

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

MUNICIPAL YEAR 2014-2015

**DEVELOPMENT CONTROL
COMMITTEE
7 AUGUST 2014**

**REPORT OF:
SERVICE DIRECTOR
PLANNING**

	Agenda Item No.9
<p>APPLICATION NO: 14/0610 - EXTENSION OF THE EXISTING PANT-Y-WAL WIND FARM WITH AN INSTALLED CAPACITY OF UP TO 36MW, COMPRISING 12 WIND TURBINES, ANEMOMETER MAST, SUBSTATION AND CONTROL BUILDING, ACCESS TRACKS AND ALL ASSOCIATED BUILDING AND ENGINEERING OPERATIONS AND LANDSCAPING, FOR AN OPERATIONAL PERIOD OF 25 YEARS. OBSERVATIONS REQUESTED BY ADJACENT PLANNING AUTHORITY: BRIDGEND COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL.</p>	

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

To give this Authority's observations on the planning application, which is to be determined by Bridgend County Borough Council.

2. RECOMMENDATION

To forward the observations of this Authority to Bridgend County Borough Council.

3. APPLICATION DETAILS

Bridgend County Borough Council has requested the observations of this Council, as neighbouring Local Planning Authority on a full planning application for 12 wind turbines comprising a western extension of the existing Pant-y-wal wind farm. The application site lies partly within and partly adjacent to Strategic Search Area (SSA) F: Coed Morgannwg, one of 7 SSAs in Wales identified in TAN 8 by the Welsh Government.

The proposed development will be accommodated on 71.09 hectares of land located within the Ogmere Valley to the north-west of Gilfach Goch

and the additional 12 no. 3MW turbines will be located to the west of the existing wind farm which was completed in 2013 and comprises 21 turbines (115 in height). Of the existing 21 turbines, 7 lie within the boundary of Rhondda Cynon Taf and are known as Mynydd Pwll-yr-hebog being allowed on appeal in 2011 (06/1842). The proposed turbines have a typical 3 blade rotor and each has a maximum tip height of 125m and measures 80m to the hub. The proposal also includes an anemometer mast, substation and control building, access tracks and all associated building and engineering operations and landscaping and is intended to be operational for a period of 25 years.

The existing wind farm is served by 11km of access tracks via a single private access track leading northwards from the A4093 which runs from Blackmill in the west, to Gilfach Goch and Tonyrefail in the east. At the time the existing wind farm was built, the turbine parts were delivered on purpose designed vehicles which left the M4 motorway at junction 34 and then travelled to the site via the A4119 and A4093. It is proposed that the same route would be used for constructing the proposed extension and therefore part of the proposed construction route will run through Rhondda Cynon Taf. Within the site, access to the turbines will be via the existing tracks, which will be extended where necessary.

The application is accompanied by an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA), which examines a number of issues including landscape and visual amenity, nature conservation and biodiversity, archaeology and heritage, ground conditions, noise, traffic and transportation, electromagnetic interference, aviation, public safety and shadow flicker.

4. SITE APPRAISAL

The site known as 'Pant y wal', lies within an upland area to the north of Gilfach Goch and to the north east of Ogmore Vale, in the County Borough of Bridgend. The current proposal including the footprint of the turbines and the access road is 71.09 hectares, in addition to the existing application site which extends to 282 hectares.

The wind farm site consists of open mountain pasture that is currently used for grazing and occupies an upland location at an elevation of between 350 and 480m AOD. There is a local high spot beyond the site at Mynydd William Meyrick at 517m AOD. To the north, the land falls away down to the extensive forestry plantations above Clydach Vale and Tonypandy. To the east, the land comprises open mountain pasture falling down to the settlements of Evanstown and Gilfach Goch with a forestry plantation to the west of Evanstown. To the south, lies a further extensive forestry plantation at Ogmore Forest and to the west beyond the open pasture lies the Ogwr Fawr Valley and the settlements of Ogmore Vale and Price Town.

The access route to the southern edge of the wind farm is 5 metres wide and some 7.2km in length and runs northwards to the site from the proposed junction from the A4093 Tonyrefail to Blackmill Road, to the east of Glynogwr. The application site is crossed by a number of Public Rights of Way which have been taken into account in the design of the development.

5. PLANNING HISTORY

Planning history records are held by Bridgend County Borough Council however, this Council has been previously consulted on an application for 11 turbines at Pant y wal, to which a response of no objection subject to further consultation on mitigations measures and relevant conditions, was made (06/0829).

6. PUBLICITY

Publicity of the planning application, including site and press notices, will have been undertaken by Bridgend County Borough Council and the DAS confirms that a public exhibition was also held for local residents in February 2014.

7. CONSULTATION

Consultation with statutory consultees on the planning application will have been undertaken by Bridgend County Borough Council.

In response to this application, consultation has also been carried out with relevant internal departments within the Council, in order to inform the recommendation to Members and a summary of the comments is provided below.

