption in favour of large-scale wind within the Pre-assessed Areas but also outside, subject to performance against Policy 18. The site is not located in Pre-assessed Area (PAA) for wind; and

- Policy 18 – Renewable and Low Carbon Energy Developments of National Significance** states sets out a range of criteria that developments must meet including consideration of landscape effects with specific regard to national Parks and AONB and ensuring no unacceptable adverse: visual impacts on nearby communities; impacts on heritage assets; impacts by virtue of shadow flicker; and impacts on the transport network. The supporting text of Policy states that *“Irrespective of location or scale, the design and micro-siting of proposals must seek to minimise the landscape and visual impact, particularly those in close proximity to homes and tourism receptors.”*

4.3 Local Development Plans

- 4.3.1 The Proposed Development is located within the administrative area of TCBC and BGCBC.

Torfaen County Borough Council Local Development Plan policies

- 4.3.2 TBCB planning authority adopted its LDP in December 2013. The document was intended to apply up to 2021 although it remains the current plan until the Torfaen Replacement Local Plan 2018-2033 comes into effect which is still in early production. **Table 4.1** summarises what are considered to be the relevant LDP policies.

Table 4.1 Torfaen County Borough Council Local Development Plan policies

Policy title	Summary
S3 Climate Change	The policy seeks to mitigate the causes of further climate change and adapt to the current and future effects of climate changes. It includes (at criteria d) utilising renewable and low or zero carbon energy technologies to generate heat and electricity requirements.
S4 Place Making / Good Design	Sets out a range of criteria for good design in new development including having full regard to the context of the local natural and built environment.
S7 Conservation of the Natural and Historic Environment	Seeks to ensure that development proposals ensure the conservation and enhancement of the Natural, Built & Historic Environment of Torfaen, in particular a) Biodiversity resources; b) Geodiversity resources; c) Water environment. d) Landscape setting; e) Character of the built environment; and f) Historic assets.
BW1 General Policy – Development Proposals	Sets out general criteria development proposals need to comply with. In relation to developments that affect the Natural Environment the criteria include avoiding unacceptable adverse effects in respect of land contamination, instability or subsidence, air, heat, noise or light pollution; landfill gas; water pollution; or flooding, from or to the proposal, and does not result in significant effects on designated biodiversity sites, the landscape, and the water environment. The policy also seeks to ensure that the development does not compromise highway safety.
SAA5 The British SAA, Talywain, Pontypool	The policy confirms that land is allocated at the British Strategic Action Area, Talywain for a major land reclamation scheme. The land reclamation scheme will prepare the land required for future redevelopment as part of a long term regeneration scheme and make safe the surrounding land
M1 Minerals Safeguarding	Seeks to protect mineral resources and prevent permanent sterilisation.

Policy title	Summary
M3 Tir Pentwys Preferred Area for Aggregates	Land at Tir Pentwys (near Pontypool) is allocated as a Preferred Area for Aggregates as shown on the Proposals Map, within which proposals for the extraction of 7.2 million tonnes of aggregates may be permitted.
M4 Mineral Sites Buffer Zones	This policy explains that any development that would prejudice the extraction of the mineral or operation of a permitted mineral site will be refused.
C2 Special Landscape Areas	This policy development explains that development proposals that could impact on these designations will be expected to conform to high standards of design and environmental protection which is appropriate to the LANDMAP character of the area.
BG1 Locally Designated Sites for Biodiversity and Geodiversity	This policy seeks to avoid adverse impacts on local nature conservation designated sites (including the features of a Site of Importance for Nature Conservation, Local Nature Reserves, or Regionally Important Geological Sites).
HE1 Buildings and Structures of Local Importance	Seeks to ensure that development proposals affecting buildings and structures of local importance which make a valuable contribution to the character and interest of the local area will not be permitted where the distinctive appearance, architectural integrity or their settings would be significantly adversely affected, unless the benefits of the proposal would outweigh such adverse effects.

Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council Local Development Plan policies

4.3.3 The relevant local policy for the site is set out in the BGCBC Local Plan (LDP) which was adopted in November 2012. The document was intended to apply up to 2021 although it remains the current plan until the Local Development Plan 2018 to 2023 comes into effect which is still in early production. Table 4.2 highlight the relevant LDP policies.

