

PLANNING COMMITTEE – 12TH JANUARY 2016

ITEM 1

APPLICATION NO.

2015/1786

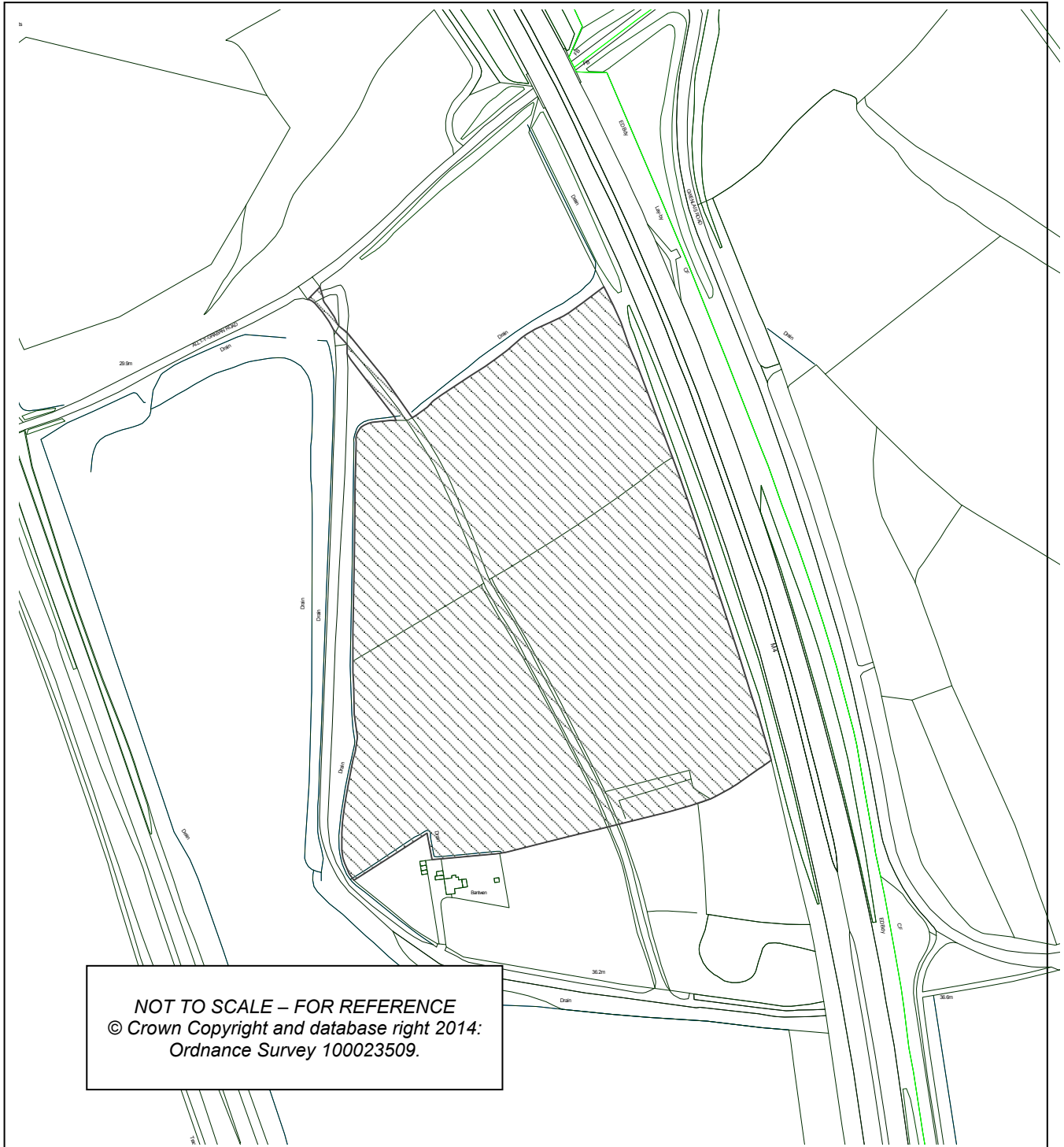
WARD:

Penyrheol

Location: Land associated with Castell Ddu Farm, Off Allt -y-Graban Road, Pontarddulais Swansea SA4 8DH

Proposal: Construction of a ground mounted solar PV generation project and associated works

Applicant: Solar Power Parks Ltd



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BACKGROUND INFORMATION

POLICIES

Policy	Policy Description
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Policy R11	Proposals for the provision of renewable energy resources, including ancillary infrastructure and buildings, will be permitted provided:
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- (i) The social, economic or environmental benefits of the scheme in meeting local, and national energy targets outweigh any adverse impacts,
- (ii) The scale, form, design, appearance and cumulative impacts of proposals can be satisfactorily incorporated into the landscape, seascape or built environment and would not significantly adversely affect the visual amenity, local environment or recreational/tourist use of these areas,
- (iii) There would be no significant adverse effect on local amenity, highways, aircraft operations or telecommunications,
- (iv) There would be no significant adverse effect on natural heritage and the historic environment,
- (v) The development would preserve or enhance any conservation areas and not adversely affect listed buildings or their settings,
- (vi) The development is accompanied by adequate information to indicate the extent of possible environmental effects and how they can be satisfactorily contained and/or mitigated,
- (vii) The development includes measures to secure the satisfactory removal of structures/related infrastructure and an acceptable after use which brings about a net gain where practically feasible for biodiversity following cessation of operation of the installation.

