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16/09/2026

Re: Rhiwlas Energy Park Reference: CAS-01928-W3M9S8

Dear Sir/Madam,

This letter serves to formally raise concerns held by Llangurig Community Council regarding the planning application submitted by Rhiwlas Energy Park Limited concerning the proposed Rhiwlas Energy Park, identified under DNS reference CAS-01928-W3M9S8, situated on land to the south-east of Llangurig in Powys. The application documentation currently outlines a final design comprising 12 wind turbines, each with a maximum blade-tip height reaching up to 200 metres, alongside a substation and associated infrastructure. It is noted that the statutory notice issued under Article 18 by PEDW describes the proposal more broadly as involving the construction and operation of up to 13 wind turbines, together with a substation and related infrastructure. While acknowledging the critical role of renewable electricity generation and recognising the strong policy support it receives within Wales, the serious concerns set out here do not challenge the principle of onshore wind energy per se. Instead, they focus specifically on whether a development of this magnitude is appropriate in this particular setting. Careful consideration must be given to the landscape character, ecological sensitivities, hydrological factors, heritage assets, residential amenity, recreational opportunities, and cumulative impacts associated with the project when assessed against the relevant national and local planning frameworks, including Future Wales, Planning Policy Wales, and the adopted Powys Local Development Plan. The grounds underpinning these concerns are detailed herein.

Landscape and Visual Effects

The introduction of turbines reaching heights of up to 200 metres, with their continuously rotating blades, would mark a significant alteration to the open upland environment, where existing structures are generally much smaller in scale. This transformation extends beyond the turbine towers themselves, encompassing associated infrastructure such as access tracks, crane hardstandings, a substation, earthworks, and other ground-level developments, all of which would collectively modify the character of the site.

Assessment of the landscape and visual impact has been undertaken by the applicant, encompassing a broad range of receptors. These include the settlement of Llangurig, the corridors of the A44 and A470, various recreational pathways, and elevated vantage points. While the identification of these receptors does not inherently indicate unacceptable harm, it establishes the spatial scope over which the development's effects must be evaluated.

Considerable attention must be afforded to those who would encounter the turbines at close or moderate distances, particularly residents, walkers, equestrians, cyclists, and road users who would experience the structures repeatedly while traversing the area. Policies such as Future Wales Policy 18 and Powys Local Development Plan Policy DM4 stipulate that landscape and visual impacts, including cumulative effects, must remain within acceptable limits. Given the proposal's substantial size and its prominent position within an exposed upland setting, the resultant alteration to landscape character and visual amenity is assessed as a substantial adverse effect.

Cumulative and Sequential Development

The presence of multiple significant energy developments in the vicinity of Llangurig necessitates a comprehensive evaluation of their combined effects rather than assessing each in isolation. While Rhiwlas constitutes a prominent project, Banc Du is concurrently being advanced on the opposite flank of the settlement, and existing wind energy installations already form part of the established baseline environment. Additionally, a separate initiative by Green GEN Cymru is underway to establish electrical connections between Rhiwlas, Banc Du, and the broader electricity network. The Planning and Environmental Decisions Wales (PEDW) has previously acknowledged, during deliberations concerning the Rhiwlas and Banc Du projects, that although these proposals are distinct Development of National Significance (DNS) applications, their geographical proximity warrants a cumulative impact assessment. Although the grid connection scheme follows an independent consenting trajectory, its interrelationship with the aforementioned energy parks means that potential cumulative effects must be considered as reasonably foreseeable. From the perspective of local inhabitants and visitors alike, the overarching concern lies in the compounded and sequential exposure to substantial infrastructure situated in multiple directions around a modest rural community. This concern aligns with the requirements set out in Future Wales Policy 18, which explicitly mandates the evaluation of cumulative impacts. Accordingly, it is my considered view that the aggregate effect of Rhiwlas, Banc Du, the existing wind developments, and the anticipated grid infrastructure has the potential to engender a materially altered landscape experience, distinct from that which would result from the assessment of any single development in isolation.

Ecology, Habitat Loss and Biodiversity

The proposed development encompasses a substantial area extending well beyond the turbine foundations themselves, incorporating access tracks, crane hardstandings, cable routes, compounds, drainage installations, and various engineering operations. Such activities have the potential to cause direct habitat loss, fragmentation, disruption to ecological connectivity, and alterations to upland hydrology over a broad landscape. These impacts are particularly significant in upland environments where ecological networks are sensitive to disturbance and dissection.

In accordance with Planning Policy Wales, a hierarchical approach to managing ecological impacts must be adopted. Initially, all efforts should be made to avoid adverse effects on biodiversity and habitat. If avoidance is not achievable, subsequent measures should focus on minimising harm, followed by mitigation or

restoration. Compensation measures are to be considered only when prior steps fail to adequately address the ecological damage. Furthermore, the policy mandates that development proposals deliver a net benefit for biodiversity.

