Awel y Môr Offshore Wind Farm

Assessment of the Visual Effects from the Glascoed Nature Reserve

Deadline 2

Date: 09 November 2022

Revision: A

Document Reference: 2.29

PINS Reference: N/A

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REVISION	DATE	STATUS/ REASON FOR ISSUE	AUTHOR	CHECKED BY	APPROVED BY
A	November 2022	Deadline 2	OPEN	RWE	RWE

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1 Introduction

1 This document provides an assessment of the visual effects on the Glascoed Nature Reserve as a result of the onshore elements of the proposed Awel y Môr Offshore Wind Farm (AyM).

2 The Examining Authority's (ExA) first written questions included ExQ1 – 10.13 which states – *'During an unaccompanied site inspection [EV-001], [EV-002], the ExA observed views towards the OnSS site from within the publicly accessible Glascoed Nature Reserve. Please comment on the likely use of this nature reserve by the public, including workers associated with St Asaph Business Park, and provide an assessment of visual effects for its users.'*

3 This document provides The Applicant's response to ExQ1.10.13.

1.1 Approach

4 This response is based on the description of onshore elements of AyM within ES Volume 3, Chapter 1: Onshore Project Description (AS-029). The methodology used in this response is set out in ES Volume 3, Chapter 2, Section 2.5 - Assessment criteria and assignment of significance (AS-029). The response relies upon field survey undertaken for the Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) (AS-029) during periods of clear visibility between March and June 2021 and in January 2022. This response should be read in conjunction with the following Figures:

- (APP-163) - Volume 6, Annex 2.2: Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) Figures - Figure 2.7 (Context Photos).
- (APP-164) - Volume 6, Annex 2.2: Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) Figures - Figure 2.8a (Substation Bare Ground Zone of Theoretical Visibility (ZTV) with Viewpoints).
- (APP-166) - Volume 6, Annex 2.2: Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) Figures – Figure 2.8c (Substation Screened Zone of Theoretical Visibility (ZTV) with Viewpoints).
- (APP-182) - Volume 6, Annex 2.3: Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) Visualisations - Figure 2.19 (Viewpoint 2: St Asaph, Business Park).
- (APP-066) Volume 3, Chapter 5: Onshore Biodiversity and Nature Conservation.

2 Assessment

2.1 Baseline

5 The Glascoed Nature Reserve is an area of land that lies immediately to the west of St Asaph Business Park (SABP) between Glascoed Road and Bridlepath (PRoW 201/9). The area is shown on Figure 9 within (APP-066) ES Volume 3, Chapter 5: Onshore Biodiversity and Nature Conservation (AP-066).

6 The Nature Reserve is an area of rough grassland vegetation which is separated into three main compartments by the retained hedgerow field boundaries that now appear as strips of scrub vegetation. The northern and southern boundaries of the Nature Reserve have small woods that provide a degree of further separation from Glascoed Road and SABP. A series of ponds have been created in each of the compartments which are home to a population of Great Crested Newts and as highlighted in (APP-066) Volume 3, Chapter 5: Onshore Biodiversity and Nature Conservation, the Nature Reserve '*is managed for the benefit of the species*'…'*Mitigation for GCN has been and remains an integral part of the development of the business park*'.

7 The Nature Reserve can be accessed from Bridlepath (PRoW 201/9) or from the SABP near the location of LVIA Viewpoint 2 (see (APP-182) - Volume 6, Annex 2.3: Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) Visualisations - Figure 2.19 (Viewpoint 2: St Asaph, Business Park)). There are breaks in the scrub vegetation that separate the compartments of the Nature Reserve. Informal tracks across the Nature Reserve have formed between these breaks and the entrance points creating the most commonly used access through the Nature Reserve. There are no barriers to accessing other parts of the Nature Reserve except for the post and wire fencing around the ponds and the often-thick grass vegetation which would deter most visitors from straying off the tracks.

8 The existing views from the Nature Reserve are framed by the woods to the north and south and hedgerows and trees to the east against the SABP and west against the edge of the AyM Onshore Substation site. See Photograph F8 on LVIA Figure 2.7e within (APP-163) - Volume 6, Annex 2.2: Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) Figures - Figure 2.7 (Context Photos). The scrub and small trees that separate the Nature Reserve from the AyM Onshore Substation site are approximately 2-3m high and broken in places allowing views across the AyM Onshore Substation site towards the mature woodlands associated with Bodelwyddan Park and along Bridlepath (PRoW 201/9). The buildings of businesses located at the western edges of the SABP are in close proximity to the Nature Reserve and dominate views to the east.

