

## **PREFACE ITEM**

APPLICANT(S) NAME: Infinite Renewables Ltd

PROPOSAL: Erection of a single wind turbine (up to 77m blade tip height) with associated access track, crane hardstanding substation/transformer and boundary fencing.

LOCATION: Land to the north east of Blaen Morlais Farm, Pengarnddu, Merthyr Tydfil

Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council has sought this Council's observations on a planning application to erect a single wind turbine on land north east of Blaen Morlais Farm, Pengarnddu. The application site is an area of agricultural land used for grazing, the site being approximately 570 metres from the administrative boundary between Merthyr CBC and Caerphilly CBC, 2.1 km from Butetown and 3.2 km from Rhymney.

The proposed development comprises the erection of a 500kW wind turbine (for a period of approximately 20 years) that would measure up to 50 metres high to the hub of the turbine, with a three bladed rotor having a diameter of 56 metres. The turbine would have a maximum blade tip height of 77 metres and would have a minimum reflective mid-grey finish. The proposal also includes a small enclosure which will house a transformer, associated switchgear and electrical protection equipment.

The Divisional Landscape Architect (DLA) has considered the submitted Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment and considers it to be generally in line with what is currently considered to be best practice. A Zone of Theoretical Visibility (ZTV) Map has been produced at a radius of 25-30 km and refined to produce a study area for Landscape Character and Visual assessment of 15 km radius from the site. This 15 km study area and ZTV map suggests that the proposed turbine is potentially visible from parts of Butetown, Llechryd, and Rhymney; the upper valley sides above and between Abertysswg and New Tredegar; the northern part of the Cefn Brithdir Ridge above Parc Cwm Darren; Fochriw and the northern part of Gelligaer Common, and parts of Mynydd Bedwellte north of Manmoel, all within 10 km of the site. At a distance of 10-15 km the turbine may also be visible from parts of Gelligaer Common north of Bargoed and parts of Coed y Moeth common north of Markham.

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With the exception of potential views from Llechryd, Butetown Rhymney and Fochriw, which are likely to be restricted by elevation, aspect and adjacent properties. The majority of views from within Caerphilly County Borough are likely to be from elevated and isolated areas of open countryside and experienced mainly by walkers and road users.

An assessment of the impact of the proposed turbine upon the Landscape Character of the study area has been undertaken using LANDMAP data. However, the DLA feels that the assessment of landscape character is too focused upon the areas closest to and within 5 km of the site, whereas Natural Resources Wales LANDMAP guidance requires the assessments in respect of Visual and Sensory, Historic Landscape, Cultural Landscapes to cover the full study area of 15 km in respect of Outstanding and High aspect area evaluations. A complete assessment of LANDMAP data for the full 15 km study area would be required from the applicant to allow a fuller judgement of the potential effects of this proposal upon Landscape Character to be undertaken.

Sixteen representative photo-viewpoints were chosen for analysis. Only two of these viewpoints (A. Butetown and B. Cefn Brithdir) are located within Caerphilly County Borough and both are within 5 km of the site. A third photo-viewpoint at Cefn Ystrad is located in Merthyr Tydfil CBC within 1 km of the boundary with Caerphilly CBC. Given the relatively open landscape of this part of the borough, this view could be said to be indicative of a view from Caerphilly's side of the county boundary also. At least one additional photo-view point from an elevated location within the county borough between 5-15 km south of the site would have been welcomed.

The potential views of the proposed turbine from Butetown at 2.8 km from the site and the Rhymney Valley Ridgeway Walk at Cefn Brithdir 5.7 km from the site are both assessed as a "slight to moderate adverse effect." The significance of effect being reduced on the both locations by the presence of the existing Pengarnddu turbine and the electricity transmission lines, whilst the presence of the lighting columns of the A465, and the Pengarnddu estate also influences the assessment of the turbines impact on Butetown.

The assessment of the view from Cefn Ystrad is that the erection of the proposed turbine would result in a moderate/major adverse significant effect, due in part to its relatively close proximity to this view point and the absence of visual detractors between the viewpoint and the turbine.

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The DLA considers the potential for the proposed turbine to exert a significant adverse impact upon other local views from within the county borough, and in particular from the Upper Rhymney Valley Special Landscape area to be slight given that most local views will also include transmission lines, parts of the Pengarnddu and Tarfanau-bach industrial estates, the A465 infrastructure and the fringes of local settlements.

The DLA believes that the likely impact of the proposed turbine on more distant views from within the county borough and in particular Gelligaer Common Special Landscape Area is also unlikely to be significant. Given the potential distances from the site and the scale of the intervening landscape, Pengarnddu industrial estate and its existing turbine, the A465 road and infrastructure and transmission lines are also likely to be visible as detractors where the full height of the turbine is visible.

A cumulative impact assessment has been undertaken. Nineteen turbines, groups of turbines or wind farms within a 25 km study area have been identified and mapped. Unfortunately the study does not identify the status of these sites, i.e. constructed or whether all have planning consent. A check of the online data-base suggests that appeal judgements are awaited on at least three of the sites and at least one application has been withdrawn. A schedule of cumulative landscape and visual effects/impacts, to complement the schedule of Landscape and visual effects of the proposed single turbine would have been helpful in understanding the outcomes of the Landscape Character assessment.

The cumulative assessment summary recognises that when the current proposal is assessed in conjunction with other wind energy developments along the Heads of the Valleys corridor there is the potential for a change in the Landscape Character of the Heads of the Valleys Area to one associated with Wind energy development. It does not identify whether the addition of this turbine is sufficient to make that change of character inevitable and given that not all of the turbines listed in this cumulative assessment currently have a valid planning consent. The DLA does not believe the tipping point has been reached.

A cumulative visual impact assessment was undertaken based on the viewpoints used for the original visual assessment. The assessment identifies the potential for a moderate adverse change to the view from Butetown and a moderate/major adverse change to the views from Cefn Ystrad (Pen Marche). This is not a significant change on the original assessment for the single turbine, from these viewpoints.

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With regard to more distant views from within Caerphilly County Borough the addition of a single turbine will not have a significant cumulative impact, given the distances involved, the scale of the potential views and the potential presence of additional detractors within such a view. In distant views the turbine will be seen with others at Pengarnddu and not seen as a new isolated development.

To conclude, the DLA considers that the Landscape and Visual Impact assessment lacks some information in relation to Landscape Character Assessment and tends to concentrate the landscape character, visual impact and cumulative impact assessments on the local area within 5 km of the site rather than considering more fully the wider study area. The impact of the proposed turbine on the heads of the valleys road, other transport corridors, long distance walks, local footpaths and Special Landscape Areas is not considered as fully as he would have wished.

However, on the basis of the information provided and an appreciation of the area derived from previous turbine applications the DLA does not believe the impact of this proposal upon Caerphilly County Borough is sufficient to warrant an objection.

The Transportation Engineering Manager advises that the applicant should provide a Traffic Management Plan which provides a detailed report on the proposed route to be taken to the application site. This should include the adequacy of the route and provide details of any improvements required to the highway network to allow the movement of the abnormal loads. The plan will need to indicate full consultation and approval with neighbouring authorities which the loads pass through, consultation and approval with the Welsh Government and South Wales Police Liaison Transport officer who co-ordinates the safe passage of the vehicles and approval with the Highways Agency.

The Head of Public Protection has no objection to the proposed development.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

Taking into account the aforementioned comments it is concluded that the effect of the proposed turbine on this Borough is acceptable. It is therefore recommended that Merthyr Tydfil CBC be advised that this Council raises no objection to the application and that the comments should be forwarded to Merthyr for their consideration.

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