Proposals for large-scale (over 25MW) onshore wind developments shall be directed to within the Strategic Search Area defined on the Proposals Map subject to consideration of the above criteria. (City & County of Swansea Unitary Development Plan 2008)

Policy EV30	Protection and improved management of woodlands, trees and hedgerows which are important for their visual amenity, historic environment, natural heritage, and/or recreation value will be encouraged. (City & County of Swansea Unitary Development Plan 2008)
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Policy EV29	Common land will be protected from development in recognition of its importance for agriculture, natural heritage, the historic environment and as an informal recreation resource. (City & County of Swansea Unitary Development Plan 2008)	
Policy EV21	In the countryside non-residential development will only be permitted where it can be demonstrated that it is beneficial for the rural economy, or it meets overriding social or economic local needs, or it is appropriate development associated with farm diversification, sustainable tourism or nature conservation, or it provides an acceptable economic use for brown field land or existing buildings, or it is essential for communications, other utility services, minerals or renewable energy generation. (City & County of Swansea Unitary Development Plan 2008)	
Policy EV1	New development shall accord with a defined set of criteria of good design. (City & County of Swansea Unitary Development Plan 2008).	
Policy EC13	Development that would result in the loss of the best and most versatile agricultural land will not normally be permitted. (City & County of Swansea Unitary Development Plan 2008)	

SITE HISTORY

App No.	Proposal
2015/0866	PRE APP for a 5MW solar park Decision: Mixed Response Decision Date: 23/06/2015

RESPONSE TO CONSULTATIONS

The application was advertised on site and in the press and one individual property was consulted. ONE LETTER OF OBJECTION has been received, which is summarised as follows:

- I am particularly concerned about the impact of the development on our living conditions and amenity and also on the condition of the access to my home which is shared with the application site.

Grovesend and Waungron Community Council – Objects on the grounds of severe and significant disruption from large vehicles travelling through the villages of Grovesend and Waungron, infringement of developing greenbelt land and the potential for glare from the panels to affect vehicles travelling on the M4 motorway immediately adjacent to the site.

The Gower Society – Comment as follows:

1. We have not inspected the site in great detail but we are aware of its location and accept that it *may not* significantly impact upon the landscape.
2. There could be issues relating to the designated Common Land adjacent and this must be looked at.

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3. The proximity of any adjacent domestic dwellings must be carefully considered and the reasons given by the Planning Inspector in recently dismissing case 3005095 (relating to Pencefnarda Farm) be fully applied here.
4. We have previously expressed our concerns about the large number of such applications (both approved and still not determined) in the area North of Swansea and the lack of any clear published vision by the CCS on their possible eventual collective impact upon the surrounding landscape and people who live near to them.

Glamorgan Gwent Archaeological Trust – We note that the supporting information includes an Archaeological and Heritage Assessment (H_EDP3018_01a). However, we find that this document overall does not meet acceptable professional standards for such an assessment. Nevertheless, in this particular instance we concur with the assessment's conclusion that no additional archaeological investigation is required.

As there is unlikely to be an archaeological restraint to this proposed development, consequently, as the archaeological advisors to your Members, we have no objections to the positive determination of this application. The record is not definitive, however, and features may be disturbed during the course of the work. In this event, please contact this division of this Trust.

Natural Resources Wales - We would offer no objection to the above application, providing appropriately worded conditions are attached to any planning permission your authority is minded to grant.

European Protected Species – Dormice

We note that a 'Preliminary Ecological Appraisal Report' has been carried out by Wildwood Ecology Ltd dated September 2015. We understand that it is not intended to remove trees and entire hedgerows; however, as part of the development, cabling for the arrays will go underground through the existing hedgerows in trenches. We therefore assume that the hedgerows will need to be removed on a temporary basis whilst these works are being carried out.

To ensure that the removal of the hedgerows do not cause detriment to the maintenance of the favourable conservation status of the local dormouse population, we recommend that the following condition be attached to any planning permission your Authority is minded to grant;

Condition

No development approved by this permission shall be commenced until a Method Statement detailing all necessary protected species mitigation measures is submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. Method Statement to be implemented as agreed.

The Method Statement should address the likely impacts of the scheme, setting out what precautions will be undertaken to ensure that animals are not killed or injured during the course of the works, and addressing any breaks in connectivity. It should also set out how the hedgerows to be removed as a result of the required cabling will be re-instated as quickly and efficiently as possible.

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Dormice are protected under the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010 (as amended). Under the Habitats Regulations, it is an offence to injure or kill the species, to disturb it, or to damage or destroy its breeding or resting place. Should dormouse be found, then work should stop immediately, and NRW contacted for further advice.

Pollution Prevention

We note that the site is located approximately 1.4km from the boundary of the Carmarthen Bay and Estuaries SAC and the Burry Inlet and Loughor Estuary SSSI. Watercourses to the northern, southern and western boundaries of the site appear to provide a direct hydrological link between the application site and the SAC/SSSI.

We would request that the developer produce a method statement detailing all necessary pollution prevention measures for the construction phase and lifetime of the development.

Condition

No development approved by this permission shall be commenced until a Method Statement detailing all necessary pollution prevention measures for the construction phase of the development is submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority.

The method statement should identify the following as a minimum;

- Highlight the temporary offloading storage areas.
- Storage facilities for all fuels, oils and chemicals.
- Details on any water features on the site and how they will be protected.
- Full details of how any watercourses will be crossed or confirmation that this is not applicable.
- Any sources of pollution (including silt), potential pathways for that pollution to enter any watercourses within the vicinity of the site and appropriate pollution control measures to be implemented on site.
- Measures for dealing with any contaminated material (excavated waste).
- Details on waste types that will be produced and how they will be managed.
- Details on any invasive species on site and how they will be managed.
- Details of emergency contacts, for example Natural Resources Wales' Pollution hotline 0800 807 060

The Method Statement should then be efficiently communicated to all contractors and sub-contractors (for example, via toolbox talks) and any deficiencies rectified immediately. The developer should plan any haul routes, excavations and electricity cable runs carefully, so that contaminated water cannot run uncontrolled into any watercourses (including ditches).

Further guidance on pollution prevention can be found via the following link;

Protected Sites

We consider it unlikely that the on-site works would have a significant adverse effect on the Carmarthen Bay and Estuaries SAC and the Burry Inlet and Loughor Estuary SSSI, providing appropriate mitigation is provided in the form of pollution prevention method statement is in place.

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There is also a requirement to assess any potential impacts under the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010. Regulation 61 of the Regulations, requires the competent authority to undertake a test of the likely significant effects of the proposal on the SAC.