Table 4.2 Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council Local Development Plan policies

Policy title	Summary
SP7 Climate Change	The policy sets out overall approach to address climate change and reduce energy demand and includes (at criteria (1a)) encouraging renewable/low/zero carbon electricity and heat generation.
SP9 Active and Health Communities	This policy promotes the delivery of active and healthy communities including protecting and enhancing accessibility to natural greenspaces.
SP10 Protection and Enhancement of the Natural Environment	Seeks to protect and, where possible, enhance natural environment and provides criteria through which this will be achieved within Blaenau Gwent related landscapes, green infrastructure, biodiversity and nature conservation.
SP11 Protection and	Seeks to protect, preserve and enhance the historic environment through safeguarding nationally designated sites and protecting locally designated buildings

Policy title	Summary
Enhancement of the Historic Environment	and conservation areas, enhancing sites of historic/archaeological value and promoting heritage tourism.
DM1 New Development	Sets out a range of criteria for good design in new development: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sustainable design including energy efficiency, effective use of resources, minimisation of construction waste, and no net loss of biodiversity; • Amenity including consideration of compatibility with other uses in the locality, adverse visual impacts, adverse impacts on the water environment, health, and land stability; and • Accessibility including the provision of safe, effective and efficient access and parking, servicing and operational space.
DM2 Design and Placemaking	Sets out a range of criteria to including ensuring development proposals are appropriate to the local context in form, scale and mix; are of a good design which reinforces local character and distinctiveness and responds to the area's context.
DM4 Low and Zero Carbon Energy	The policy provides criteria against which low and zero carbon development, such as onshore wind will be considered. The criteria cover a range of issues including landscape impacts, archaeology, noise and amenity, electro-magnetic fields, and removal of infrastructure.
DM14 Biodiversity Protection and Enhancement	Projects within 10km of Usk Bat Sites SAC that would have impacts on connectivity or cause direct/indirect effects to be subject to HRA. Proposals close to or within SINC's or LNR or affect ecological corridors of Priority Habitats and Species will only be permitted subject to a) maintaining or enhancing the importance of the designation or b) the need for the development outweighs the importance of the site and the development cannot be reasonably located elsewhere.
DM16 Trees, Woodland and Hedgerow Protection	Requires that development proposals not give rise to unacceptable harm to trees, woodlands and hedgerows that have natural heritage value or contribute to the character or amenity of a particular locality.
DM19 Mineral Safeguarding	Seeks to protect mineral resources and prevent permanent sterilisation.
ENV2 Special Landscape Areas	Lists the eight SLAs that have been identified within the area administered by Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council using a regionally agreed methodology. Development within the defined SLAs will be expected to conform to the highest standards of design, siting, layout and materials appropriate to the character of the area.
ENV3 Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation	The policy lists the Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINC's). There are 26 SINC's within 2km of the Site.
M1 Safeguarding of Minerals	Safeguards mineral resources to avoid sterilisation.
M2 Mineral Buffer Zones	The policy seeks to (a) avoid development that prejudices the extraction of mineral or operation of sites whilst (b) no new mineral extraction will be permitted except in exceptional circumstances.

Policy title	Summary
M4 Preferred Areas	The policy identifies Preferred Areas and buffer zones with some commercial potential.

5. Design Evolution

5.1 Introduction

- 5.1.1 This section sets out the process undertaken to evolve the Proposed Development from site selection through to the onsite design options chosen. A full description of the approach to the selection of the site and to deciding on the specific design is set out in **Draft ES Chapter 3: Scheme Need, Alternatives and Iterative Design Process**.

5.2 Site selection

- 5.2.1 Pennant Walters as Applicant undertook a site selection process in 2019. The site selection was informed by national policy considerations and specific technical criteria relevant to the proposed use for wind turbines and landscape.
- 5.2.2 As set out in Section 4.2, Future Wales sets out a series of Pre-Assessed Areas (PAA) for Wind Energy within which the principle of developing large scale wind farms is supported. Although at the time of the site selection process the approach to PAA was emerging it was clear that the final version of Future Wales would include PAA. The Applicant undertook a high-level review of areas with a more detailed review of options that were within or close to PAAs.
- 5.2.3 The consideration of wind speed was a key consideration. Areas that did not have a mean annual average wind speed above 7 metres per second (considered by the Applicant to be the minimum required for a commercially viable scheme) in the ETSU NOABL database were excluded from further consideration. Those areas with wind speeds above 7m/s within the Brecon Beacons National Park (BBNP), and any other national landscape designations, were excluded from the search exercise consistent with Future Wales planning policy.
- 5.2.4 Four sites were identified, all of which are being taken forward as DNS applications by the Applicant.
- 5.2.5 A summary of the main factors considered in the site selection and the performance of this site is set out in **Table 5.1**.