Transportation Section – has carried out a review and assessment of the traffic and transportation information contained within the Environmental Statement (ES) and has raised the following comments:

It is noted that the site will be accessed via the existing site entrance in Bridgend and that no information has been provided in relation to the size of the vehicles which will transport the turbine components as abnormal indivisible loads (AILs). Whilst the size of these vehicles gives cause for concern in terms of highway safety and free flow of traffic, it is acknowledged that the same access route as for the existing wind farm, from the M4 motorway at junction 34 and then via the A4119 to Tonyrefail and the A4093 will be utilised and any concerns could be addressed and mitigated as part of the Traffic Management Plan (TMP) which can be conditioned accordingly. This route minimises the impact on built up areas, its use by AIL's will only be over 4 months and is therefore acceptable in principle.

It is noted that construction traffic will operate over a period of 12 months, however, even on days when concrete deliveries occur when the impact of traffic will be greater, this impact will be for a relatively short period of time along a route which can accommodate HGV traffic (A4093) and is therefore considered acceptable in principle. The route of general construction traffic can be addressed through the TMP.

During the operational phase, the routine maintenance would be carried out 2-4 times a year by means of a 4x4 vehicle and blade inspections undertaken between 2-5 years using a cherry-picker or 50T crane. Once decommissioned (after 25 years), the turbines, plant and machinery would be removed by HGVs.

It is advised that the Highways Authority would require a comprehensive Traffic Management Plan (TMP) as a pre-commencement of any development on site to ensure that the route of abnormal loads and any mitigation measures would satisfactorily address highway safety, the free flow of traffic and the protection of street furniture as well as services. The TMP should cover such matters as a detailed description of the route, convoy size, traffic management and delivery times, as well as any highway works required and details of swept path analysis and trial runs.

It is concluded that on the basis that the highway network has been previously used in the construction of the existing wind farm, the effect would be for a relatively short period of time and subject to a Traffic Management Plan that would minimise the impact of AILs on the highway infrastructure, the proposal is considered acceptable. Conditions to require a TMP, a conditions survey of the highway prior to and following the completion of the development and a restriction on the deliveries of AILs are suggested, which are detailed below.

Countryside, Landscape and Ecology - has advised that it will be for Bridgend officers to determine the ecological impact of the proposal. Concerns are raised however regarding the failure in the provision of various mitigation works for peat bogs within RCT as part of the community benefit package for the Fforch Nest Windfarm. It is therefore advised that Bridgend County Borough Council secure measures that have been previously identified via a long-term S106 Management Agreement with the applicant. It is advised that as this is partly in mitigation for impacts within Rhondda Cynon Taf, the Council has a particular interest in seeing the mitigation and enhancement delivered.

8. POLICY CONTEXT

The relevant Development Plan is the adopted Bridgend Local Development Plan 2006-2021.

National Guidance

The relevant national policy and guidance is Planning Policy Wales.

Chapter 3 (Making and Enforcing Planning Decisions), Chapter 4 (Planning for Sustainability), Chapter 5 (Conserving and Improving Natural Heritage and the Coast), Chapter 8 (Transport), Chapter 12 (Infrastructure and Services) and Chapter 13 (Minimising and Managing Environmental Risks and Pollution), set out the Welsh Government's policy on planning issues relevant to the determination of the application.

Other relevant policy guidance consulted:

PPW Technical Advice Note 5: Nature Conservation and Planning;

PPW Technical Advice Note 8: Planning for Renewable Energy;

PPW Technical Advice Note 11: Noise;

PPW Technical Advice Note 18: Transport;

Manual for Streets

9. REASONS FOR REACHING THE RECOMMENDATION

The principle of the development and other material planning considerations fall to Bridgend County Borough Council to assess in its determination of the application. However, from a Rhondda Cynon Taf perspective, the main considerations are the potential visual impact of the development, its impact on traffic and highway safety and ecology effects within the County Borough.

Visual Impact

The application is accompanied by an Environmental Statement (ES), which provides a comprehensive assessment of the various impacts of the proposed development in this location. In terms of visual impact, the DAS advises that particular attention has been paid to the site layout and the location of the turbines, associated built elements and access, so as to minimise the visual intrusion to the area.

The landscape and visual impact assessment (LVIA) submitted as part of the ES assessed the impact of the extension on the landscape and views available to people including a study site area (enlarged application site area), as well as the local context up to 5km and viewpoints up to 20km. In relation to the surrounding landscape, the greatest effect during the operation of the wind farm identified is on settlements in the adjacent Ogmere Valley (within Bridgend CBC) and other landscape effects have been assessed as minor or negligible. In relation to visual amenity, consideration was given to the locations where views might be available using the zone of theoretical visibility (ZTV) however, it was also determined that most areas to the east and north-east would have limited visibility of the turbines.