If it cannot be demonstrated that there will not be a significant effect, either alone or in combination with other plans and projects, you are required to undertake an appropriate assessment of the implications of the proposed scheme for the SAC in view of its conservation objectives, before granting planning permission.

Flood Risk

The site is located within zone A, as defined by the development advice maps referred to under TAN 15 Development and Flood Risk (July 2004). Our Flood Map information, which is updated on a quarterly basis, indicates the site to be outside the current flood zones.

The proposal is for a solar park approximately 6 hectares in size which is classed as less vulnerable development according to TAN15. A flood consequences assessment (FCA) has been prepared by Waterman dated July 2015 in support of the application. The FCA identifies the current surface water runoff regime on the site and concludes that the proposals will not increase flood risk at the site. The assessment also highlights that the solar panels will have rain gaps between the modules to allow rainwater to fall beneath the panels and infiltrate into the ground.

Ultimately, the drainage system design is a matter for the local authority engineers and therefore we would advise that they are consulted with regards to this proposal.

Landscape

The proposal would not have any landscape or visual impact on the Gower Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) which is approximately 8km away. The site is well screened by the undulating topography and intervening woodland and vegetation and therefore would not be perceptible from the AONB.

The Coal Authority - The Coal Authority acknowledges the Coal Mining Risk Assessment but comments that the Report fails to consider any risks posed by the 'high wall' associated with the previous extraction, and considers that the site investigations should extend to identify the line of the extraction in order to inform a layout that would not include solar PV panels or any other development being placed/built over it. The Coal Authority therefore **has no objection** to this planning application, subject to the imposition of an appropriate condition to ensure this.

Council's Drainage Section - We have reviewed the submitted information which does demonstrate that the proposed development will not have any impact on land drainage or surface water flows on site due to the use of permeable materials and rain gaps on the solar panels so a natural field surface will be maintained.

Given that no surface water management scheme is required we do not have any objection to the scheme nor wish to recommend any conditions.

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Council's Ecologist comments and appropriate assessment – The proposed solar farm at Castell Ddu Farm is approximately 1.4 km from the Bury Inlet SAC. The Bury Inlet SAC was designated for its estuarine habitats, lamprey species and otters. The estuary is also an SPA for over wintering wildfowl. There are no aspects of the proposed development which could adversely affect features of the Bury Inlet SAC or SPA. The development will not produce any pollutants and will not cause any physical disturbance to the protected site. It can be concluded that the development will not have any significant effect on the SAC or SPA features.

Council's Common Registration Officer - I wish to inform you that part of the land edged red on your plan is registered common land (CL53 Mynydd Lliw Common) and part of the land abuts the common land.

Highways Observations - The site is located at Castell Ddu located off Allt-y-Graban Road approximately 1.2km north west of Pontlliw and 1km north east of Grovesend. The developable area of the site is 6.75 hectares. The site is defined by Mynydd Lliw Common to the north west and south and the eastern boundary is defined by the M4 Motorway. There are no bridleways, byways or other routes with open public access.

The original submission detailed the use of an area to allow for heavy loads to be decanted to smaller vehicles due to the presence of a weak bridge but this has since been amended as it had been determined that the area for the transfer should possibly have been included within the red edge area. Now the proposal is to bring in the movements by smaller vehicles hence the transfer area is no longer required.

The appraisal submitted considered the principal traffic impacts associated with the construction of the site

1. The existing highway network including the existing access point to the site.
2. The proposed access arrangements including routes to and from the strategic highway network.
3. The likely volume of construction traffic including vehicle type for the most intensive phase of construction.

Traffic movements associated with the operating of the solar farm are minimal, the impact is concentrated in the construction phase.

Access to the site is gained directly off Allt y Graban Road which forms a simple priority junction. Allt Y Graban Road is an unclassified rural road approximately 2km in length that runs west-east direction from Bolgoed Road. There is a large area of hardstanding in the vicinity of the access roads intersection with the highway Allt Y Graban Road links with Pentre Road to the west and with the A48 principal route to the east. In the vicinity of the proposed access the average carriageway width is approximately 5.0-5.5m width. There are localised narrowings along the road which remove the ability for two cars to pass. The speed limit is 60mph at the access point and the road is unlit. The speed limits are 30mph at the Pentre Road end and 40mph at the Bolgoed Road end. Adequate visibility is available subject to some minor hedge trimming in one direction being undertaken.

The speed limits are well signposted, as are the weak bridges in the vicinity.

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There are three main routes that could be used to access the site two that link to junction 48 of the M4 and one to junction 47 of the M4. The weak bridges in the area will largely dictate the route of the proposed construction vehicles. The majority of the vehicles will therefore be largely travelling from junction 47 towards Pontlliw (as seen on figure 2.2 of the amended access appraisal) along Bolgoed Road, then turning onto Allt y Graban.

The route that is most likely to be used for construction vehicles has been assessed in terms of accidents records and it is noted that there are clusters of accidents around the principal junctions. The most accidents at a single location (13) were recorded at the grade separated junction that is Junction 47 of the M4. There have been no recorded fatalities from any of the routes linking the site to junction 47 or junction 48.

Whilst there are constraints on all of the available routes to the site (weak bridges, narrow carriageways and the horizontal alignment to the east of the railways line) it is considered that the route from junction 47 is the most suitable route to transport the component parts for the solar farm, subject to the vehicles being of an appropriate weight classification.

The access to the site is as existing and consists of a bell mouth access. There is sufficient carriageway for the first 35m for two goods vehicles to pass each other internally. After 35m the access forks into two and it is the easternmost access that will provide access to the construction compound area.

A temporary construction compound and car parking area for contractor's vehicles will be made available during the construction phase. A swept path analysis has been submitted for a 16.5m articulated HGV, a 10m rigid vehicle and a large mobile crane. The construction phase is expected to last between 5 and 8 weeks to construct with approximately 30-50 staff maximum at any one time. Staff trips will be made primarily by car or van and a temporary car parking area will be available. Operational hours are detailed between 0730 and 1800 Monday to Friday and 0730 to 1300 Saturday. All deliveries will be made using vehicles appropriate to the surroundings i.e. taking into account the weak bridge. No deliveries via abnormal loads are expected and this would be subject to separate procedures anyway.

