

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

MUNICIPAL YEAR 2014-215

**DEVELOPMENT CONTROL
COMMITTEE
5 MARCH 2015**

**REPORT OF: SERVICE
DIRECTOR PLANNING**

	Agenda Item No. 6
APPLICATION RECOMMENDED FOR REFUSAL	

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

Members are asked to determine the planning application outlined in Appendix 1.

2. RECOMMENDATION

To refuse the application for the reasons outlined in Appendix 1.

1. Application No.14/1388 - A single wind turbine of max 67m to tip, along with associated infrastructure including an access track and electrical housing, land at Cefn Farm, Mount Road, Rhigos, Aberdare, GRID REF: E:291009 N:206648

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APPLICATIONS RECOMMENDED FOR REFUSAL

APPLICATION NO: 14/1388/10 (HW)
APPLICANT: Mr P Morgan
DEVELOPMENT: A single wind turbine of max 67m to tip, along with associated infrastructure including an access track and electrical housing.
LOCATION: LAND AT CEFN FARM, MOUNT ROAD, RHIGOS, ABERDARE, CF44 9YS GRID REF: E:291009 N:206648
DATE REGISTERED: 29/10/2014
ELECTORAL DIVISION: Rhigos

RECOMMENDATION: Refuse

REASONS:

The proposed wind turbine is considered to bring wind turbine development, already in existence with further consented on the coal field plateau above the scarp slope to the south, closer to the Brecon Beacons National Park. This proposal is also considered to spread wind turbine development in to an area forming part of the setting of the Park where there is currently none. This is considered to result in an adverse landscape impact on the National Park and visual impact when viewed from certain areas of it. This conflicts with national policy in respect of development and its impact on National Parks, and Policy AW12 of the Rhondda Cynon Taf Local Development Plan.

APPLICATION DETAILS

Planning permission is sought for a single wind turbine at Cefn Farm, Cefn Rhigos. The proposed turbine is 67 metres high when measured to the blade tip, and 40 metres high to the hub, and would have an output of 500 kilowatts. The turbine will be of a 3-blade design. The proposed tower is steel and the three blades are reinforced polyester. The tower is to be painted an off white colour. It is intended the turbine will be operational for a period of 25 years.

In addition to the turbine, an access track of approximately 450 metres in length is proposed from Mount Road to the turbine. There is currently a partial access from Mount Road in existence, which serves the farm house. A transformer and control cabinet is also proposed adjacent to the turbine, with a footprint of 5 metres x 3.1 metres and a height of 2.3 metres, along with a hardstanding and an underground cable between the turbine and the control house.

Following a Screening Request in August, the Council adopted a Screening Opinion that Environmental Impact Assessment was not required. The application therefore is not accompanied by an Environmental Statement, but is accompanied by a number of documents as follows:

- Design and Access Statement.
- Planning Statement.
- Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA).
- Habitat Report.
- Historic Impact Assessment.
- Noise Report.
- Shadow Flicker Analysis.
- Transport Management Plan.
- Public Consultation Report.

SITE APPRAISAL

The site is currently improved pasture farm land, located to the west of the small village of Cefn Rhigos. It measures 7000 square metres in area. The landform of the area is a slight hollow on a gently sloping shelf of land between the scarp slope of the South Wales Coalfield and the steep slopes of the Nedd Valley to the north. The land cover is mainly improved pasture with fields defined by fences with occasional clumps and lines of trees and areas of rough grassland. The Brecon Beacons National Park (BBNP) lies to the north beyond the A465.

A number of electricity pylons are present in the landscape in this area. Two overhead electricity lines and their supporting sets of pylons meet just to the west of the proposed turbine. The northern power line has larger pylons. These are only slightly lower than the proposed turbine blade tip (at approximately 59 metres) and one pylon lies approximately 90m away from the turbine.

The Vale of Neath Gliding Club is located approximately 200m to the south west of where the turbine will be located, on a gentle ridge to the south of the turbine. The farmhouse is adjacent to the proposed access track, close to Mount Road. The nearest residential properties not connected with the application site are on Mount Road, approximately 480 metres to the north east of the proposed turbine location, and 100m north of the access.

In respect of other wind turbine development, The Maesgwyn wind farm lies to the north west of the site beyond Glynneath. The Pen y Cymoedd consented wind farm will be sited on the plateau at the top of the scarp slopes. The operational Ffynnon Oer wind farm is also adjacent to Pen y Cymoedd. A single turbine has been consented recently east of Rhigos at a similar elevation, just south of the Hirwaun Industrial Estate.