Table 5.1 Summary of main factors considered in site selection

Assessment Category	Specific factor	Site performance
Wind resource	Average annual wind speed Wind direction	7m/s Predominantly southwest
Electronic Infrastructure	Proximity of transmission lines Proximity of grid connection points	33kv, 66kv and 132kv sufficiently close to the site Adjoining the site
Land Value	Land ownership Ecological value Archaeological value Landscape value (and designations)	Willingness of landowner Low/moderate Low/moderate

Assessment Category	Specific factor	Site performance
		Partly within a PAA and outside any sensitive landscape designations.
Land Form	Size of site, useable area	Over 200ha
	Steepness of terrain Smoothness of hill tops	Predominantly flat ridge areas
	Alignment of high ground to prevailing wind	Plateau on steep sided banks Good Very Good
Land use/Land cover	Road network and access	Classified highway immediately to the west
	Radio-telecommunications masts	No masts on site, telecoms links identified.
	Current land use	Grazing mixed livestock
	Nearby land use	Land surrounding the site is rural, agricultural. The LDP identifies the site and 70% of the County Borough as mineral safeguarding (sandstone)
	Proximity of urban settlements	Porth to the north and Trebanog to the west.

5.2.6 Overall, the Site was considered to be a suitable site due to a range of factors:

- excellent wind resource;
- whilst the majority of the site is outside a Future Wales PAA for Wind Energy it is also well outside a national park and AONB;
- large usable area;
- low vulnerability to major accidents and disasters arising from, for example, flooding or sea level rise, due to location;
- good potential access;
- available existing electric infrastructure nearby;
- not on national statutory designations;
- minimising effects on common land;
- likely low impact on ecology, archaeology, geology etc. given the baseline conditions, both from the Proposed Development and from potential major accidents and disasters (although these could only be confirmed subsequently once the necessary surveys had been undertaken).

5.3 Design

5.3.1 Following site selection the design has been informed by the technical and site-specific requirements. The design was optimised to maximise the capability for wind generation whilst reducing the environmental impact as far as possible. The design process was informed by a number of criteria:

- ground conditions – ground conditions must be suitable for the installation of wind turbines, access tracks and cables;
- site topography – the site topography is computer modelled to establish the wind flow on and around the site to provide guidance on the best locations for the wind turbines;
- distance between turbines – to minimise turbulence interaction between wind turbines (wake effect), turbines should be separated by set distances both perpendicular to, and in line with, the prevailing wind direction. This design feature is a key factor in maximising the overall power generating capacity of a site;
- proximity to occupied dwellings – wind turbines have to be located sufficiently far away from houses to protect local amenity;
- environmental constraints – features and areas of local environmental sensitivity (ecology, archaeology, hydrology etc.) are identified and their implications considered;
- landscape and visual design considerations are taken into account and the layout modified accordingly;
- existing land use – whilst the wind turbines and their associated infrastructure typically occupy no more than 2% of the site, the existing use of the land is considered in the layout of tracks and turbines. For example, existing track lines are used where practicable;
- the presence and magnitude of woodland is also important, as these can reduce energy production from wind turbines;
- proximity to obstructions – such as tall trees or buildings;
- available spare capacity of the electricity grid to take power from the wind farm; and
- proximity to a road network suitable to allow the transport of construction plant, equipment and wind turbine components to the site.

5.3.2 In addition to the above considerations, planning guidance, discussions and/or consultation with statutory and non-statutory consultees and the landowners have influenced the evolution of the design.

Design iterations

5.3.3 Wind farm design is an iterative process, and the layout of the Proposed Development has evolved in response to a number of environmental and technical constraints – including site character and appearance of the scheme – and discussions with the local community and statutory and non-statutory consultees during non-statutory consultation. **Table 5.2** identifies the main iterations of the design and the rationale for such changes.

Table 5.2 Design Iterations

Design Iteration	Rationale / Summary
Layout 1	Initial layout based on known information and good design practice.
January 2020	This layout served as a starting point for consideration of the Proposed Development.

Design Iteration	Rationale / Summary
Layout 2 April 2021	<p>This iteration was prepared following some initial constraints identification and mapping including national and international designations, existing infrastructure, woodland and waterbodies.</p>
Layout 3 May 2021	<p>This design iteration included the minimisation of tracks within area denoted as Common Land, to reduce the overall impact on the designated area.</p>
Layout 4 March 2022	<p>Following the review of engineering feasibility, this iteration included the relocation of a turbine due to technical constraints, as well as the addition of the finalised access tracks and crane pads to the layout.</p>
Layout 5 May 2022	<p>This iteration was for the inclusion of the permanent met mast location (which was the subject of a separate application) and the onsite substation.</p>
Layout 6 Revised layout June 2022	<p>This iteration updated the layout as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relocation of the substation due to the requirements of the underground grid connection. • Including the grid connection indicative routing to the point of connection • Amended access track between Turbine 4 and 8, due to constraints highlighted by the swept path analysis.
Layout 7 Red line boundary amended June 2022	<p>Following Layout 6, the red line boundary of the Site was modified to remove any areas not required for the infrastructure but to allow for micro-siting distances of up to 50m for each turbine, whilst also including the access route and grid connection corridor within the redline.</p>
Layout 8 Design chill for Draft ES August 2022	<p>Following an engineering review, the changes from the previous layout include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Addition of crane pads and storage areas • Minor changes to access track layouts • Movement of electrical substation <p>The non-turbine infrastructure required on site was designed and arranged in such a way as to avoid the identified on-site constraints where possible. Whilst the majority of the infrastructure layout was designed following the turbine layout design, some minor iterations to turbine locations and track alignments were necessary to facilitate the optimum on-site infrastructure requirements. Access track routes in particular were designed to follow existing tracks where possible and to avoid potentially sensitive areas.</p>