The submitted information indicates that the development would be theoretically visible from various parts of Rhondda Cynon Taf however, Penrhys is the only settlement likely to have views of the 10-12 turbine blade tips from around 4km and from a greater distance, part of Pantygraigwen, Efail Isaf and Beddau, where not blocked by vegetation. In a limited number of locations which are closer to the site (within 3.6km) including Clydach Vale and Gilfach Goch, only 2-4 turbines would be substantially visible. It is noted that whilst a number of the existing turbines are already visible from these settlements, the proposed extension lies on land further to the west and therefore the additional turbines, albeit slightly taller, are unlikely to be seen as a significantly harmful feature within the existing landscape. In other identified locations including Tonyrefail, Porth, Tylorstown, Llanharry, Llantrisant and Pontypridd, the turbines would be seen from between 7-12km away. Therefore, most of the additional turbines would only be visible from remote and elevated positions in Rhondda Cynon Taf and in closer views, only between 2-4 turbines would be visible.

Traffic Impact and Highway Safety

The main transport impact identified within the application details is the movement of HGVs and abnormal indivisible loads (AILs) that are required to carry the large turbine components during the construction phase of the development. These loads would leave the M4 at junction 34 and travel to the site via the A4119 and A4093, which was the same route as when the wind farm was originally constructed.

Information contained within the ES advises that the assessment of the A4093 indicates that the road is of sufficient width and alignment to facilitate expected HGV movements. Given the temporary nature of the use of these roads by construction traffic and the fact that the AILs will be transported outside of peak hours, it is considered that the impact will be minor or negligible. Maintenance traffic to the site post construction will also be infrequent (2-4 visits a month).

In relation to the impact on Rhondda Cynon Taf resulting from the proposed development, it is not considered that the development will have an adverse impact on highway safety and the Council's Transportation Section has also confirmed that subject to a comprehensive Traffic Management Plan and other conditions being satisfied, the proposal is acceptable.

Ecology

It will be for Bridgend County Borough Council officers to review all of the protected species issues and habitat impacts to ensure that appropriate mitigation is provided.

Information accompanying the application confirms however that the application site does not fall within or adjacent to any statutorily designated nature conservation site and although a number of habitat types have been identified within the study area, these were considered to be of low value. Surveys conducted to inform the ES identified that the site was considered to have up to local value for various species including bats, polecat, otters and common reptiles.

The DAS confirms that the site does not contain or form part of any area that has been statutorily designated for its nature conservation value on either an international or national basis however, the western slope of Mynydd yr Aber which adjoins the application site (in Bridgend) and the area adjacent to the north-eastern boundary of the site (in Rhondda Cynon Taf), are designated as Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINC).

It is confirmed that detailed ecology surveys have been carried out which are reported as part of the ES and identified constraints have been taken into account in the wind farm layout design. Further mitigation is also proposed including the production of a Construction Environmental Management Plan and Habitat Management Plan with specific mitigation for breeding goshawk, reptiles and otters. Whilst it is not considered that there will be any residual nature conservation or ecology impacts as a result of the proposed scheme, the Council's Ecologist has identified a potential issue in relation to securing the delivery of mitigation/enhancement and it is therefore proposed that a suitable note to Bridgend Borough Council is included with this Council's response.

It is therefore concluded that the development is highly unlikely to have any significant visual or other adverse impact upon Rhondda Cynon Taf and it is recommended that subject to the conditions set out below, observations of no objection are returned to Bridgend Borough Council.

RECOMMENDATION: Raise no objection, subject to the following conditions and note:

1. No development shall take place until a Traffic Management Plan (TMP) has been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. Any temporary mitigation measures affecting public highway shall be implemented prior to transportation of the abnormal loads and reinstated upon completion of the development. The TMP shall include the following:-
 - a) Swept Path Analysis (showing full route and mitigation measures);
 - b) Component size (width, height, length, weight);
 - c) Convoy Length (number of vehicles including emergency services and escorts);

- d) Traffic Management (during transportation of abnormal loads);
 - e) Structures (over bridges height, width, weight restrictions);
 - f) Highway works (including all temporary works to public highway to facilitate access and reinstatement works including timescales);
 - g) Dry Run (to be witnessed by highway authority and police);
 - h) Temporary Traffic Regulation Orders; and
 - i) Emergency Contingencies.
2. Prior to the commencement of the development, a report indicating a methodology for undertaking a conditions survey from the junction of the A4093 with Cambrian Avenue, Hendreforgan, Gilfach Goch westwards to the RCT boundary with Bridgend County Borough Council that could be affected by the proposed development shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The report should include: the timescales for undertaking the surveys and the method(s) of reporting the findings to the Local Planning Authority; comprehensive photographs; and potential compensation arrangements. The development shall not be brought into use until the final survey (on completion of the development hereby approved) and any compensation arrangements have been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority.
3. No abnormal load delivery shall take place between the hours of 07:30 – 09:30 and 15:00 – 17:30 weekdays unless otherwise agreed in writing by the Local Planning Authority.

Note:

That Bridgend County Borough Council be advised to secure all mitigation and enhancement measures identified through the application via a long-term S106 Management Agreement.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

as amended by

LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS

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OFFICER TO CONTACT

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See Relevant Application File

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