PLANNING HISTORY

There is no relevant planning history in respect of this site.

PUBLICITY

The application has been advertised via a site notices and letters sent directly to residents. Letters of objection were received from 6 addresses. A petition was also received from local residents, comprising 35 signatures from 27 addresses. These are summarised as follows:

- Concerned about visual impact;
- The turbine will be visible from residential properties and the surrounding area;
- The turbine will spoil the view of the surroundings and landscape;
- The turbine will tower over trees and hedgerows along Mount Road;
- A lot of pride is taken by local residents in caring for Mount Road, and the turbine will spoil this;
- Concerned about noise pollution from the turbine, particularly due to the area being presently very quiet, and especially at night;
- The noise will be audible from the gardens of residential properties;
- The turbine will be detrimental to wildlife, including owls and bats using the surrounding trees, and other birds of prey, which could get injured or scared away by the noise;
- Concern that the area proposed for the turbine is a breeding ground for curlews;
- Concerns about the impact on red kite, that are no more than quarter of a mile from this location;
- There are plenty of other potential locations- other sites should be considered, which are not so near to residential properties;
- Local people are already surrounded by turbines, so another one so close to the village is not acceptable;
- Concern this may lead to other turbines;
- There will be no financial benefit to local people;
- A site visit is needed to consider the impacts of the turbine on this part of the village.

The following matter has also been raised, but is not considered material to the decision:

- The value of local houses will fall.

The Vale of Neath Gliding Club has also commented that they are “perturbed” by the proposal, but due to its location, they anticipate that the proposal will not have a detrimental impact on flying operations. Therefore, the Club will not be providing any substantial reasons to object.

CONSULTATION

Highways Development Control - no objection raised, subject to conditions to deal with abnormal loads.

Countryside - no objections raised in respect of ecology. In respect of Rights of Way, highlight that the Design and Access Statement suggests no. 22 may be affected during construction, and the applicant should contact them prior to development.

Public Health and Protection - no objections raised, but recommend conditions in respect of hours of construction.

Land Reclamation and Engineering - no objection, but a condition for drainage details is recommended.

Brecon Beacons National Park Authority - object to the proposal, due to significant concerns regarding potential landscape impacts on the National Park.

Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council - no objection, subject to the proposed route for abnormal loads being via the A465 at Hirwaun and not via Glynneath and Pontwalby.

Natural Resources Wales – object, due to the likely adverse cumulative impact on the Brecon Beacons National Park.

Glamorgan Gwent Archaeological Trust - no objections raised, but recommend a condition requiring an archaeological watching brief.

Cardiff Airport - no objection.

Ministry of Defence - no objection, but the development should be fitted with aviation safety lighting.

Wales and West Utilities - no objection.

Dwr Cymru/Welsh Water – no comments to make.

Vodafone - no objection.

Civil Aviation Authority – no objections raised.

Western Power Distribution - no comments made.

Rhigos Community Council - object on grounds of visual impact.

A number of other telecommunications operators were also consulted, but no comments were received.

POLICY CONTEXT

Rhondda Cynon Taf Local Development Plan

The site is outside any settlement boundary, and is not within a Special Landscape Area or Site of Importance for Nature Conservation.

The relevant policies in the Rhondda Cynon Taf Local Development Plan (LDP) are as follows:

Policy CS1 - Development in the North.

Policy AW5 - New Development.

Policy AW8 - Protection and Enhancement of the Natural Environment.

Policy AW10 - Environmental Protection and Public Health.

Policy AW12 - Renewable and Non-Renewable Energy.

National Guidance

Planning Policy Wales:

Sections 5.3 (Statutory Designations) and 12.8 and 12.10 (Renewable and Low Carbon Energy) are considered relevant.

Technical Advice Note 8: Planning for Renewable Energy is also considered relevant. The site is outside Strategic Search Area (SSA) F, as defined by Technical Advice Note 8.

REASONS FOR REACHING THE RECOMMENDATION

Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires that, if regard is to be had to the development plan for the purposes of any determination to be made under the Planning Acts, the determination must be made in accordance with the plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

Furthermore, applications that are not in accordance with relevant policies in the plan should not be allowed, unless material considerations justify the grant of planning permission.