Micro-siting

- 5.3.4 The application seeks a micro-siting allowance for the turbines and associated infrastructure. The allowance which is being sought is up to 50m for turbines and 100m for internal wind farm tracks and other infrastructure such as substations and compounds. This would allow minor changes to turbine locations at the construction stage and this allowance has been accounted for in the EIA process.

5.4 Public involvement and consultation

Introduction

- 5.4.1 EIA scoping is the process of identifying those aspects of the environment which need to be considered when assessing the effects of a particular development proposal. This recognises that there may be some environmental elements where there will be no significant effects resulting from the development and hence where there is no need for further investigations to be taken.
- 5.4.2 Scoping is undertaken through consulting organisations and individuals with an interest in and knowledge of the site combined with the professional judgement of the EIA team. It takes account of published guidance, the effects of the kind of development proposed and the environmental resources which could be affected.

Scoping Report

- 5.4.3 As the Proposed Development qualifies as a DNS, a formal Scoping Direction was sought from Planning Inspectorate Wales (PINS)⁷ in May 2021 in order that the Environmental Statement contains the information required for it to evaluate the environmental effects of the Proposed Development. To assist it in reaching its opinion, and to allow broader consultation on the scope with bodies which may be unfamiliar with the proposals, the following information was provided in a Scoping Report:
- the development characteristics;
 - the anticipated temporal and technical scope;
 - an overview and evaluation of the main environmental issues, including:
 - ▶ landscape and Visual amenity;
 - ▶ historic Environment;
 - ▶ biodiversity;
 - ▶ ornithology;
 - ▶ water Environment;
 - ▶ ground Conditions;
 - ▶ traffic and Transport;

⁷ On 1 October 2021 PINS Wales became the Planning and Environment Decisions Wales (PEDW) (or Penderfyniadau Cynllunio ac Amgylchedd Cymru)

- ▶ noise; and
- ▶ infrastructure and other issues including Shadow Flicker; Socio-economics; Major accidents and disasters.
- an outline of the proposed methodologies for completing the identification of the baseline conditions and the assessment of predicted impacts and effects; and
- a summary of the proposed scope of the EIA.

Scoping Direction

- 5.4.4 A Scoping Direction was received from the Planning Inspectorate dated 6 August 2021. The ES details the final scope of the assessment in relation to effects that it has assessed could be significant and therefore needed to be subject to more detailed assessment. Both the Scoping Report and the subsequent Scoping Direction have been used as a basis to assess, and inform the design of, the scheme.

Consultation

- 5.4.5 The initial proposals for the site were subject to early public consultation which closed in August 2021⁸. The consultation sought views on the site constraints, emerging proposals, environmental impacts, transport issues and community benefit.
- 5.4.6 This Draft DAS together with other documents will be the subject of statutory consultation, feedback from which will be reviewed in relation to the present proposals for the Proposed Development.

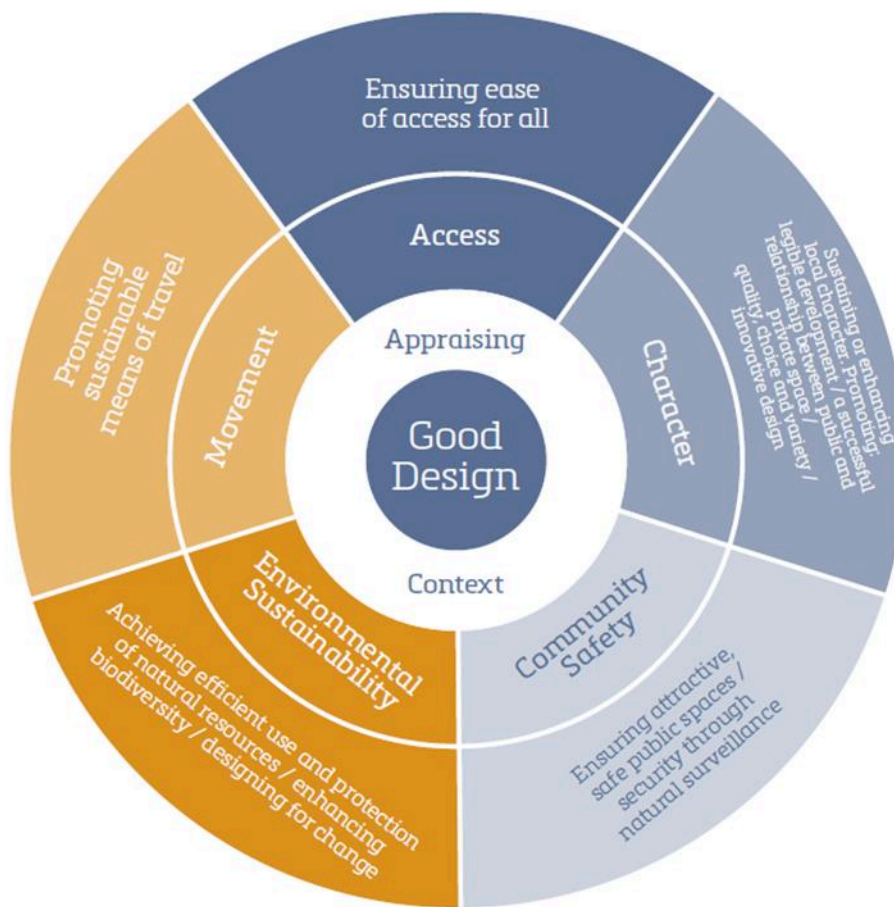
⁸ Details of the public consultation are available via: Pennant Walters (2022). Consultation (Online) Available at: <https://mynydd-llanhilleth.co.uk/> (Accessed November 2022).