Temporary Traffic management and signage may also be used and approval will be required (these will be both covered under the condition relating to approval of the Construction Traffic Management plan). Whilst not specifically mentioned a condition survey will be required to be undertaken to chart and repair if required, any deterioration in the road construction. There will also be wheel washing facilities to ensure that the highway is kept clear of dirt and this can be secured by condition.

Traffic movements during this phase for the contractors has been estimated at a total of 90 movements spread over the three week period, this equates to 5-6 trips per day which is not a high volume of traffic. Overall, the total predicted movements are not considered to be of a high volume.

Following completion of the construction phase, traffic movements will be minimal and relate to occasional maintenance visits only, approximately 10-20 visits per year.

Given the limited traffic movements associated with the development I recommend no highway objection, subject to:

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1. The submission of a Construction Traffic Management Plan prior to commencement of any work at the site. All works shall be completed in accordance with the approved management plan.
2. No development approved by this permission shall take place until details of the methodology for the scope and nature of the dilapidation surveys on the adopted highway have been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The dilapidation surveys shall be undertaken in accordance with the approved details and the results together with any remediation works proposed shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority within two months of completion of the dilapidation surveys. Any remediation works shall be undertaken in accordance with the approved details within 6 months of the date of approval of such details.
3. Wheel washing facilities in accordance with details to be submitted for approval shall be available at all times to ensure that the highway is kept clear of dirt and debris.

Note: The Developer must contact the Highway Management Group , The City and County of Swansea , Penllergaer Offices, c/o The Civic Centre , Swansea SA1 3SN before carrying out any work . Please contact the Team Leader e-mails to, tel. no. 01792 636091

APPRAISAL

Description

Full planning permission is sought for the installation of a solar photovoltaic (PV) array on land at Castell Ddu Farm, Allt-Y-Graban Road, Pontarddulais, Swansea. The array would comprise approximately 8694 individual panels and associated works and structures over a site area of approximately 6.04 hectares and will have a total installed capacity of 5MW. Ancillary development would include a small number of buildings in the form of substations, transformers and switchgear buildings, security fencing and associated security features (including CCTV cameras), and a temporary construction compound.

Site Location and Use

The application site lies in the open countryside and between the settlements of Pontlliw and Grovesend, which are located approximately 750m east and 500m south-west of the site, respectively. The application site extends over an area of 14.9 acres/6.04 hectares and occupies some 5 no. agricultural field parcels, the gradient of which are generally level in nature.

An existing, gated, private road extends the length of the site in a north-west to south-manner. It is infrequently used, apart from movement associated with the agricultural fields. Ground conditions appear to be such that they are in active use for grazing and hay harvesting purposes. There are no structures situated within the application site.

The site's northern, western and southern boundaries are bounded by mature trees and hedgerows which serve to enclose the site and restrict views from associated land in these directions. A single residential dwelling is situated adjacent to the site's south-western boundary, accessed via a rural, un-named road which runs along the entire western site boundary. The eastern boundary comprises the M4 motorway and associated embankment lined with trees and hedgerows providing an element of screening.

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The site and its immediate surroundings does not contain any listed buildings or scheduled ancient monuments and does not include any trees which are subject to Tree Preservation Orders. The adjacent open access land to the north-west and south forms part of the Bryn Lliw Grasslands SINC.

The nearest residential property to the site is a single dwelling named Banwen, whose boundary lies approximately 23m to the southern most solar farm boundary and approximately 20m from its eastern most boundary. The access to Banwen lies to the west of the application site and both sites share the same turn off from Allt-Y-Graban Road.

Screening Opinion

The Authority has undertaken a screening opinion on the submitted scheme and it has been determined that an EIA is not required for the proposal.

Supporting Documents

The planning application is accompanied by a number of supporting documents.

A Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) has been submitted with the application including several photomontages of views of the site from a number of locations in the surrounding area, both nearby and from distance. Overall it concludes that the site at Castell Ddu can accommodate a new solar development with no impacts upon the landscape character and visual amenity of its immediate surroundings and no impact upon the wider Bryn Lliw Grasslands SINC.

An Extended Phase I Habitat Survey and Protected Species Survey Report has been submitted which assesses the ecological value of the site, recording any protected or otherwise important habitats and any evidence for notable or protected species within and adjacent to the survey area and provides recommendations on mitigation and enhancement where appropriate.

An Access Appraisal document has been submitted which sets out details of the anticipated construction programme, anticipated activity and site parking and manoeuvring arrangements and the proposed access route. Construction works will involve the delivery of equipment and material to and from the site, an indicative timetable for which is approximately 5-8 weeks.

During the construction phases it is anticipated there will be up to 30- 50 construction staff on site at any one time, and their trips will be primarily by car or van. HGVs will be used to deliver all equipment and materials to and from the application site. The potential number of HGVs in any one day will vary between the phases. The proposal is likely to generate a total of 90 construction and delivery vehicle trips (two-way) during the most intensive phase of construction. Based on a three week period, this will equate to approximately five – six goods vehicle trips (two-way) per day. The majority of these trips would be undertaken by rigid goods vehicles less than 18T in gross weight.

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A Glint and Glare Assessment has been included in the Planning Statement and covers the potential effects on potential visual receptors within the vicinity of the site. Some receptors in this area comprise of M4 to the north of the site, the Swansea to Pontarddulais railway which runs approximately 300m to the east of the site and nearby dwellings (i.e. Banwen). The report concludes that the solar effects on these receptors will be negligible.

A Coal Mining Risk Assessment has been submitted. It shows that a single mine entry (adit) is within 20m of the application site and that the site is likely to have been subject to historic unrecorded underground coal mining at shallow depth. The records also indicate that the site has been subject to surface mining operations and that the 'high wall' of the previous extraction bisects the site. The Coal Authority has considered the report and is satisfied that the application site is, or can be made, safe and stable for the proposed development.