Under Policy AW12 of the Local Development Plan energy proposals should demonstrate that they have no unacceptable effect on a variety of features, including landscape importance.

The main concern is the visual and landscape impact that the proposal has on the Brecon Beacons National Park, particularly given that the National Park Authority and Natural Resources Wales (NRW) have objected on these grounds.

Paragraph 5.3.4 of Planning Policy Wales states that the statutory purposes of National Parks are to conserve and enhance their natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage and to promote opportunities for public understanding and enjoyment of their special qualities. It goes on to state that where it appears that there is a conflict between those purposes, greater weight shall be given to the first ("Sandford Principle"). Public bodies and other relevant authorities have a statutory duty to have regard to these purposes (Environment Act 1995). Paragraph 5.3.6 indicates that development management decisions should give great weight to conserving and enhancing natural beauty of National Parks. Paragraph 5.3.7 makes it clear that the duty to have regard to National Park purposes applies to activities affecting the Parks, whether those activities lie within or outside the designated areas.

In terms of specific national policy on renewable energy and visual and landscape impact, Planning Policy Wales states that renewable energy projects should generally be supported by Local Planning Authorities. However it also states that in determining applications Local Planning Authorities should take into account the impact on natural heritage (paragraph 12.10). As the turbine lies outside SSA F, national policy indicates that landscape character should be maintained (TAN 8 Annex D 8.3) when considering renewable energy proposals.

Review of the Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA)

In respect of assessing landscape and visual impact, an external landscape consultant, Simon White of White Consultants, has been employed to undertake an assessment. His comments are particularly focussed on the impact on the Brecon Beacons National Park, and these are summarised as follows. In addition to these, Simon White has also raised concerns regarding the methodology used to write the Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, principally that lower than expected levels of significance have been attributed to some effects.

Site and Proposal:

The Brecon Beacons National Park (BBNP) lies to the north of the development beyond the A465. A key issue is whether the turbine adversely affects its purposes or its special qualities. The relevant landscape character area of the Park is "Area 4 Waterfall Country and Southern Valleys" (as set out in the Brecon Beacons National Park Authority's Landscape and Development Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG)).

Most of Area 4's key landscape qualities and features, as set out in the above SPG, relate to the rivers, dramatic waterfalls and wooded valley landscapes present, although pastoral landscapes are also mentioned. The perceptual qualities focus

mainly on waterfalls, but the sensitivities of the area given in the SPG also include a loss of tranquillity due to visible or audible developments. Forces for change in the landscape include mention of the extensive opencast workings and a wind farm (presumably Maesgwyn) just beyond southern boundary of the National Park which are prominent in views, especially from higher land. Specific management guidelines include a plan to reduce the visual impacts of wind farms beyond the National Park boundary and resist applications for future development which would harm the special qualities of the area.

Landscape Effects:

It is accepted that the wind turbine does not have an adverse effect on the rivers, waterfalls or wooded valley landscapes. However, it is perceptible in views from the open intervening uplands towards the coalfield plateau scarp. It is accepted also that there are views towards existing and consented wind turbine developments - Pen y Cymoedd, Maesgwyn and the single turbine east of Rhigos. The sensitivity of the area in the BBNP landscape assessment includes a loss of tranquillity due to visible developments. If a proposed single turbine was located close to the existing clusters (not the consented single turbine), the additional effect would be likely to be limited as it would read as part of the existing groups. However, in this case, the turbine is distinctly separate from the major groups, and in a different landscape type, close to the Park. The individual effect of the turbine on the landscape character of Landscape Character Area 4 is probably less than significant. However, the additional cumulative effect of the turbine is likely to be significant. It also runs contrary to management guidelines to reduce the visual impacts of wind farms beyond the National Park boundary and resist applications for future development which would harm the special qualities of the area.

Visual Effects:

Walkers in BBNP would have views of the turbine. The closest view is from the Penderyn/Craig y Dinas footpath at 1.65km. The turbine would be seen against the scarp slope and in conjunction with the nearby pylons which would be more recessive against the slopes, although noticeable on the skyline further west. There is no apparent built development separating the turbine from the National Park so there appears to be a degree of visual continuity between the Park and the landscape around the turbine. The turbine would be seen in conjunction with Pen y Cymoedd wind farm in SSA F above. The proposal will therefore have the effect of bringing wind energy down from the plateau top into the lower landscape, and closer to the National Park. Its location would therefore appear rather incongruous.

