

6/7/23

Lynne Price
Clerk, Merthyr Mawr Community Council
By email

Dear Ms Price,

Examination of the Replacement Bridgend Local Development Plan

Thank you for your letter of 21 June 2023.

I note that your correspondence draws my attention to the Welsh Government's recent consultation on Targeted Policy Changes to Planning Policy Wales on Net Benefit for Biodiversity and Ecosystems Resilience and asks if the document informs the examination.

The Targeted Policy Changes to Planning Policy Wales (PPW), were subject to public consultation between 9 March 2023 and 31 May 2023. To date no revisions have been issues. The relevant policy document is therefore remains PPW, Edition 11 (February 2021).

Notwithstanding this, to provide you with a substantive response to the question you raise, I have asked the Council for its comments on your correspondence and to explain its approach to biodiversity in the Replacement Bridgend Local Development Plan. The Council advised as follows:

"I refer to Merthyr Mawr Community Council's letter (21st June 2023), in relation to the proposed targeted policy changes to Planning Policy Wales on Net Benefit for biodiversity and ecosystems resilience, specifically addressing allocations PLA2: Land South of Bridgend and COM1(2): Craig y Parcau. Please refer to the Councils separate response (4th July 2023) to the Inspectors Note: Targeted Policy Changes to Planning Policy Wales on Net Benefit for Biodiversity and Ecosystems Resilience - this response reviews the contents of the consultation document and assesses the implications of the proposed targeted policy changes for the Bridgend Replacement Local Development Plan (RLDP).

The planning authority has followed the approach advocated by Development Plans Manual Edition 3 (2020) in addition to the relevant legislative and regulatory requirements. The preparation of the LDP has strictly ensured that sustainable development is at the heart of the development plan process. The Council has ultimately considered biodiversity and the natural environment from the outset of the RLDP's preparation. The step-wise approach to maintaining and enhancing biodiversity has already been followed in terms of the site selection process and policy development. The RLDP has sought to ensure any adverse environmental effects are firstly avoided, then minimised, mitigated, and as a last resort compensated for. The final selection of sites and policy framework have been determined by considering

robust evidence and a detailed SA/SEA/HRA process and Candidate Site Assessment.

Merthyr Mawr Community Council raise concern to the potential detrimental effects the development would have on the habitats and species present on site and the long term indirect and cumulative adverse impacts due to the effects of lighting, noise, people, domestic cat pressure and an access road which bisects the SINC. From the outset of plan preparation all sites have been subject to a thorough and comprehensive SA Site Assessment against a wide range of important sustainability and environmental criteria including designations at international, national or local level for reasons of biodiversity conservation, geological importance, heritage or landscape value. No significant adverse impacts were considered likely in relation to both sites.

The Council has also undertaken a plan wide HRA of the Deposit LDP. The HRA process has been carried out in full accordance with the relevant statutory requirements, particularly in accordance with the Habitat Regulations. The HRA process identified the Kenfig / Merthyr Mawr SAC as a relevant European Site to consider in the HRA. The HRA identified a number of Likely Significant Effects (LSE) to the Kenfig / Merthyr Mawr SAC as a result of proposals and policies contained within the Deposit LDP. In order to mitigate against these LSE, appropriate mitigation measures have been incorporated into the wording of policies contained within the Deposit LDP. The HRA concluded that in light of the mitigation measures set out within the wording of policies, no LSE to the Kenfig / Merthyr Mawr SAC are anticipated to arise from the LDP Deposit Plan (including PLA2: Land South of Bridgend & COM1(2) Craig y Parcau) through air pollution, habitat loss, changes to hydrology, recreation, or pollution.

As part of Stage 2 of the Candidate Site Assessment, the site promoter of both sites prepared and submitted ecological appraisals (SD123 and SD184), which were undertaken by competent ecologists, Ethos Environmental Planning. The ecological appraisals identified and considered a number of species including dormouse, riparian mammals, great crested newt, birds, bats, badgers and reptiles. This report has informed the master planning of each site, identifying a number of ecological constraints, appropriate mitigation measures to address them and recommendations regarding further survey work to support a planning submission.

In terms of the concerns relating to the disturbance on habitats and species through light, noise people and cats, it is important to note that a mitigation strategy was established as part of the existing consent (P/08/1114/OUT). The strategy retained the existing SINC with the southwest field becoming a wildlife enhancement area within the new development. This responded to the areas of habitats to be lost, and modification to the remaining areas due to the impacts of the development, including noise and light spillage. Part of the mitigation strategy to counter these losses included the creation of new habitats suitable for the relevant species in the southwest field. As such, habitat design was guided by the requirements of the protected species of which had the potential to utilise the site, ensuring the safeguarding of resilient ecological networks and improvements to ecosystem resilience in accordance with the targeted policy changes to PPW. The habitat design for the consented scheme included:

- Tree and Scrub Planting: translocation and planting new trees and scrub in the southwest field, providing an alternative for displaced animals, including dormice, bats, and shelter for reptiles and amphibians.