Consequently, the final layout for the Rhiwlas scheme is expected to reflect the avoidance of sensitive habitats wherever this is reasonably practicable. Any biodiversity enhancements proposed should be demonstrably additional to existing conditions, sustainable over time, and enforceable through suitable mechanisms.

The developer has undertaken modifications to the scheme design aimed at reducing ecological constraints. Notably, Turbine 13 has been omitted to prevent impacts on bat populations and woodland buffer zones, while the access route to Turbine 3 has been realigned to lessen effects on peatland habitats. Although these adjustments are pertinent in reducing environmental harm, they do not obviate the necessity for a comprehensive assessment of residual habitat loss and disturbance arising from the final development configuration.

As a Community Council with a Biodiversity Policy and Plan in place, the impact of this development directly opposes our Biodiversity values and actions.

Water Environment, Drainage and Flood Risk

Situated on upland terrain integral to the headwaters and catchment areas of significant river networks, Rhiwlas presents particular concerns regarding water movement and quality due to development activities. The installation of tracks, foundations, cable trenches, drainage systems, and construction compounds has the potential to modify natural hydrology, potentially facilitating the transfer of sediments or pollutants into downstream watercourses. Such effects warrant careful scrutiny, especially given the hydrological links to environmentally sensitive areas, including the River Wye/Afon Gwy Special Area of Conservation (SAC) and Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). Additionally, the safeguarding of private water supplies is a critical consideration where these depend upon groundwater or surface waters vulnerable to disturbance during construction. In addressing these matters, Powys Local Development Plan (LDP) Policy DM6 mandates that proposals must suitably manage flood risk, watercourse integrity, and land drainage. The planning assessment focuses not on the presumption that an upland wind farm will cause flooding or pollution, but rather on whether the proposed drainage strategies, construction protocols, and water quality safeguards convincingly demonstrate that no unacceptable impacts will arise throughout the phases of construction, operation, and eventual decommissioning.

Dark Skies and Aviation Lighting

In rural Powys, the character of the night-time environment warrants distinct planning attention, as recognised in Powys Local Development Plan (LDP) Policy DM7, which specifically addresses issues of dark skies and external lighting to protect areas valued for their minimal artificial illumination. The proposed development involves turbines of such height that aviation safety lighting is mandated. According to the developer, this lighting will be configured to minimise visual intrusion, with the lights operating at reduced intensity for the majority of the time when not obscured by

cloud cover. Nonetheless, even with these mitigation measures, the presence of elevated aviation lights can be discerned over considerable distances, potentially transforming the nocturnal landscape experience in areas otherwise characterised by darkness. Consequently, the assessment must rigorously evaluate the existing night-time baseline conditions, the precise location and luminous intensity of the aviation lights, their visibility from residential properties and public thoroughfares, and the cumulative visual effects when considered alongside other tall energy-related infrastructure in the vicinity. It is imperative to acknowledge that the necessity for lighting to ensure aviation safety does not negate its implications for landscape and visual amenity, which must be factored into the overall planning judgement.

Residential Visual Amenity and Shadow Flicker

The assessment of the proposed wind turbine development at Rhiwlas must carefully consider the impact on residential visual amenity, particularly for those residing in close proximity. Residents would encounter the turbines frequently from various vantage points, including their homes, gardens, local roads, and daily travel routes. The planning consideration extends beyond the mere loss of a private view; it focuses on whether turbines of the specified scale would exert a visually dominant presence or appear overbearing within the normal living environment of individual dwellings.

In response to these concerns, the developer has taken deliberate steps to mitigate visual impacts by removing Turbine 13 and repositioning Turbine 3. These adjustments indicate that maintaining residential amenity was a significant factor influencing the design constraints of the scheme. Despite these modifications, the visual effects of the final arrangement comprising 12 turbines must be evaluated against the current assessment criteria to determine their acceptability.

In addition to visual aspects, shadow flicker effects must be addressed where the spatial relationship between turbines, the sun, and receptors indicates a plausible occurrence. When operational controls or automatic shutdown mechanisms are proposed to manage shadow flicker, it is essential that these measures are clearly defined and enforceable to ensure effectiveness. The overall consideration of residential amenity should encompass the integrated experience of visual scale, turbine movement, lighting, noise, and any shadow effects, taking care to avoid double-counting any single source of harm.