The view from Comin y Rhos at 3.2km is further away and seen from an expanse of open land between the wooded Nedd and Mellte valleys. This view shares most of the characteristics of the views above but feels as if it is further into the National Park. The open cast mine with its dark slopes is just apparent beyond the proposal. Maesgwyn is prominent from this location. The proposed turbine would be apparent

as a separate and isolated development at the bottom of the scarp slope between Maesgwyn, Pen y Cymoedd and the turbine east of Rhigos. It would appear, colloquially, as a 'lost sheep'.

Cumulative Effects:

The main issue is the additional cumulative effect that the turbine has in spreading wind turbine development into the landscape outside the main SSA groups of turbines of Pen y Cymoedd and Maesgwyn. It is an isolated development at the bottom of the scarp slope. Despite this, the turbine would have the effect of partially visually linking the turbine east of Rhigos with Maesgwyn at a location relatively close to the National Park and outside the SSA. It would therefore increase proliferation and associated effects on the National Park.

Discussion:

Whilst the power lines have been used to an extent as a justification for the turbine which is hardly higher than the northern pylons, the juxtaposition is awkward with the solid white, moving structure of the turbine contrasting with the static grey lattice of the pylons. The turbine stands out against the scarp slopes to the south whereas the pylons tend to be more recessive. The effect is unsightly.

The relationship with the other wind energy developments is of concern. The turbine is seen as an isolated single turbine extending the effect of wind energy from the scarp tops down to the lower levels and filling the gap between Maesgwyn and the Land at Rhigos turbine. This has the effect of further extending the influence of wind energy closer to the National Park. Whilst this turbine is only a medium sized development it has greater effects seen in conjunction with other development.

The key issue is the effect on the qualities and purposes of the National Park including the effect on users of public rights of way and open access land. The proposal has individual significant adverse effects on the views of users within Area 4. In terms of landscape effects, it also has significant additional and combined cumulative adverse effects on views and tranquillity in conjunction with other wind energy development.

The significant effects are likely to be at lower levels, reflecting the scale of development, but still need to be taken into account, particularly in relation to nationally designated landscapes.

The proposals need to be considered in the context of TAN 8, Planning Policy Wales and local policies relating to landscape protection, including the Brecon Beacons National Park, and wind energy.

Objections on the Grounds of Landscape/ Visual Impacts on the Brecon Beacons National Park

These have been received from the Brecon Beacons National Park Authority and Natural Resources Wales (NRW).

In respect of the impact on the National Park, The Park Authority raise concerns that the proposed turbine is of a scale and location to have detrimental impact on the experience of the landscape within Landscape Character Area 4. They consider that the proposal will be a “singular example of turbine development in direct contrast, and significantly obtrusive, against the view of the ridgeline beyond.” As such the Park Authority considers that the proposal will impact on the following special qualities of the Park, as defined in the Brecon Beacons National Park Management Plan (2010), and as such it amounts to an unacceptable degree of significant landscape change:

- Peace and Tranquillity- Opportunities for quiet enjoyment, inspiration, relaxation and spiritual renewal;
- Sweeping grandeur and outstanding natural beauty;
- Contrasting patterns, colours and textures;
- Rugged, remote and challenging landscapes.

NRW's objection focuses more on the cumulative effects on the Brecon Beacons National Park. They consider that the cumulative effect of this proposal in combination with other wind turbines in such close proximity to the Park is likely to have an adverse effect on the quality and character of views, and on the sense of tranquillity and remoteness, within the Brecon Beacons National Park. This would result in a change in character that is detrimental to the purposes of the designation.

They consider the view from Comin y Rhos is particularly important for visual amenity, with numerous viewers who are focussed on the landscape and that the combined cumulative effect of wind turbines would be detrimental to the visual amenity of viewers from this and other viewpoints within the National Park. They note that the operational Ffynnon Oer wind farm is noticeable from this point, within the National Park at over 12km distant and that the nearby Maesgwyn wind farm (4km away) is prominent from this location. In addition, the Pen y Cymoedd and Mynydd Bwlfa large wind farms have been consented approximately 7km to the south. A 78m turbine has been consented at land off Rhigos Road, approximately 4.5km away (ref. 13/1241/10). The proposed Cefn Farm turbine is approximately 3km from Comin y Rhos. The Rhigos Road turbine is also likely to be visible from Comin y Rhos, Bryn Bwch, Moel Penderyn and access land near Mynydd y Glog, in combination with the Cefn Farm turbine and wind farms at Maesgwyn, Pen y Cymoedd Ffynnon Oer and Mynydd Bwlfa. Also they note that further wind farm proposals are in planning; an extension to Maesgwyn, and proposals at Hirfynydd and Melincourt within 10km of the National Park.