As the site lies within Zone A (according to the Development Advise Map referred to in TAN 15) and is considered to be at negligible risk of flooding, a flood consequences assessment has also been submitted for the site. The site is located outside of the extreme flooding extent and is therefore unlikely to be at risk from flooding from rivers and sea.

Issues

The main issues for consideration are the impacts of the proposed solar farm on the visual amenity of the area, upon residential amenity, highway safety, ecology & habitats with regard to policies EV1, EV2, EV2, EV35, EV30 and R11 of the City & County of Swansea Unitary Development Plan 2008. There are no overriding issues with regard to the Human Rights Act.

Policy EV1 is a general design policy and states that new development shall accord with the objectives of good design, including, inter alia:

- (i) Be appropriate to its local context in terms of scale, height, massing, elevational treatment, materials and detailing, layout, form, mix and density;
- (iii) Not result in a significant detrimental impact on local amenity in terms of visual impact, loss of light or privacy, disturbance and traffic movements;
- (iv) Incorporate a good standard of landscape design;
- (v) Sensitively relate to existing development patterns and seek to protect natural heritage, the historic and cultural environment not only on-site, but in terms of potential impact on neighbouring areas of importance;
- (xi) Having regard to the desirability of preserving the setting of any listed building.

Policy R11 supports the provision of renewable energy resources including ancillary buildings and infrastructure subject to:

- (i) The social, economic or environmental benefits of the scheme in meeting local, and national energy targets outweigh any adverse impacts;
- (ii) The scale, form, design, appearance and cumulative impacts of proposals can be satisfactorily incorporated into the landscape, seascape or built environment and would not significantly adversely affect the visual amenity, local environment or recreational/tourist use of these areas;

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- (iii) There would be no significant adverse effect on local amenity, highways, aircraft operations or telecommunications;
- (iv) There would be no significant adverse effect on natural heritage and the historic environment;
- (v) The development would preserve or enhance any conservation areas and not adversely affect listed buildings or their settings;
- (vi) The development is accompanied by adequate information to indicate the extent of possible environmental effects and how they can be satisfactorily contained and/or mitigated;
- (vii) The development includes measures to secure the satisfactory removal of structures/related infrastructure and an acceptable after use which brings about a net gain where practically feasible for biodiversity following cessation of operation of the installation.

Policy EV2 states that the siting of new development should give preference to the use of previously developed land over greenfield sites and must have regard to the physical character and topography of the site and its surroundings. Policy EV21 refers to criteria for non-residential development in the countryside being permitted where it can be demonstrated that (v) it is essential for communications, telecommunications or renewable energy generation.

Policy EV30 states that protection and improved management of woodlands, trees and hedgerows which are important for their visual amenity, historic environment, natural heritage and/or recreation value will be encouraged. Policy EV35 relates specifically to considerations of surface water run-off.

Amount, Scale and Layout

The development relates to a site area of 6.04 hectares and comprises three field parcels, which has the capacity to provide an output of up to 5 megawatts (MW), which equates to powering a total of approximately 4,000 homes. An existing access lane directed from Allt-y-Graban Road, to the north of the field parcels will accommodate the proposed access into the site.

The proposal constitutes the construction of PV panels laid out in rows running from west to east across the site. These modules will be allocated within solar arrays which encompass 46 panels. Each array will be mounted on a simple metal framework; the height of any installation will be limited to 1.90m above ground level. The framework will be driven into the soil, removing the need for deep foundations or piling. The panels will be raised off the ground to allow the land to be grazed by sheep, thus retaining agricultural productivity and keeping the grass down.

The operational life of the solar farm will be approximately 25 years.

Construction Phase & Access

The anticipated construction period for the proposed solar farm will be approximately 5 – 8 weeks and will include preparation, cable laying, assembly and erection of PV panels, installation of transformers and connection to the grid. Within the construction programme there is likely to be an intense period of activity over a two week period, when the majority of construction materials and panels will be brought to site.

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The proposal is likely to generate a total of 90 construction and delivery vehicle trips (two-way) during the most intensive phase of construction. Based on a three week period, this will equate to approximately five – six goods vehicle trips (two-way) per day. The majority of these trips would be undertaken by rigid goods vehicles less than 18T in gross weight.

A total of 17 deliveries of loads and components necessary to establish the solar farm are indivisible and these will be delivered to the site by way of Allt-Y-Graban (east).. These loads will access the site by way of Allt-Y-Graban (east) and temporary traffic regulation orders may be required.

All suppliers and contractors will be notified of the agreed construction routeing strategy and expected to comply. All goods vehicles in excess of 18 tonnes gross vehicle weight that are transporting indivisible loads will arrive at the site by way of Allt y Graban (East). A banksman will be stationed at the site access to ensure that deliveries do not attempt to depart the site when another vehicle is due to arrive. The banksman will also ensure there is no conflict with vehicles on Allt-Y-Graban which based on on-site observations undertaken during the preparation of this access appraisal is lightly trafficked.

No vehicle parking, loading or unloading will take place from the public highway and suitable wheel washing facilities will be installed, if required, to ensure no mud or debris is deposited on the public highway during the construction period. A construction signage strategy will be agreed with the Highways Authority and implemented prior to construction commencing on site. This signage strategy will be in place along the route from the M4 motorway or along part of the route as deemed necessary with the local highway authority to direct construction vehicles to the site. It will also provide road users with advance warning of the location of the site access and the potential for meeting construction traffic.

The original proposal was to transport everything to the site on 44 tonne trucks but, due to the presence of the weak bridge on Allt-Y-Graban Road, the goods would then be transferred onto smaller trucks in a nearby transshipment area to transport them to site. This plan has now been amended as indicated above to ensure the goods are brought straight to site on trucks that can use the 18 tonne restricted weight bridge to avoid the need to set up a transshipment area in the locality.

Following commissioning, minimal maintenance is expected in relation to the PV panels and other fixed elements of the site. Once operational there will be no staff based permanently on site. Visits for maintenance, cleaning and monitoring are likely to be infrequent, approximately four times a year. These trips will typically be made by small vans or 4x4's. There will be sufficient space on site for these vehicles to enter, park and manoeuvre without causing any undue impact.