Operational and Construction Noise

Assessment of noise from wind turbines must be grounded in the actual acoustic conditions characteristic of rural settings. This requires utilisation of the prescribed technical methodologies, acquisition of representative background noise measurements, selection of appropriate receptor points, utilisation of realistic turbine sound-power data, and careful accounting for cumulative noise impacts from other pertinent developments. In instances where the precise turbine model remains undetermined at the time of consent, it is essential that any planning permission ensures subsequent procurement adheres strictly to the noise parameters evaluated during the application process. Should compliance necessitate operational restrictions such as curtailment, the decision-making authority must be assured that

these operational constraints are clearly defined in technical terms and enforceable. The construction phase introduces a distinct noise environment, characterised by activities including earthworks, operation of heavy machinery, track formation, and use of other plant equipment. Although these impacts are temporary, their duration can be considerable. Consequently, construction noise should be assessed in conjunction with construction-related traffic and any foreseeable temporal overlap with other significant projects, where such interactions might materially exacerbate noise effects on surrounding residents.

Community Wellbeing and Tranquillity

The landscape surrounding Llangurig, characterised by expansive open countryside and minimal development, offers residents, farmers, walkers, and riders a valued experience of tranquillity and swift access to a rural environment. This sense of openness and calm is integral to the community's cultural attachment and everyday wellbeing. However, the introduction of the Rhiwlas development would alter this established character through the presence of large, moving structures visible on the skyline, additional ground-level infrastructure, ongoing construction activities, and aviation lighting. When considered together with the Banc Du project and its associated grid infrastructure, the concern is not one of direct, measurable harm but rather a substantive shift in the environmental qualities that underpin community wellbeing and the local sense of place. The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, while not imposing an outright prohibition on such developments, emphasises the significance of maintaining resilient environments, fostering cohesive communities, and supporting cultural wellbeing in public decision-making processes. These factors must be weighed alongside the recognised benefits of renewable energy within the broader planning balance.

Transport, Abnormal Loads and Construction Traffic

The transportation of turbine components on the scale proposed necessitates the movement of abnormal indivisible loads, alongside a significant volume of construction traffic comprising aggregate, concrete, steel, plant, and personnel. Consequently, the adequacy of the access route constitutes a crucial element of the proposed development. The A44 and A470 roads in the vicinity of Llangurig form part of a rural network characterised by constrained sections, property frontages, and a scarcity of alternative routes. It is essential that the transport evidence details the temporary and permanent measures required to accommodate these abnormal loads, which may include junction modifications, verge adjustments, vegetation management, and alterations to boundary features where necessary. Additionally, consideration must be given to the cumulative impact arising from overlapping construction activities associated with Rhiwlas, Banc Du, and related grid infrastructure. Even if each project can be served individually, the combined effect of heavy goods vehicle movements, temporary traffic controls, and abnormal load transports has the potential to produce a materially different impact on local residents, businesses, walkers, riders, and routine agricultural traffic. This reasonably foreseeable interaction warrants thorough assessment within the planning process.

Agriculture, Land Management and Rural Function

The proposed development at Rhiwlas is situated within an active upland agricultural environment, where farming practices have historically influenced and preserved the character of the landscape. It is important to recognise that while the installation of wind-energy infrastructure does not entirely preclude agricultural activity, it alters land use in several tangible ways. Specifically, areas occupied permanently by turbine foundations, access tracks, hardstandings, and the substation will no longer be available for farming purposes. Additionally, land required temporarily during construction, modifications to drainage systems, and the practical implications of new infrastructure on livestock movement, access routes, and the management of adjacent hill land must be carefully considered. Any removal of forestry or commitments to long-term habitat management that result in changes to current land use are also relevant factors in the assessment. Rather than presuming that grazing can continue unaffected between turbines, it is essential to demonstrate concretely how existing agricultural holdings will be able to maintain their operations in the presence of the proposed development.

Tourism and the Outdoor Visitor Economy

Powys's visitor economy is fundamentally intertwined with its natural environment, encompassing countryside, scenic landscapes, and outdoor leisure activities. In the vicinity of Rhiwlas, tourism primarily revolves around pursuits such as walking, horse riding, cycling, touring, wildlife observation, and staying in local accommodation rather than visiting a singular attraction. Therefore, the network of recreational routes and the area's elevated terrain constitute integral elements of the visitor experience potentially influenced by the proposed development.

It is important not to presume that the mere visibility of a wind farm directly results in a quantifiable decline in visitor numbers. Instead, the critical consideration lies in whether the specific landscape and recreational impacts identified would materially alter the characteristics upon which the local outdoor tourism sector relies. Equally, it must be assessed whether the applicant's socio-economic evaluation sufficiently addresses this interrelationship.

When substantial landscape or visual impacts occur along visitor-frequented routes and locations, such effects may bear economic consequences alongside their environmental significance. Any potential adverse effects on the visitor economy should be carefully balanced against the economic advantages asserted by the proposal, including those arising from construction activities, the supply chain, and ongoing operational phases.

The Community Council fear this development will have a negative impact on tourism in the area and therefore the economy of a small Welsh village and its inhabitants.