On its own, as an isolated feature, NRW do not consider this turbine is likely to have a significant effect on the National Park. However, they consider it would not be seen

in isolation, but with other turbines and would increase the spread of turbines outside the SSA and closer to the National Park, such that wind turbines would be a key characteristic of that area between the SSA and the National Park.

NRW believe that the ability of the landscape adjacent to the southern boundary of the National Park to accommodate wind turbines is close to capacity and consider that the approval of a further turbine of this scale in this location, so close to the National Park boundary, is likely to increase the combined cumulative effect to significant. The sweeping grandeur and outstanding natural beauty, prominent hilltops with extensive views in all directions and sense of tranquillity and remoteness are special qualities of the National Park, set out within the National Park Management Plan. Views from high ground across neighbouring uplands and intervisibility with the landscape to the south are a key characteristic of the Forest Fawr and Waterfall Country & Southern Valleys Landscape Character Areas, as identified in the National Park Landscape Character Assessment, within the BBNPA's Landscape & Development SPG (2014). Views of distant wind farms may not have a significant effect on the character and quality of views from the Park. However, the proposed turbine is not a distant feature and its proximity increases and intensifies the effect of turbines to the point at which they are likely to significantly affect views and perceptions within the Park.

Comments from Agent and Landscape Consultant

In response to the above objections and comments made by Simon White, letters have been received from the applicant's agent and Landscape Consultant. In summary, these make the following points:

- The addition of another single vertical element perceived against a backdrop of hills and not breaking the skyline, viewed in combination but separately from other more exposed wind energy schemes, would not 'tip the balance' of the area into a "wind farm landscape".
- The proposed wind turbine will be perceived from the National Park but will be viewed on lower ground, against the backdrop of rising hills. The proposed wind turbine will not break the skyline when perceived from within the National Park and has the potential to become lost within the expansive lower landscape. It is agreed that the proposed wind turbine will impact on the setting of the National Park, but it will not be significant.
- It is agreed that the proposed wind turbine will selectively influence the setting of the National Park. As illustrated in the view points submitted, although perceived from selected elevated and open locations within the National Park, the perception of the proposed wind turbine will not dominate the National Park.

- The LVIA followed the appropriate guidance and was completed by an experienced chartered landscape architect. The LVIA is appropriate and proportionate to the size of the development being assessed.
- Planning Policy Wales (PPW) places significant emphasis on the need to deliver an energy programme that contributes towards reducing carbon emissions as a means of tackling climate change. PPW recognises that the cumulative impact of development can be a material consideration, however, such consideration must be balanced against the need to meet the Welsh Government's renewable energy aspirations and the conclusions reached fully justified in any decision taken.
- Instead of progressing two turbines with a maximum tip height of 77m on land at Cefn Farm, as originally proposed, a single turbine with a maximum tip height of 67m, positioned between existing pylons has been progressed. This will have a reduced impact on local residents, utilises the local landform and is positioned in conjunction with the existing infrastructure (in between two rows of pylons, the closest being 59m high).
- The Penderyn Landscape Character Area in which the proposal is situated is an upper valley sides landscape with a strong upland feel, it has a slight urban feel on the lower slopes. The main detractors include pylons and the sharply defined urban edge as well as the noise and movement from the A465 that crosses the area, separating the proposed location from the National Park.
- Furthermore, the surrounding landscape has been characterised by opencast mineral extraction. Subsequently, the proposal can be integrated within this landscape without adversely affecting characteristics which positively contribute to the local landscape.
- The position of the proposal within the landscape, lower down the valley and its singular nature, ensures that any perceived effects are minimised and its presence fleeting. Consequently, it is considered that the proposal can be integrated within the receiving landscape and visual environment without significant adverse effects.
- The LVIA specifically considers the potential visual and cumulative impact of the proposal on the designated landscape of the National Park and draws the overall conclusion that: *"In summary, although the proposed development has the potential to be perceived from within the National Park, they will largely not influence the key characteristics including "the diverse landscape, where sweeping uplands contrast with green valleys with dramatic waterfalls, woodland, caves, forests and reservoirs." At worst, the magnitude of impact will be **negligible**, the significance of effect will be **minor** on the setting of this nationally recognised landscape. However, for the majority of the National Park, even when within the ZTVs, the screening provided by subtle variations*