6. The Proposal

6.1 Introduction

6.1.1 This section sets out further information about the Proposed Development and how it meets the objectives of Good Design contained in the PPW in line with the Welsh Government’s DAS guidance (2017). The objectives of Good Design are included in **Figure 6.1**.

Figure 6.1 Objectives of Good Design



Source: Welsh Government (2021) Planning Policy Wales – Edition 11

6.1.2 The five objectives examined in the following sections are:

- **Character** – sustaining or enhancing local character promoting legible design and a successful relationship between public and private spaces;
- **Access** – ensuring access for all;
- **Movement** – promoting sustainable means of transport;
- **Environment sustainability** – ensuring the efficient and protection of resources; and

- **Community safety** – ensuring safe and attractive spaces.

6.1.3 At the start of each section the Welsh Government's DAS guidance (2017) requirements are captured. Additionally, in the final section, consideration is given to how the Proposed Development responds to the policy context.

6.2 Character

DAS Guidance: How does the proposal sustain or enhance local character and promote legible development, a successful relationship between public and private space, quality, choice and variety and innovative design?

Wind farm design

Turbines

- 6.2.1 The Proposed Development consists of up to eight turbines, each with a three-bladed rotor with a diameter of up to 150m, a hub height of up to 122m and maximum height to blade tip of 180m. The turbines proposed are three bladed variable speed pitch regulated, with the rotor and nacelle mounted on a cylindrical tower. This is a typical modern, horizontal axis design comprising four main components: a rotor (consisting of a hub and three blades); a nacelle (containing the generator and also often a gearbox) to which the rotor is mounted; a tower; and a foundation. This reflects ongoing innovation in wind turbine design.
- 6.2.2 The specific choice of wind turbine is dependent on the final commercial and technical choice by the Applicant but would not exceed the physical parameters specified in the consent (and as assessed in the ES). The turbines would be supported by a transformer which is likely to be located immediately adjacent to the turbine tower (although they can be incorporated into the nacelle or base of the tower and this will be dependent on final turbine choice).
- 6.2.3 The design process has considered an appropriate colour for the wind turbines and determined that a neutral colour (colour specification, light grey RAL 7035) with a semi-matt finish, so as to minimise the visual intrusion, is the preferred colour to minimise contrast against the sky.
- 6.2.4 The wind farm has been designed to be operational for up to 30 years and will include site management to ensure that site facilities such as roads, boundaries, gates and signage are maintained. At the end of the operational life of the turbines, there are two possible options. Firstly, to decommission the wind farm and remove the turbines; or apply to install new equipment on the site (for which a further planning consent would be required).

Foundations

- 6.2.5 The full foundation requirements will be subject to finalisation dependent on detailed ground investigation. The design of foundations will minimise excavation requirements and visible projection above ground level and allow for the re-establishment of surface vegetation when construction is complete. Foundations will usually comprise a reinforced concrete base slab with dimensions of approximately 20m diameter x 4m depth.