Local Economy and Employment

The proposed development at Rhiwlas is anticipated to generate significant economic advantages through various channels, including capital investment, construction contracts, supply chain spending, and ongoing operational activities. These benefits are substantial and warrant formal recognition. However, the weight

attributed to these economic gains must be carefully calibrated based on detailed evidence concerning the geographic distribution of expenditure and employment opportunities, the duration of jobs created during the construction phase, and the size of the permanent workforce required for operation. While commitments to local procurement can enhance the benefits to the immediate area, such commitments should not be assumed to guarantee local employment unless they are clearly defined and demonstrably achievable. An assessment of the economic implications must therefore balance the verified local and regional advantages against any plausible negative impacts on existing sectors, particularly those reliant on agriculture, landscape, and tourism. Although investment in renewable energy constitutes a positive contribution, it does not obviate the need to thoroughly evaluate potential detrimental effects on the established rural economy.

Community Benefit Payments

In evaluating the planning acceptability of the Rhiwlas development, it is essential to separate any voluntary community benefit fund from the core assessment. While such voluntary contributions can offer valuable support to local communities, they do not mitigate the inherent impacts on landscape, ecology, heritage, or local amenity. It is imperative that decision-makers clearly differentiate these voluntary benefits from the mitigation measures necessary to render the development acceptable, as well as from any formal planning obligations that comply with the relevant legal tests. The planning judgement regarding Rhiwlas must be grounded solely in the environmental and planning evidence presented, independent of any voluntary financial contributions offered.

Notwithstanding this distinction, Llangurig Community Council is concerned that residents living closest to the proposed wind farm may experience its most direct and sustained effects without receiving a proportionate share of the wider benefits. There is currently no clear indication that electricity generated by the development would be supplied directly to, or result in reduced energy costs for, residents of Llangurig. The community would therefore host major energy infrastructure on its doorstep while the electricity produced would feed into the wider network, with no guaranteed direct energy benefit for local households.

The Council is also concerned that the arrangements for distributing any voluntary community benefit funding may favour more highly populated areas, despite those communities being further from the development and experiencing fewer of its immediate effects. Funding should recognise proximity and impact as well as population. Llangurig and the residents living closest to the site should consequently receive a meaningful and proportionate share of any fund established in connection with the development.

There is also insufficient clarity regarding how any community benefit fund would be governed, how funding priorities would be determined, and how decisions would be made and scrutinised. Any regional board or equivalent body responsible for administering the fund should include direct representation from the Community councils and residents of the communities most affected. Llangurig Community Council and local residents should have a genuine role in setting priorities and making decisions, supported by transparent criteria, published records, appropriate

accountability arrangements, and regular reporting on the allocation and use of funds.

Environmental Information and Public Participation

Ensuring the public is afforded a genuine and equitable chance to comprehend both the development proposals and the environmental information presented to the Welsh Ministers is paramount. This is especially critical in instances where chapters of the Environmental Statement, its appendices, visual representations, or related documents have undergone revision or replacement throughout the application process. Such revisions, in themselves, do not constitute a procedural irregularity; it is recognised that environmental assessments may appropriately evolve as a project progresses. The key considerations revolve around whether the current documentation collectively forms a coherent and comprehensive record, whether previously superseded materials are clearly identified and distinguished, and whether any additional environmental information has been properly publicised and made accessible for public consultation in line with the relevant Development of National Significance (DNS) and Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) procedural requirements. It is incumbent upon the Welsh Ministers to base their decision on a complete and internally consistent environmental record. In cases where a significant aspect of the assessment relies on information yet to be provided, the decision-maker must be assured that the outstanding details can be validly controlled through planning conditions and do not constitute essential information required to understand the likely significant environmental effects prior to the granting of consent.

Summary

The proposal for Rhiwlas Energy Park involves the installation of turbines reaching heights of up to 200 metres, alongside related infrastructure, within an open upland area proximate to Llangurig. This location encompasses recreational paths, significant water catchment zones, and sensitive ecological and landscape features, all of which must be carefully considered. Additionally, the potential impacts of this development require assessment in the context of nearby existing wind farms, the Banc Du project, and separate electrical grid infrastructure developments underway to facilitate power generation in the region.

While the contribution of Rhiwlas Energy Park to renewable electricity generation aligns with the strong national planning policy emphasis on decarbonisation and merits considerable weight, it is essential to recognise that Future Wales does not grant automatic consent for renewable energy projects. Instead, all environmental and community impacts must comply with relevant planning policies and legal requirements.

Conclusion

As a Community Council our focus remains on Community Wellbeing, environmental impacts, local economy and the financial benefits to our residents. Our concerns centre around these core values, we respectfully request that these values and

concerns as detailed above are considered by Welsh Ministers during the planning application process for DNS CAS-01928-W3M9S8.

Yours faithfully,

Llangurig Community Council