2.2 Sensitivity

9 The Nature Reserve is not subject to a landscape designation for its scenic quality however views may be valued locally by visitors. Value is considered to be medium. Visitors are likely to be focused on their surroundings which for the most part will be the immediate landscape context of the Nature Reserve itself. Wider views are available in places where views open up through broken or lower sections of field boundary scrub, extending the visual interest for visitors towards Bodelwyddan and across the AyM Onshore Substation site. Views from the Nature Reserve are also influenced by the developed, industrial context located along its eastern edges. On balance, susceptibility is considered to be medium. In combining the medium value and medium susceptibility, sensitivity to change is assessed as medium.

2.3 Magnitude of Change

10 The zone of theoretical visibility diagrams on ((APP-164) - Volume 6, Annex 2.2: Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) Figures - Figure 2.8a (Substation Bare Ground Zone of Theoretical Visibility (ZTV) with Viewpoints)) and on ((APP-166) - Volume 6, Annex 2.2: Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) Figures – Figure 2.8c (Substation Screened Zone of Theoretical Visibility (ZTV) with Viewpoints)) show that theoretical visibility is relatively extensive across the Nature Reserve.

11 The AyM Onshore Substation would appear in the neighbouring fields to the west of the Nature Reserve in close proximity. As can be seen in the visualisation for LVIA viewpoint 2 ((APP-182) - Volume 6, Annex 2.3: Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) Visualisations - Figure 2.19 (Viewpoint 2: St Asaph, Business Park)), the OnSS maximum parameter would occupy a wide extent of the view to the west of viewpoint 2. It follows therefore that from within the Nature Reserve, the maximum parameter would occupy a similarly wide part of the view west, which would further increase for western parts of the Nature Reserve. As can also be seen in the visualisations for LVIA viewpoint 2 the example OnSS models for GIS and AIS are substantially screened by the successive layers of existing vegetation within and along the Nature Reserve boundaries. Whilst some screening of the built elements would occur due to intervening scrub and small trees along the western Nature Reserve boundary, it is considered that the mitigating potential of this would be less than recorded in the assessment and visualisations for viewpoint 2.

12 The exact location of the AyM Onshore Substation infrastructure within the maximum parameter has not yet been finalised, however, based on the maximum parameter, it is evident that the magnitude of change would be greater within the Nature Reserve than it would be at viewpoint 2 due to the reduced level of existing screening available. The intervening Nature Reserve boundary of scrub and small trees would however limit the visibility of lower parts of the AyM Onshore Substation.

13 Given the lower parts of the AyM Onshore Substation would be largely screened from view, construction activities associated with the onshore export cable corridor (onshore ECC) are not likely to be visible in combination with the construction of the AyM Onshore Substation and the ground works or platform creation would also not likely be visible. Construction lighting would add to the effect of construction activity but would only be partially visible in winter months when working days would extend into hours of darkness. Lighting during construction would be controlled by the Artificial Light Emissions Plan (Document 2.44 of the Applicant's response to Deadline 2) to minimise impacts such as light spill.

14 Taking these factors into account, the magnitude of change is considered to be medium-high during construction. Based on the potentially close proximity of the AyM Onshore Substation, the operational magnitude of change is considered to remain medium-high in year 1.

15 Mitigation woodland planting is proposed for within the landscape immediately to the west of the Nature Reserve and in year 15 it is anticipated that this mitigation planting would provide sufficient screening potential for the built elements of the AyM Onshore Substation to substantially reduce the visual magnitude of change experienced. The existing scrub planting along the edges and between the compartments would also have further matured and so further restricting views towards the AyM Onshore Substation site. Taking all of this into account the magnitude of change in year 15 is considered to reduce to medium-low once planting matures.

2.4 Significance of Effect

16 The effect during construction and year 1 operational is considered to be Moderate and Significant. Whilst the cessation of construction activities would slightly reduce the magnitude of change, the landscape reinstatement would not have any visual mitigation potential in year 1. For these reasons it is considered that a significant effect would still be present in year 1 following completion of construction. In year 15 operational, the effect would reduce to Moderate-Minor and Not Significant once mitigation planting matures.

17 Construction effects are adverse, short term and reversible. Operational effects are adverse long term and reversible.

18 Effects would vary within the Nature Reserve depending on the relative location of receptors and the final design of the AyM Onshore Substation. This assessment considers the worst case proximity of receptors within the Nature Reserve and worst case scale of development within the AyM Onshore Substation maximum parameter.

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