Substation

- 6.2.6 The applicant has received an offer of a grid connection from Western Power Distribution (WPD) as the Distribution Network Operator (DNO). The connection will be via an underground cable between the on-site substation and the existing WPD overhead line network to the east of the Site near Tal-Ochor Farm to the west of Pontnewynydd. The underground cable will be delivered by WPD, but will be consented as part of this DNS process.
- 6.2.7 The specific arrangement for the on-site substation depends on WPD's requirements. A transformer may be required to be located onsite. If required, a transformer would be provided within a substation compound which would comprise a stoned area of approximately 37.5m x 35m containing the transformer and associated equipment (isolators, circuit breakers). If a transformer is not required then all electrical equipment would be housed within the substation building.
- 6.2.8 The substation building (approximately 14m x 10m) would be a single storey building which will house metering, protection and control equipment, storage and welfare facilities. The substation building would be traditional blockwork construction and faced in stone with a slate roof. Any associated fencing would be finished in either moorland green/brown or dark grey in order to blend with either the existing landscape colours or traditional building colours for the area.

Site context

- 6.2.9 The assessment of the site's wider context formed a key part of the site selection process as illustrated by **Section** Error! Reference source not found. of this DAS. Furthermore, the Proposed Development is supported by an ES, which has considered the likely significant environmental effects of the development on environmental and human receptors.

Cultural heritage setting

- 6.2.10 An assessment of the impact on the cultural heritage setting has been undertaken. There are no designated historic assets on the Site. Whilst there are non-designated historic assets on the Site the draft ES Chapter concludes that that Proposed Development would not result in any adverse effect on their heritage value and there would be no significance of effect. The presence for unknown archaeology is however recognised and the Applicant is committed recording any archaeology found – where the limited intrusive groundworks are required – with the exact approach to be secured through DNS condition.
- 6.2.11 **Draft ES Chapter 7: Historic Environment** assesses the potential for the Proposed development to affect the setting of historic assets such as Scheduled Monuments, listed buildings, conservation areas, historic parks and gardens and the Blaenavon Industrial Landscape World Heritage Site (BILWHS) which is located 3.75km to the south of the nearest turbine. The draft chapter acknowledges that whilst the Proposed Development would result in a single impact upon the BILWHS comprising a Moderate Adverse significance of effect to one of its values, namely its Aesthetic and Visual Value, the assessment concludes that owing to the distant nature of the development and the absence of any change to the setting of the WHS's core areas of heritage interest in the town of Blaenavon and valley bottom, the effect would not translate into a loss of any of the WHS's Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) or its integrity and authenticity. The Blaenavon Landscape of Outstanding Historic Interest (BLOHI) is also located beyond the site. The nearest Historic Landscape Character Areas (HLCA) that makes up the BLOHI is 2.75km to the north of the site. The draft chapter concludes that the proposed development would not result in any adverse effect on the BLOHI.

6.3 Access

DAS Guidance: How do the proposals ensure ease of access for all into the development and to all elements within the site?

Site access

- 6.3.1 Draft ES **Chapter 12: Traffic and Transport** describes the transport network surrounding the site and the routes to be taken both by local construction vehicles and by deliveries of turbine components from the port of Swansea. Direct access into the site for construction and operation will be via the B4246 (Talywain), where it is proposed to create a new construction access.

Construction

Site access

- 6.3.2 The access for construction will be from a new junction created with the B4246. **Draft ES Chapter 12: Traffic and Transport** assesses the likely effects on the traffic and transport network.
- 6.3.3 Based on the construction programme the approximate peak of 77 HGV movements per day two-way is predicted. This number represents between 1.4% and 0.3% of total vehicle movements along the three roads assessed, namely the B4246 (Talywain), A40043 (Pontnewynydd) and A472 (Pontypool) roads. The number of movements exceeds only a 30% increase in HGVs along the B4246 (Talywain), A40043 (Pontnewynydd) roads. As a result the A472 (Pontypool) road is therefore scoped out of further assessment.
- 6.3.4 The assessment for the B4246 (Talywain), A40043 (Pontnewynydd) roads considers the effects on severance, driver delay, pedestrian delay and amenity, fear and intimidation (of pedestrians and cyclists), accidents and safety and concludes that they would be not significant. Overall, the draft chapter concludes that effects on the transport network would not be significant.
- 6.3.5 A Draft Construction Traffic Management Plan (CTMP) has also been prepared (Draft ES Appendix 12B). This sets out the management of daily delivery profiles and controls construction vehicle movements and routing of HGVs to/from the site.

Onsite access

- 6.3.6 It is anticipated that approximately 5.8km of onsite track will be required for the Proposed Development overall. The tracks will be approximately (~)5m wide, ~0.6m deep (dependent of ground conditions), with a ~2m grass verge either side. The tracks will be constructed of suitable roadstone. Any existing track will be upgraded. Gradients for new tracks will be kept to less than 8 percent with radius curves to 50m where practicable. The track layout is designed to accommodate the requirements of delivery vehicles and to allow the construction workforce, plant and machinery to move safely. The track layout seeks to follow contours where possible and to avoid cross slopes and deep cut and fill into the existing terrain where possible. Tracks are routed to avoid sensitive ecological, archaeological and hydrological features.