Decommissioning

When the panels reach the end of their lifetime (approximately 25 years), the solar farm would be decommissioned, all equipment would be dismantled and removed from the site and the site restored to its previous use. A condition to this effect would be attached to any grant of consent.

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Visual Amenity

In terms of the impact of the scheme upon the character and appearance of the open countryside, the LVIA has investigated a number of viewpoints to analyse the existing baseline conditions and assess the likelihood for potential visual effects caused by the proposed development. These are considered in turn below:

Viewpoint 1 - is a short range view looking south east from Allt-Y-Graban Road. The site is screened by intervening topography. *Developments visual impact: no change*

Viewpoint 2 - is a short range view looking south from Allt-Y-Graban Road. The site is screened by intervening woodland. *Developments visual impact: no change.*

Viewpoint 3 - is a short range view from the junction of Allt-Y-Graban Road and Gwenlais Road. The site is screened by intervening woodland. *Developments visual impact: no change.*

Viewpoint 4 - is a long range panoramic looking south west from the junction of Allt-Y-Graban Road, Bolgoed Road, Bryntirion Road and Heol Y Barna. The site is screened by a combination of intervening topography and vegetation. *Developments visual impact: no change.*

Viewpoint 5 - is a long range view looking west from Pontlliw on the junction of Carmel Road and Bryntirion Road. The site is screened by a combination of intervening topography and vegetation. *Developments visual impact: no change.*

Viewpoint 6 - is a mid-range view looking north east from a farm access track immediately to the east of the Gower Way National Trail. The site is screened by intervening vegetation. *Developments visual impact: no change.*

Viewpoint 7 - is a long range panoramic looking north from a public footpath linking the Gower Way National Trail with Grovesend. The site is screened by a combination of intervening topography and trees and vegetation associated with the Gower Way National Trail. *Developments visual impact: no change.*

Viewpoint 8 - is a long range view looking south east from a public footpath adjacent to the entrance to Castell Ddu Farm. The site is screened by intervening roadside trees and vegetation. *Developments visual impact: no change.*

The level nature of the site and the surrounding vegetation dictates that the proposal would not be highly visible in the surrounding landscape and although visible from the nearest residential property, the overall impact upon the visual amenities of the area is considered to be negligible.

Residential Amenity

Turning now to residential amenity, in general the site is well screened from the surrounding area due to intervening vegetation and landform as indicated above. There is one residential property close to the south and south western corner boundary of the site, and the solar farm will be legible from private views from this property at a distance of approximately 23m.

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The LVIA considers the visual impact of the proposed development from this surrounding residential property and concludes that whilst it will be visible from this property, existing screening provided by hedgerows and proposed planting will mitigate this impact. The impact of the proposed development on a localised level is therefore not considered to be of such significance that would warrant a refusal in this instance. Furthermore the retention and addition of hedgerows and woodland copses within the site is considered to minimise the extent of the perceived change to the site when viewed from both private and public vantage points.

In terms of the potential for glint and glare, particularly from private amenity spaces in properties in the wider surrounding area, a glint and glare assessment has been submitted and it has been concluded that this would not result in any undue impact upon the nearest residential properties. The glint and glare assessment has also been considered from the adjacent M4 and surrounding roads and comments as follows:

“Within the solar reflection arcs, there are unlikely to be any significant views of solar panels from the M4; there will be virtually no views of solar panels from the A48 or B4296; hence little possibility of solar reflections reaching any of these roads. Similarly, there are unlikely to be significant views of panels from nearby unclassified roads and public paths and rights-of-way.

If any solar reflections are received by traffic on these roads and rights-of-way, they will be in the early mornings for receptors to the west of the site, and evenings for those to the east. Solar reflections could only be seen fleetingly in gaps in hedgerows, trees or buildings and from the side of a driver's view of the road ahead. The much brighter sun will be shining from close (in angular terms) to any reflecting panels and will therefore be the predominant source of any nuisance to either drivers or walkers.

Therefore, any effects from solar reflections on these roads and paths will be negligible.”

With regards to potential noise and disturbance, again there are significant distances involved in terms of the application site and neighbouring residential properties. Whilst it is accepted that there would be a certain level of noise and disturbance during construction, particularly from deliveries and site works, given that the construction period is anticipated to be completed within 5 – 8 weeks and is not a continuous construction process, these impacts would be temporary. It is therefore considered that the proposed development would not create significant levels of noise and dust and any noise/dust created during operation would be short in duration. In addition, no adverse comments have been received from the Council's Pollution Control section on this issue.

Public Right Of Way/ Common Land

There are no public rights of way across the application site. The Commons Registration Officer has advised that part of the site is registered common land and part of the land abuts common land. It is acknowledged that the access crossed common land but it is not considered that the proposal would have an impact on the common land and would remain protected.

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Hedgerow Planting and Management

The site is surrounded by large mature hedgerows and woodland and is not visible from surrounding areas accessible to the general public. However to enhance the sites ecological value and ensure the continuing effectiveness of the screening provided by the surrounding vegetation the operators of the proposed solar development propose to maintain the existing hedgerows at their current height. Any gaps / thin spots are to be infilled with new native planting and a natural woodland management regime is to be implemented to ensure the continuing health and quality of the adjacent woodlands.

Glimpses of the proposed development will be gleaned from the private garden of Bantwen. To mitigate any potential harm to the outlook of Bantwen, the applicants have proposed a linear buffer approximately 5 metres wide will be planted along the southern boundary of the site.

A condition to require the exact mix of species to be agreed before commencement of works is recommended.

Access and Highway Safety

The Head of Transportation and Engineering raises no highway objection given the limited traffic movements associated with the development subject to the submission of a Construction Traffic Management Plan, details of the methodology for the scope and nature of the dilapidation surveys on the adopted highway and details of wheel washing facilities prior to commencement of any work at the site. It is noted that there are three main routes that could be used to access the site; two that link to junction 48 of the M4 and one to junction 47 of the M4. Whilst there are constraints on all of the available routes to the site (weak bridges, narrow carriageways and the horizontal alignment to the east of the railways line) it is considered that the route from junction 47 is the most suitable route to transport the component parts for the solar farm, subject to the vehicles being of an appropriate weight classification.

