

**ADRODDIAD PENNAETH
CYNLLUNIO,
CYFARWYDDIAETH YR
AMGYLCHEDD**

**REPORT OF THE
HEAD OF PLANNING,
DIRECTORATE OF ENVIRONMENT**

**AR GYFER PWYLLGOR CYNLLUNIO
CYNGOR SIR CAERFYRDDIN**

**TO CARMARTHENSHIRE COUNTY
COUNCIL'S PLANNING COMMITTEE**

**AR 22 MEDI 2020
ON 22 SEPTEMBER 2020**

**I'W BENDERFYNU/
FOR DECISION**

*Ardal Del/
Area South*



Mewn perthynas â cheisiadau y mae gan y Cyngor ddiddordeb ynddynt un ai fel ymgeisydd/asiant neu fel perchennog tir neu eiddo, atgoffir yr Aelodau fod yna rhaid iddynt anwybyddu'r agwedd hon, gan ystyried ceisiadau o'r fath a phenderfynu yn eu cylch ar sail rhinweddau'r ceisiadau cynllunio yn unig. Ni ddylid ystyried swyddogaeth y Cyngor fel perchennog tir, na materion cysylltiedig, wrth benderfynu ynghylch ceisiadau cynllunio o'r fath.

In relation to those applications which are identified as one in which the Council has an interest either as applicant/agent or in terms of land or property ownership, Members are reminded that they must set aside this aspect, and confine their consideration and determination of such applications exclusively to the merits of the planning issues arising. The Council's land owning function, or other interests in the matter, must not be taken into account when determining such planning applications.

COMMITTEE:	PLANNING COMMITTEE
DATE:	22 SEPTEMBER 2020
REPORT OF:	HEAD OF PLANNING

INDEX - AREA SOUTH

REF.	INFORMATION ITEM
DNS/00422	DNS (DEVELOPMENT OF NATIONAL SIGNIFICANCE) - PROPOSED SOLAR PARK (DNS/3213164) AT LAND AT PENDERI, BLAENHIRAETH FARM, LLANGENNECH, LLANELLI, SA14 8PX

Application No	DNS/00422
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Application Type	Development of National Significance (DNS)
Proposal & Location	DNS (DEVELOPMENT OF NATIONAL SIGNIFICANCE) - PROPOSED SOLAR PARK (DNS/3213164) AT LAND AT PENDERI, BLAENHIRAETH FARM, LLANGENNECH, LLANELLI, SA14 8PX

Applicant(s)	Voltalia UK Limited – Kelly Clutterbuck
Case Officer	Gary Glenister
Ward	Llangennech
Date registered	08 September 2020

Introduction

Two Developments of National Significance (DNS) have been submitted to Welsh Government for solar renewable energy schemes within Carmarthenshire. The first near Llangennech and second near Tycroes. Under the DNS procedure, Carmarthenshire County Council is not the determining body, however it is a key consultee in the process.

The following is an information item regarding the Llangennech scheme which covers a site with land in the Llangennech, Llannon and Swiss Valley wards. The Tycroes scheme will be reported to the Planning Committee in October as an information item so this report only covers the Llangennech scheme.

As a consultee, this authority is required to produce a Local Impact Report (LIR) which is a technical report highlighting potential local impacts that will need to be assessed by the Welsh Government. If Planning Committee wishes to make representations expressing a view to Welsh Government it can do so under a separate cover by the 9th October 2020. This report is for information only and if Committee wishes to make observations to Welsh Government these can be noted and ratified in the minutes on the 8th October 2020.

The Head of Planning seeks delegated authority to submit the Local Impact Report on behalf of the Council.

The Proposal Overview

The scheme constitutes a solar farm with associated infrastructure. The peak capacity is 38MW of renewable energy to achieve a maximum export capacity of 30MW.

It is estimated that the proposal would generate renewable electricity for over 10,600 homes per year which is equivalent to displacement of 15,000 tonnes of CO₂ per year or 525,000 tonnes over the 35 year operational lifespan of the scheme.

An economic benefit report suggests that the scheme would be a £30m capital investment in Carmarthenshire and support 70 temporary jobs (approx. 30 directly and 40 indirectly) during an 11 month construction period and 4 full time equivalent jobs directly and indirectly for on going management of the site during operation with a gross value added to the local economy of £3.3m during construction and £1.7m over 10 years operation based on ONS figures.

Solar panels are proposed to be mounted on frames to form what are known as arrays. Arrays vary in length and have a height of 2.75m spaced so they have 3.65m clear space between them. They are orientated to the south with a tilt angle of 25degrees (when flat) to maximise solar gain. The sites are not flat, so the proposed arrays would follow the topography of the land.

Electricity generated feeds into inverters which are located in 'transformer centres' with 16 located through the scheme which are linked by cable to a sub-station proposed immediately to the North North West of the farm complex which in turn is proposed to feed directly to a National Grid 132kv overhead line which passes over the site. Linking cables are proposed to be buried in 1m deep trenches. The proposal is set within a 2m security fence with 3m high CCTV cameras to provide surveillance.