Operation

- 6.3.7 During the operational phase the expectation is that the Proposed Development would require the maintenance of turbines at six monthly intervals and at other times when faults occur. More maintenance may be required early in the 30 year operation life and towards the end of the period.

Access for all

- 6.3.8 The type of Proposed Development is such that it is not designed to enable access for members of the public regardless of levels of mobility. Therefore, specific provisions for disabled access have not been incorporated into the design. Although onsite tracks are capable of being used by the public and have been designed to provide safe and appropriate access, they are not designed for the purpose of enabling access for all.
- 6.3.9 There are some Public Rights of Way (PRoW) which cross the site. **Section 6.6** sets out considerations of the PRoW with respect to ensuring safe access during construction and operation.

6.4 Movement

DAS Guidance: How does the proposal promote sustainable means of travel?

- 6.4.1 The wind turbines, substation and other infrastructure on site will only be accessed by construction personnel and maintenance teams who will periodically attend the development site to, for example, maintain and service the turbines.
- 6.4.2 As stated in ES draft **Chapter 12: Traffic and Transport** given the site's location in relation to the public transport network, the opportunity for contractors to travel to the site by public transport is not viable. Additionally, the distance to the established cycle network and lack of footway connections to local amenities and establishments means that travel by alternative sustainable modes is unlikely to be chosen by contractors. Car-sharing is something that can be promoted to the construction workforce.
- 6.4.3 The public has access to the Site given that it includes a network of PRoWs and common land. This will be managed through appropriate measures, set out in the Construction Environmental Management Plan which includes a Public Rights of Way Management Plan, for the duration of the proposed construction works. After this point the impact on the PRoW would be minimal with the access being used sparingly for routine maintenance vehicles in the operational phase. In addition, as the proposed construction access crosses an existing PRoW, safe access in the construction phase will also be specified in the Construction Traffic Management Plan (CTMP). Construction works will be sign posted, and users of the PRoW network notified of activity.
- 6.4.4 As noted above the Proposed Development would result in the loss of 2.7ha of common land. The Applicant would provide 4ha to compensate with this area of land remaining as common land once the wind farm has decommissioned. In view of the mitigation proposed, the effect of the Proposed Development during its construction and operation is considered to be not significant. The means of managing the construction interface with the commoners will be set out in the CEMP whilst, for operation, the compensatory land would be delivered via the Commons Act 2006.

6.5 Environmental Sustainability

DAS Guidance: How does the proposal achieve efficient use and protection of natural resources, enhance biodiversity, and demonstrate designing for change?

Renewable Energy

- 6.5.1 The Welsh Government has set a target for 70% of energy consumption in 2030 to be provided by renewable sources. Dependant on the final turbine choice, the Proposed Development of up to 8 turbines could generate up to 34MW of power with the Draft ES assessing a candidate turbine that would generate up to 33.6MW⁹ of power. This is capable of powering approximately 21,392 average households. With regards to resource efficiency, and supporting a reduced reliance on fossil fuels, this is considerable.
- 6.5.2 The Proposed Development will help to ensure environmental sustainability through the production of renewable energy thus supporting the move away from fossil fuels.
- 6.5.3 The site design has been influenced by the optimal scheme for wind power generation, taking into account consideration of achieving the best wind resource and reducing turbulence from turbines. The design responds to site conditions whilst balancing the effects arising from construction and operation. The design layout was found to be the most sustainable and appropriate for the type of development proposed.

Agricultural land

- 6.5.4 As set out in **Draft ES Chapter 11: Ground Conditions**, the site is assessed as mainly Grade 5 Agricultural Land Classification (ALC) and some Grade 4. Therefore, no land that is considered to be the 'best and most versatile' (Grades 1 to 3a) will be lost through the development. The actual built development covers a relatively small percentage of the overall land take. Measures embedded in the design will ensure that soil removed during construction is reused on site where possible and low ground pressure machinery will be used where possible to minimise soil impactation.

Landscape assessment

- 6.5.5 The landscape and visual assessment is set out in **Draft ES Chapter 6: Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment**. Whilst it is acknowledged there will be significant effects on one LCA that forms part of the BBNP, the draft chapter concludes that no significant effects on the special qualities of the BBNP as a result of the Proposed Development during construction or at operation.
- 6.5.6 The likely effects on locally designated Special Landscape Areas (SLA) have also been assessed in the LVIA. Of these, three crossed into the site and would incur both direct and indirect effects from the Proposed Development. Significant overall landscape effects were assessed for the following SLAs: Blaenau Gwent CBC SLA A; Mynydd Carn y Cefn and Cefn yr Arail; SLA D; Eastern Ridge and Mynydd James and SLA E; St Illtyd Plateau and Ebbw Eastern Sides; and Torfaen CBC SLA H - Western Uplands and Torfaen SLA F – Eastern Uplands.