Traffic movements during the contractor phase has been estimated at a total of 90 movements spread over the three week period, this equates to 5-6 trips per day which is not a high volume of traffic. Overall, the total predicted movements are not considered to be of a high volume and following completion of the construction phase, traffic movements will be minimal and relate to occasional maintenance visits only, approximately 10-20 visits per year.

Other Relevant Local Appeal Decisions

There have been three appeal decisions this year for solar parks within the authority's boundaries, all of which have been dismissed. The first at Webbsfield, Ilston (Planning Ref: 2014/0876) lies within the Gower AONB where the planning inspector, in reaching his decision on the 1MW development, was mindful of the statutory duty to in relation to the protection of the AONB and found the development would be significantly harmful in visual and landscape terms, which is of national importance given its statutory designation. The Inspector did note that the amount of renewable energy that would be generated by the scheme would equate to the needs of 300 households...and contrary to the views of objectors, considered that it was a significant contribution.

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Clearly the current application site is not located within AONB and therefore in assessing the current proposal the authority is not bound by this statutory duty. Instead the policy test outlined in Policy R11 is whether the development would have a significant adverse effect. For the reasons outlined above it is not considered the development would conflict with the criteria of R11.

An application for a solar park at Gwenlais Uchaf Farm in Pontlliw (Planning Ref: 2014/1620) was also dismissed due to the impact of the solar arrays on the nearby Listed Building having regard to the Council's statutory duty to protect it and its setting. There are no Listed Buildings within the vicinity of the current application site and to this end, the conclusions of the Appeal do not apply to the current proposal.

A more recent decision relates to a proposed 3.6MW development at land at Pencefnarda Uchaf Farm, Gorseinon (Planning Ref: 2014/0761). The appeal was dismissed on the grounds that the development would be in-appropriate within a green wedge, the inspector considered the proposed development would appear as modern industrial engineered structures that would be in contrast to the rural landscape surrounding it. He found the development would detract from and unacceptably harm the open character and appearance of the area. Moreover, the inspector found that the development would result in a significant level of harm to the outlook of occupiers of properties near to the site on Pencefnarda Road.

The current development proposed is not within a green wedge as such this aspect of the Pencefnarda Farm decision is not relevant to the consideration of this application.

The application site is however, within approximately 23m of the boundary of the nearest residential property to the south i.e. Bantwen and as such the comments of the Appeal Inspector are relevant in this regard. However, notwithstanding this, it is considered in this particular instance that as only part of the solar park would be visible from this property together with the consideration of the level nature of the site and the additional screening proposed by the applicants, it is not considered that the outlook of the owners of Bantwen would be so severely affected as to warrant a recommendation of refusal on this issue alone.

Other Issues

Natural Resources Wales and the Council's Planning Ecologist have raised no concerns with the contents of the Extended phase 1 Survey. However, it is recommended that the measures listed in section 5 of the survey to ensure the proposal has no impact upon protected species are followed and implemented.

The Council's Drainage Officer comments that having reviewed the submitted information which demonstrates that the proposed development will not have any impact on land drainage or surface water flows on site due to the use of permeable materials and rain gaps on the solar panels so a natural field surface will be maintained, no objection to the proposal are raised and no conditions are recommended.

The Coal Authority raises no objections to the proposal following consideration of the Coal Mining Risk Assessment, subject to the imposition of one recommended condition.

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The Glamorgan Gwent Archaeological Trust have reviewed the Heritage Assessment and have concurred with the assessment's conclusion that no additional archaeological investigation is required and there is unlikely to be an archaeological restraint to this proposed development. Natural Resources Wales have requested conditions regarding mitigation for protected species and pollution prevention measures and these would be attached to any grant of consent.

Response to consultations

The issues raised by the objectors have been addressed above in the main body of the report.

Conclusion

Solar Farms present an opportunity for the provision of renewable energy in the UK and are encouraged by the Government's feed-in tariffs for schemes producing 5MW or more. There is wide scale commitment to expand the deployment of renewable energy to secure the future energy demand within the UK and protect the end users of the sector from the instability of fossil fuels. Such schemes also provide investment, jobs and contribute to the UK's drive towards carbon reduction. UK Government Policy on renewable energy is set out in the Energy White Paper 'Our Energy Future - Creating a low carbon economy (2003) and this document establishes a national target of achieving 20% of electricity needs from renewable energy by 2020. This target is broadly reflected in Welsh Assembly document TAN 8. This compulsion drives the financial mechanism for Government incentives for the development of large scale renewable energy generation. Certain Areas of the UK have been identified as being optimum areas for solar energy generation. The South West and South Wales are classed as optimum areas (uksolarenergy.co.uk).

In essence, the scheme assessment and decision outcome is essentially a balance between the national and international will for a future with renewable energy, supported by regional and local policy in principle, against the impact of such schemes on the landscape and environment in which they are sited. Correspondence from Welsh Government has indicated that based on data for 2013, an output of roughly 10% of capacity for all types of solar panel in Wales was produced. This contribution to renewable energy targets has to be assessed against the impact of such schemes.

On balance, this application is considered appropriate in terms of its scale and design and would not cause unacceptable loss of amenity to neighbouring properties or surrounding land. There would not be significantly adverse visual impact on landscapes and the general locality from the site, and there would be no significantly adverse or detrimental impact on the ecology, habitats, highway safety or land drainage in the area. On balance therefore the scheme is considered acceptable and is in accordance with the criteria laid out in Policies EV1, EV2, EV21, EV23, EV30, EV35 and R11 of the City and County of Swansea Unitary Development Plan 2008. Approval is recommended.

RECOMMENDATION

APPROVE, subject to the following conditions:

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- 1 The development hereby permitted shall begin not later than five years from the date of this decision.
Reason: To comply with the provisions of Section 91 of the Town and Country Planning Act, 1990.
- 2 The planning permission is for a period from the date of this permission until the date occurring 25 years after the date of commissioning of the development. Written confirmation of the date of commissioning of the development shall be provided to the Local Planning Authority no later than 1 calendar month after the date of commissioning.