*in landform and screening by intervening vegetation as well as distance will ensure that the magnitude of impact will be **no change**, the significance of effect will be **neutral**.”*

- NRW state in their comments that the operational Ffynnon Oer Wind Farm is noticeable from viewpoint 6 of the LVIA (Comin y Rhos), within the National Park at over 12km distance. However, in reality, a combination of distance, as well as intervening woodland in the wider landscape would ensure this operational wind farm is difficult to perceive.
- The significance of effect has been assessed as moderate from the PRoW and minor-negligible from the minor road. It would provide an apparent but minor change to the existing view and would be well-absorbed into the gently undulating and lower well-vegetated landscape.
- From viewpoint 9, the proposed development will be present in the view, but will only form a very minor vertical element which will easily go unnoticed.
- There is a consented turbine on land off Rhigos Road (ref. 13/1241/10) which is only situated 1.3km from the boundary of the BBNP. The BBNPA did not object to this proposal. There are no adverse material differences between the Rhigos Road turbine and the one proposed.

Discussion of Landscape and Visual Impacts

The above objections raised by NRW and the Park Authority are given further weight by the comments made in Simon White's review. In relation to the discussion below, the viewpoints referred to are numbers 6 and 9 in the LVIA (Comin y Rhos and Bryn Bwch).

Notwithstanding technical arguments over the methodology, it is agreed that the proposal will extend wind turbine development away from the plateau to the south closer to the National Park. The turbines situated on the plateau above the dramatic scarp slope have a separation from the National Park and can be perceived from viewpoints in the National Park as located on a separate landform (i.e. the Valleys coalfield plateau landscape) to the south. However, the proposed turbine is a single, vertical structure on lower ground which is more likely to be perceived from viewpoints within the National Park as part of the continuum of the edges and setting of the Park. It is also noted that the landscape between Rhigos and the National Park appears to be unbroken by development where the turbine is proposed to be sited, as the A465 is hidden in a deep cutting. While this is a relatively small turbine in height, it is considered that the addition of a single, vertical structure of this height in the landscape at this location would have a significant landscape and visual impact, when viewed from the National Park. This is particularly the case when viewed in the context of a backdrop of several other wind turbines further away and high up on the skyline of the scarp slope. These impacts are considered to be

contrary to the national policy presumption in favour of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of National Parks, and as such have unacceptable landscape and visual impacts to cause the development to be contrary to Policy AW12 of the LDP.

It is noted that the larger Masegwyn Wind Farm (Neath Port Talbot) is also located away from the Coalfield plateau and due to its size (currently 13 turbines, although an extension is also proposed), spread and land height, is prominent in view from viewpoints in the National Park. While it is acknowledged this development already has a significant impact on these viewpoints, there is concern that the proposed turbine would result in wind turbine development spreading into an area where there is currently none, visually occupying the space between the two larger groups of existing turbines, causing wind turbine development to become cumulatively more prominent overall in the setting of this area of the National Park. This again would not be considered appropriate due to the national landscape designation. In addition, while Maesgwyn Wind Farm is prominent in view, it is considered to be in an area of different character to this proposal, being located in forest plantations and on a separate landform distinct from the National Park. In terms of policy, it is also part of Strategic Search Area E, and the wind farms to the south are part of Strategic Search Area F. These areas are designated with the purpose of accommodating wind turbine development, thus keeping it largely contained within particular areas. Creating a visual link between the two Strategic Search Areas, and extending the spread of wind energy development on their margins, particularly where this would impact on a National Park, is therefore a concern.

In relation to the arguments in respect of the pylons and the consented single turbine, it is accepted that the closest pylons to the proposed developments are large pylons of a similar height to the proposed turbine. Several pylons and electricity lines traverse the landscape in this area, and it is acknowledged that their presence detracts from the landscape within the locality. While it is considered that the presence of these pylons is potentially a valid argument as to why the turbine would not have an unacceptable visual and landscape impact within the locality, due to the recessive grey colouring and open structure of the pylons, this argument is considered to diminish with the distance to viewpoints within the National Park where the pylons are less noticeable against the backcloth of the scarp slopes. In addition, the heightened landscape and visual sensitivity of the National Park and its users such as walkers also have to be considered.