⁹ Based on turbines with an output of 4.2MW being implemented.

Biodiversity

- 6.5.7 Draft ES **Chapter 8: Biodiversity** examines how the proposals will affect biodiversity. It concludes that no significant effects will occur. Draft ES **Chapter 9: Ornithology** considers the effects on ornithology, including breeding and non-breeding birds. The draft chapter concludes no significant effects will occur. Environmental measures required to avoid or reduce biodiversity impacts will be incorporated into a Landscape and Ecology Management Plan (LEMP) which will be secured via a suitably worded planning condition.

Water environment

- 6.5.8 **Draft ES Chapter 10: Water Environment** outlines a series of embedded measures including good working practices, drainage and materials management and management of water discharges which would support appropriate management of the aquatic environment, water resources and flood risk during the construction phase. Measures such as a detailed drainage design utilising SuDS principles and appropriate fuel storage would be implemented in the operational phase. No significant effects are concluded for the water environment.

6.6 Community safety

DA DAS Guidance: How has the proposal ensured attractive, safe public spaces and security through natural surveillance?

- 6.6.1 The Proposed Development will be delivered in a safe manner and ensure that the opportunities for crime are minimised through effective design measures, such as fencing around the substation compound being incorporated into the scheme. Additionally, the construction compound would be lit with security lighting and it is anticipated that a small security area would be established at the junction to the public highway.
- 6.6.2 There is a network of PRowS which cross the site. In addition the Site is within Mynydd Llanhilleth Common which is designated as common land. There is potential for some disruption to the PRowS, with some limited interventions required such as signage, diversion or possible closure and further information on the management measures which could be employed is provided within **Draft ES Chapter 16: Socio Economics**. In summary however signage will be placed at appropriate locations to inform the public of the construction activities taking place. An overall Construction Environmental Management Plan (CEMP) will be prepared by the appointed site contractor that will provide a commitment to ensure that all workers understand that the site is open to access, and public safety should be considered at all times.

6.7 Responding to the planning policy context

DAS Guidance: This section of the document provides the opportunity to explain how the proposals have responded to relevant planning policy and guidance. The relevant policy and guidance should have been identified at the site and context analysis stage, this section should provide a summary of the design decisions that have been made in response to these policies.

- 6.7.1 The planning policy context is set out in Section **Error! Reference source not found.** The proposal would see the development of a wind farm outside an area identified in Future Wales Policy 17 as a location suitable for large scale wind development (as a PAA for Wind Energy) but still benefiting from a positive policy framework in favour of onshore wind energy generation via Policy 18.
- 6.7.2 The reason why land has been chosen outside of a PAA is that the one closest to the Site, PAA 9 is considered to be constrained both by the availability of land with a suitable wind speed and by the fact that a significant area within it includes valleys containing centres of population. This resulted in the need to identify high ground with good wind speed, away from local population centres, on Mynydd Llanhilleth.
- 6.7.3 The development has been designed so as to minimise the take up of land, the impact on the landscape and the effects on biodiversity assets. Additionally, through the ES the effects on a range of other environmental receptors have been assessed. The EIA process has helped to ensure that where possible the design of the windfarm has sought to avoid or reduce the environmental impacts. Detailed consideration has therefore been given to the criteria in Policy 18 of Future Wales through site selection and design refinement.
- 6.7.4 The **Draft Planning Statement** provides a detailed assessment of the Proposed Development against the planning policy framework.

7. Conclusion

7.1 Summary of the Proposed Development design

- 7.1.1 The Proposed Development positively contributes to the achievement of the UK and Wales' goal to increase renewable energy generation to help combat the challenges posed by climate change. The design of the Proposed Development has been informed by consideration of technical, environmental and policy constraints. Additionally, the iterative design process has been informed by consultation with key stakeholders and the local community.
- 7.1.2 The design has been informed by the EIA process. The Draft ES demonstrates that the effects on a range of environmental receptors have been assessed and a range of measures have been proposed to reduce, and avoid, impacts of the Proposed Development on the environment where possible.
- 7.1.3 Whilst the Draft ES identified that some significant environmental effects are predicted to occur at a local level, national policy highlights that these are often inherent in the development of onshore wind energy and that the level of effect should be balanced against the socio-economic benefits and environmental benefits arising from the mitigation of climate change.
- 7.1.4 There will be some disruption to public access within the site during the construction phase, but this will be temporary and once operational the Proposed Development will not restrict access with appropriate mitigation measures. The Draft ES states there will be no significant negative effects regarding access to the Site, or upon it, as a result of the construction activities proposed. Furthermore, non-significant effects will be further reduced via the adoption of management measures in the form of a Landscape and Ecology Management Plan (LEMP) and Construction Traffic Management Plan (CTMP).