(Commissioning is defined as the point at which the solar farm is put into active service or becomes active, or is in a usable condition)
Reason: To ensure the landscape impact of the development exists only for the lifetime of the development.
- 3 The development shall be carried out in accordance with the following approved plans and documents: site location plan, P01.2 general PV plant layout, P01.3 equipment inverters, P01.4 equipment transformer, P015 substation, P01.6 equipment monitoring house, P01.7 communication box, P01.8 switchgear building, flood consequences assessment, archaeological and heritage assessment TDA/2152/TCP/RHC/08.15 tree constraints plan, TDA/2152/TS&A/RHC/08.15 tree survey and assessment, received 1st September 2015, glint and glare report, habitat survey received 9th September 2015, updated Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment received 3rd November 2015, amended transport access appraisal received 15th December 2015.
Reason: To define the extent of the permission granted.
- 4 Prior to the commencement of the development hereby approved, a Construction Traffic Management plan shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The scheme shall thereafter be implemented in accordance with the approved details.
Reason: In the interests of highway safety.
- 5 Prior to the commencement of the development hereby approved, a Site Waste Management Plan shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The scheme shall thereafter be implemented in accordance with the approved details.
Reason: To ensure waste at the site is managed in line with the Waste Hierarchy in a priority order of prevention, re-use, recycling before considering other recovery or disposal option.

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- 6 No development approved by this permission shall take place until a Construction Environmental Management Plan (CEMP), which sets out all pollution prevention measures and environmental management requirements for the construction phase, has been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The plan shall make particular reference to the protection of surrounding land and water environments. The details of the plan shall be implemented as approved and must be efficiently communicated to all contractors and sub-contractors (for example, via toolbox talks) and any deficiencies rectified immediately.

Reason: In the interests of biodiversity and to prevent pollution of controlled waters and the wider environment.

- 7 No later than 12 months from the first generation of electricity, the following schemes shall be submitted in writing for the written approval of the Local Planning Authority:

(i) A scheme detailing the removal of all surface elements of the photo voltaic solar farm and any

foundations or anchor systems to a depth of 300mm below ground level;

(ii) A scheme detailing the restoration and aftercare, following consultation with such other parties as the Local Planning Authority considers appropriate.

(iii) A timetable for completion of the works

These schemes shall be implemented within 12 months from the date of the last electricity generated, should the site no longer be utilised for the permission hereby granted, and completed in accordance with the approved timetable for completion of the works.

Reason: In the interest of visual amenity and to ensure the land is restored in an acceptable manner

- 8 No development shall commence until further intrusive site investigations have been submitted to, and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority in order to establish the exact situation regarding coal mining legacy issues on the site and any remedial works required. If the site investigations confirm the need for remedial works to treat the mine entries and areas of shallow mine workings, the remedial works identified must be undertaken prior to the commencement of the development.

Reason: To ensure the safety and stability of the proposed development.

- 9 No development approved by this permission shall take place until details of the methodology for the scope and nature of the dilapidation surveys on the adopted highway have been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The dilapidation surveys shall be undertaken in accordance with the approved details and the results together with any remediation works proposed shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority within two months of completion of the dilapidation surveys. Any remediation works shall be undertaken in accordance with the approved details within 6 months of the date of approval of such details

Reason: In the interest of highway safety.

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- 10 Prior to the development hereby approved commencing on site a method statement shall be implemented in accordance with details to be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority detailing the provision of suitable facilities on site to ensure vehicles leaving the site do not deposit mud or debris on the adjacent highway.
Reason: In the interest of highway safety.
- 11 Prior to the commencement of development, details of the external colour and facing materials for the buildings hereby approved shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority. The development shall thereafter be carried out and maintained in accordance with the approved details.
Reason: In the interests of visual amenity.
- 12 The works hereby approved shall be undertaken in accordance with the recommendations listed in Section 5 of the preliminary Ecological Appraisal report prepared by Wildwood Ecology (Ref: WWE150602.PEA.2) received on 9th September 2015 survey shall be followed and implemented.
Reason: To ensure the proposal has no impact upon protected species.
- 13 Prior to the commencement of the development hereby approved, a Landscape and Habitat Management plan shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The plan shall include details of the hedgerows to be supplemented, the new hedgerow to be planted and the species to be used. The scheme shall thereafter be implemented in accordance with the approved details.
Reason: In the interests of biodiversity and habitat management.
- 14 No development approved by this permission shall be commenced until a Method Statement detailing all necessary protected species mitigation measures has been submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority. The mitigation measures shall thereafter be implemented in accordance with the approved details.
Reason: To protect and mitigate the impact of the development on protected species.

INFORMATIVES

- 1 The Developer must contact the Highway Management Group , The City and County of Swansea , Penllergaer Offices, c/o The Civic Centre , Swansea SA1 3SN before carrying out any work . Please contact the Team Leader e-mails to mark.jones@swansea.gov.uk , tel. no. 01792 636091

2 STANDING ADVICE - DEVELOPMENT LOW RISK AREA

The proposed development lies within a coal mining area which may contain unrecorded coal mining related hazards. If any coal mining feature is encountered during development, this should be reported immediately to The Coal Authority on 0345 762 6848. It should also be noted that this site may lie in an area where a current licence exists for underground coal mining.

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- 2 Further information is also available on The Coal Authority website at:
www.gov.uk/government/organisations/the-coal-authority

Property specific summary information on past, current and future coal mining activity can be obtained from: www.groundstability.com

This Standing Advice is valid from 1st January 2015 until 31st December 2016

- 3 The development plan covering the City and County of Swansea is the City and County of Swansea Unitary Development Plan. The following policies were relevant to the consideration of the application: EV1, EV21, EV29, EV30, EC13, R11

- 4 This consent is issued without prejudice to any other consents or easements that may be required in connection with the proposed development.
-