In relation to the single turbine at land off Rhigos Road, it is accepted this is a similar distance to the National Park boundary, and also 11 metres higher than the turbine proposed here. It is also accepted that this too would bring wind turbine development closer to the National Park, when compared to those on top of the scarp slope, and would be a “stand alone” structure away from other turbine development on the ridge line. However, the key difference between the consented turbine and the development being considered is the presence of Hirwaun Industrial Estate, including the consented Enviroparks scheme, between the consented turbine and National Park. While the Industrial Estate does not obscure the turbine from

viewpoints within the National Park, it is considered to break up the landscape between the turbine and the Park. This is unlike the application being considered here, where the landscape is considered largely unbroken, and therefore results in the consented turbine being considered to have a lesser visual and landscape impact on the National Park. Sensitive receptors in the National Park also tend to be further away from this turbine.

In relation to other visual and landscape impacts, it is considered that the turbine has more local adverse effects on adjacent Public Rights of Way and some residents within the area. However, in respect of the Rights of Way, it is noted that the site is not within a Special Landscape Area and the landscape is already traversed by pylons and electricity cables. As discussed above, in the context of the immediate locality, it is considered that the already detracting factor of the pylons is more relevant. In relation to residents, it is noted that for residents at some locations the turbine will have a more significant visual impact, particularly where there will be gaps in the trees and hedgerow screening along the roads, and where the settlement of Rhigos rises up at Heol Esgyn. However, given the existence of the pylons and the lack of designation of the land, it is not considered that these factors in themselves are significant enough to warrant a recommendation for refusal.

OTHER ISSUES

In respect of concerns regarding noise, the application was accompanied by a Noise Assessment. This has been reviewed by Public Health and Protection, who have advised this is acceptable.

In respect of wildlife and ecology, the Council's Ecologist has advised that the site is very agriculturally improved and of very low ecological value. The Habitat Report indicates the turbine is at least 200 metres distance from any features with bat potential, so it is not considered that any further bat survey work is required. While birds may use hedgerows and the fields around the site, it is not considered that there is any particular feature which really gives justification to ask for any detailed further survey work in respect of birds. As such, the application is considered acceptable in respect of wildlife and ecology impacts.

Turning to Neath Port Talbot County Borough's comments, originally, two options were proposed for routes for transporting abnormal loads in the Transport Management Plan. However, following a "dry run" of the transportation of abnormal loads carried out in December, a revised Transport Management Plan has been submitted, which has omitted the route causing Neath Port Talbot concern. The abnormal loads will travel eastwards on the A465 towards Hirwaun, where they will join the A4061 towards Rhigos, travel along Rhigos Road, into Mount Road, then into the site.

In respect of community benefit, the applicant's agent has advised that a fund of £8,000 per annum will be provided to the local community for 20 years, should the turbine be constructed.

Members are asked to note that the provision and level of community benefit is not a relevant consideration in determining the acceptability of the planning application, and the above is provided for information purposes only.

Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) Liability

The Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) was introduced in Rhondda Cynon Taf from 31 December 2014.

The application is for development of a kind that is not CIL liable under the CIL Regulations 2010 (as amended).

CONCLUSION

The proposed wind turbine is not considered to be acceptable in terms of its visual and landscape impacts on the Brecon Beacons National Park, due to the importance placed on the nationally designated landscape and preserving its special qualities. As such, it is considered contrary to Policy AW12 and it is recommended that planning permission is refused.

RECOMMENDATION: Refuse, for the following reason:

The proposed wind turbine is considered is to have an adverse visual and landscape impact on the Brecon Beacons National Park, and therefore an unacceptable impact on the special qualities of the Brecon Beacons National Park, due to its location close to the Park boundary in an area that can be considered as part of the setting of the Park. It is therefore considered contrary to Policy AW12 of the Rhondda Cynon Taf Local Development Plan.

RECOMMENDATION: Refuse

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LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

as amended by

LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS

DEVELOPMENT CONTROL COMMITTEE

5 MARCH 2015

REPORT OF: SERVICE DIRECTOR PLANNING

REPORT

**APPLICATIONS RECOMMENDED
FOR REFUSAL**

OFFICER TO CONTACT

**MR. J. BAILEY
(Tel: 01443 425004)**

See Relevant Application File