- Hedgerow Enhancement: enhancement and translocation of hedgerows from the centre of the site to the eastern site boundary has been undertaken, to create continuous hedge lines which help to buffer the expanded SINC site, and to filter out noise and light from development. Additionally, it provides a continuous flight line for bats and allow dormice to disperse more easily along the hedgerows.
- Bat Roosting Building: a purpose-built bat roost building has been constructed within the south-west field, providing a suitable roost site for both lesser horseshoe and brown long-eared bats, which have both been found roosting in the old hut within the SINC. The building was constructed on the lesser horseshoe key flight line to enable them to rapidly locate it, and also be close to good feeding habitats on the Merthyr Mawr and the River Ogmore.
- Dormouse Nest Boxes: 35 dormouse nest boxes placed within the field, to provide shelter for dormice that are to be displaced from other areas of the site. Placed within the north-east and south-east hedgerows, at approximately 10m interval.
- Pond creation: two new ponds have been created within the south-west field, with the primary aim of providing habitat for Great Crested Newts.
- Grassland Creation: rough grassland created around the pond to mitigate loss of existing grassland.

Taking into account the findings of the ecological appraisal, the development concept has been developed in an ecologically sensitive manner taking into account the semi-rural context of both sites, creating a network of green public open space that ensures that a continuous 'green lung' connects the site internally, and with Bridgend Town Centre (via Newbridge Fields) and Merthyr Mawr. The scheme will retain the existing mitigation measures and enhancements listed above alongside other existing nature conservation, wildlife and landscape features (including trees, hedgerows, sink holes and the existing SINC), creation of internal green movement corridors for wildlife and a sustainable urban drainage system. Furthermore, the Council have prepared a background paper on Biodiversity Net Benefit & New Development – A Case Study of Two Scales (SD52). This demonstrates how the Local Planning Authority, in collaboration with the site promoter has been actively involved in overcoming biodiversity and ecological constraints from the outset seeking to maintain, protect and enhance, achieving a net benefit for biodiversity in line with national planning policy.

There have also been policy enhancements post Deposit Stage to Policy PLA2: Land South of Bridgend. This includes details of the nature and scale of the biodiversity enhancement that will be secured as part of the development. Proposals must also work creatively with nature and must demonstrate how decisions on the built environment including design, siting, scale density and other key considerations have been informed by and incorporate biodiversity and ecosystem resilience considerations. Such considerations will be required to be demonstrated within a green infrastructure assessment as part of a planning application.

It is important to reiterate that there is an overriding need for both PLA2: Land South of Bridgend and COM1(2): Craig y Parcau. Allocation of the sites will enable the accommodation of sustainable growth enshrined in placemaking principles, deliver affordable housing in the highest need part of the County Borough and enable delivery of two schools on the site, including relocation of Heronsbridge Special School. They will also enrich active travel and green infrastructure networks within Bridgend with PLA2 creating a 'green lung' that will connect the site to the Town Centre via

Newbridge Fields. Development of these edge of settlement sites would accord with the LDP Strategy, channel growth to the Primary Key Settlement of the County Borough and make a significant contribution to the housing need identified in the LHMA. The site promoter has also provided extensive supporting information to evidence that the sites are both viable and deliverable.

With the above in mind the Council does not consider any substantive changes to Strategic and Housing Allocations PLA2: Land South of Bridgend and COM1(2): Craig y Parcau necessary in light of the proposed targeted policy changes. The masterplans for both sites have sensitively detailed connections within and between ecosystems and have sought to maintain the largest possible areas of existing habitat supporting biodiversity and functioning ecosystems, retaining existing features and improving ecosystem resilience, in direct alignment with the targeted changes to PPW. Nevertheless, a Biodiversity and New Development SPG is scheduled for publication within a year of RLDP adoption, which will only further strengthen the RLDP's approach in this respect. It is acknowledged that the targeted policy changes could still be subject to further changes post consultation and are currently draft proposals. However, any further targeted changes that do take place to PPW (post adoption of the RLDP) will be addressed within this SPG to future proof the RLDP in this important policy area."

I trust the above is of assistance, however, should you require any further information please contact me via the Programme officer , Amanda Borge by email.

Yours faithfully

Nicola Gulley

Inspector