In terms of delivery access, Site B has direct access to the A476 to provide access for construction deliveries with smaller vehicles used to deliver to different parts of the site. Site A is accessed via the U2309 and Sites B and C are connected via existing farm tracks within the holding.

The cable route to the sub station from Site A includes an on-road section which crosses the Afon Morlais at the Grade II Listed Cilddewi bridge so a secondary application for Listed Building Consent is included with the DNS.

A scheme of landscaping has been submitted which includes a combination of hedgerow reinforcement with 11 individual trees and new hedgerow planting comprising 1208 linear metres of new hedgerow comprising 6040 plants.

The Site

The application site totals 96.27ha and is split into three parcels of land.

Site A is a 39.4ha parcel of land to the North of Blaenhiraeth Farm. The site is approx. 1.6km South of Llannon and 3.3km North West of Hendy. The site is accessed off the U2309. The site forms a south western facing valley side location with Gelli Wernen Wood and the Afon Morlais running to the South West. The land is improved grassland within well defined hedge boundaries. The site has properties known as Cil-Ddewi Uchaf and Cil Ddewi Fawr to the East. The site is more visible from the A476 across the valley with properties including Penderi Farm, Wayside and disused historic farm complexes of Llwynon and Gelli Wernen.

Site B is a 17.2ha parcel of improved grassland accessed directly off the A476 approximately 2km North North East of Swiss Valley. The site is also accessible internally through Blaenhiraeth Farm using farm tracks. The land is improved grassland which is used for grazing. The site would be visible from the A476 through hedge openings with land rising to a ridge then falling away towards the farm complex. No panels are proposed on the ridge to minimise visual impact. The small clusters of properties known as Medelfyw and Clochyrie

and Ferm y Cware accessed off the A476 are to the south but the topography means that they are somewhat visually detached from the proposal.

Site C is a 13.9ha parcel of land to the South of Blaenhiraeth Farm complex. The land is again improved grassland lying to the West of the main farm access road. The Farm known as Medelfyw lies to the South West accessed off the C2077, Medelfyw is on elevated ground so has a clear view of the site. A public countryside amenity known as Trosserch Woods lies to the South East with a small car park for visitors accessed off the U2309. There are Public Rights of Way passing the side which go through the applicant's land so there is public visibility.

Further land is included within the 96.27ha application site which is proposed to be used as ecological mitigation hence the total figure is higher than the sum of the three parcels described above. This ensures that there is no doubt or ambiguity over the ecological mitigation as it forms part of the proposal within the application site. The land owner has further land which is identified in blue that is not affected by the proposal.

Public Engagement

The applicants have sought pre-application advice from the local planning authority and have carried out the pre application consultation process.

The applicants have undertaken two public consultation events in the early stages of the process, the first at Best Western Diplomat Hotel and the second at Llangennech Community Centre.

There has also been without prejudice engagement with the three community councils to discuss potential community benefits. Whilst this is not a material planning consideration, good practice would indicate that a reasonable community benefit should be offered as we have seen elsewhere such as at Brechfa Wind Farm.

27 individual representations were submitted as set out in the Consultation Report. The issues raised by the public are generally in line with issues identified by the Local Planning Authority as set out below.

It should be noted that as a result of public engagement, amendments have been made to the scheme.

The Material Considerations

Climate Change

There is general support for renewable energy in local and national policy and guidance, provided all other matters are satisfactorily addressed. The policy framework is set out in the submission. The Welsh Government has set targets for renewable energy production which it is seeking to achieve and Carmarthenshire County Council has itself declared a climate emergency and is seeking to be a net zero carbon local authority by 2030.

The principle of generating renewable energy is therefore well established in both Wales and Carmarthenshire provided it is in the right place and the impact is not so great as to clearly outweigh other considerations. It will therefore be the role of the Council as consultee, to highlight any local impacts so that Welsh ministers can assess them and determine the scheme in accordance with national policy and guidance.

Landscape and Visual Impact

The scheme is set within a 96.25ha site, so there will be an impact on the local landscape. The site is set within a defined valley so any impact is largely enclosed and limited to local

views of the site rather than it being widely visible. There are however properties within this enclosed landscape, so an assessment of visual impact on these properties is material. It is noted that the site does not fall within any local or nationally defined designated landscape so the merits need to be assessed at a local level. A landscape and visual assessment has been carried out as part of the Environmental Impact Assessment and photo montages produced to aid this assessment.

Residential Amenity

An assessment of residential amenity has been undertaken by the developer. As stated above, the site is within an enclosed landscape within a valley setting with a number of properties within this landscape.

Highways

The Transport Statement and Construction Management Plan assessment includes a construction routing plan which indicates delivery lorries will leave the M4 at Pont Abram, proceed on the A48 towards Hendy then cross under the M4 to join the B4306 and turn onto the A476 at Llannon. This is being assessed by the Head of Transport as a consultee, however the applicant's report suggests a condition should be imposed so that the precise details can be approved prior to commencement. Any requirements (conditions) will be determined by the Local Authority.

Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA)

The submission is accompanied by a comprehensive Environmental Impact Assessment that will be scrutinised as part of the determination process. The EIA identifies the impact of the proposal on the area and includes recommendations of how any impacts can be minimised or mitigated. The Environmental Statement is supported by the following documents:

- Flood Consequence Assessment
- Phase 1 Ground Condition Survey
- Outline Construction Environment Management Plan
- Arboriculture Survey, Impact Assessment and Protection Plan
- Residential Visual Amenity Plan
- Extended Phase 1 Ecological Survey Report
- Wintering Bird Survey Report
- Breeding Bird Survey Report
- Habitat Regulations Assessment Screening Matrix
- Construction Ecological Management Plan
- Landscape and Ecological Management Plan

The Non Technical summary document gives the headlines of the scheme and summarises the sections. A brief summary of relevant extracts are as follows:

Biodiversity Enhancements

3.11 Land between and beneath the panels would be used for biodiversity enhancements and seasonal sheep grazing. Tree planting would be introduced to bolster screening.

3.12 The application proposal would also include a package of landscape, ecological and biodiversity benefits that could include the installation of bird nesting boxes, bee hives, log piles and other hibernacula such as small buried rubble piles suitable for reptile species, amphibians and insect life.

Effects on Landscape Elements

5.2 The landscape elements that constitute the landscape character of Sites A, B and C would remain largely unaffected by the proposed development. Site topography, field pattern and enclosure, woodlands, hedgerows and trees would generally remain physically intact with the solar arrays and supporting infrastructure in place. Enhancements to landscape elements would be made in terms of the maintenance and infilling of hedgerows to enhance visual screening.

Effects on Landscape Character

5.3 The landscape elements that constitutes the character of the LANDMAP geological, habitats, historic or cultural aspect areas within Sites A, B and C would generally remain physically unaffected by the proposed development.

Effects on Visual Amenity

5.4 Glimpse views of the security fencing and upper solar panels above hedgerows would be perceptible when travelling along the unclassified lane between the B4306, Cil-Ddwe-uchaf, Blaenhiraeth Farm and Troserch Wood directly to the east of Site A and C; on the unclassified lane between Porth Dafen, Carn-Hywel-isaf and the A476 Llannon Road to the south of Site C; and when travelling along the elevated A476 Llannon Road to the west of Site B. These glimpse views would be further screened through proposed hedgerow reinforcements to improve visual screening.

5.6 Sites A, B and C would not be visible from the settlements of Hendy, Llangennech, Swiss Valley or Horeb. Distant glimpse views of the solar arrays within Site A would be barely perceptible from Llannon located 1.6km to the north. Due to the undulating landform, hedgerows and woodland many views of the solar panels would generally be restricted to glimpses from upper floor windows from the isolated farms and residential properties directly surrounding the sites.

Summary

5.8 The proposed solar PV development would result in a degree of harm to the landscape character and visual amenity of the land at Blaenhiraeth Farm, Llanelli. However, the landscape and visual effects would be localised owing to the sloping landform of the valley, surrounding woodland and the limited receptors or opportunities to observe the proposed development in the wider landscape from publicly accessible viewpoints.

Ecology and Nature Conservation

6.2 The ecological survey identified a range of habitats on/immediately adjacent to the site, however, many of these habitats were of low ecological value. The habitats within and adjacent to the site were assessed as being suitable for a variety of notable and protected species.

6.8 With the successful implementation of the mitigation measures adverse impacts upon the ecological features identified can largely be reduced to a non-significant level.

The submission also includes the following:

- Planning Statement
- Design and Access Statement
- Consultation Report
- Noise Assessment
- Glint and Glare Assessment.

Listed Building Consent

Part of the application is seeking a secondary consent to allow a cable trench to be installed across the Grade II Listed Cilddewi Bridge to connect the Northern section of the proposal known as Site A to the substation at the farm complex and therefore gain access to the National Grid. This involves laying 3No. 11kv cables across the bridge. A methodology has been submitted within the Heritage Assessment. This is proposed to involve closure of the bridge and cutting a trench in the upper tarmac and concrete layers of the bridge, between the historic structure and the modern surface to allow a cable duct to be installed so the cabling can be installed so the high power connection can be made between sites.

Conclusion

The proposal is on a large scale and if approved would inevitably have an impact on the local area. Any impact will have to be weighed against local and national policy and targets on renewable energy in light of the climate emergency declared by the Council on the 19th February 2019. The Local Impact Report will highlight local impacts and will be scrutinised by the Planning Inspectorate on behalf of Welsh Ministers who will determine the application. The determination procedure will be agreed once this consultation period is completed and the representations have been assessed.

Should Committee wish to make a representation independently of the LIR it can do so, and any comments made by Committee will be compiled and minuted so they are ratified in the minutes on the 8th October 2020 Committee and passed on the Planning Inspectorate under a separate cover from the LIR. Any representations from individual Local Members needs to be submitted by the 9th October 2020.

Recommendations

1. To note this information report and give the Head of Planning delegated authority to submit a Local Impact Report.
2. To consider whether Committee wishes to make a representation separately from the LIR and if so, comments will be compiled and minuted for submission as a representation.