
Asesiad o Ddatganiad Amgylcheddol

Assessment of Environmental Statement

gan A L McCooey BA (Hons) MSc MRTPI

Arolygydd a benodir gan Weinidogion Cymru

Dyddiad: 22/11/2021

by A L McCooey BA (Hons) MSc MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Welsh Ministers

Date: 22/11/2021

Ref: DNS/3261355

Site address: Land off Refinery Road, Hundleton, Pembrokeshire, SA71 5SJ

- The Environmental Statement which is the subject of this assessment has been submitted in relation to the above application for a Development of National Significance (DNS) in accordance with the Town and Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) (Wales) Regulations 2017.
 - The application is made by Rhoscrowther Wind Farm Limited.
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Introduction

1. An Environmental Statement (ES) was prepared to support a DNS application which has been submitted to Planning and Environment Decisions Wales (PEDW) for determination, following the transfer of responsibility for DNS applications from the Planning Inspectorate to PEDW on 1 October 2021.

Proposed Development

2. The proposed development as described on the application form is the "Construction and operation of three (3) wind turbines with maximum tip height of 135m together with ancillary development comprising substation compound, electricity transformers, control building, new site entrances, access tracks, crane hardstanding, temporary construction compound and associated works. The 3 turbines will have a total installed capacity of 12.9MW".
3. Construction would take place over a 10-month period and the wind farm would then be operational for 35 years. A connection to the national grid is available via the existing on site overhead 132kv line.

Completeness of Environmental Statements

4. The aim of an Environmental Statement (ES) is to provide a systematic and objective account of the significant environmental effects likely to arise from the proposed development, including sufficient information to verify the conclusions and identify the source of the information provided. Regulation 17 and Schedule 4 of the 2017 Regulations specify the information to be included in an ES. My assessment of completeness is based on these requirements.

The Environmental Statement and Description of the reasonable alternatives

5. The ES comprises 3 volumes: Volume 1 – the ES chapters, Volume 2 – Figures and Volume 3 – Appendices and a separate Non-Technical Summary document. The ES comprises 14 chapters as follows: 1. Introduction, 2. Environmental Impact Assessment, 3. Project Description, 4. Planning & Energy Policy Context¹, 5. Landscape, Seascape & Visual Amenity, 6. Socio-economic, 7. Ecology, 8.

¹ Although not forming part of the ES, a Planning Statement outlining relevant planning considerations and a planning balance has also been provided.

Historic Environment, 9. Hydrology & Hydrogeology, 10. Noise, 11. Aviation & Telecommunications, 12. Transport Assessment, 13. Shadow Flicker and 14. Geology & Soils².

6. The ES describes the history of the development proposals on the site at Chapter 2. The site was chosen in 2011 after consideration of the criteria in paragraph 2.12 and securing the support of the landowner. An application was prepared in 2012 – 2013. Various alternative turbine numbers and siting options were considered in order to minimise environmental impacts. A scoping report was submitted to the Local Planning Authority (LPA) and a Scoping Opinion was issued on 22nd November 2013. An application was submitted to the LPA in 2014, the layout for which is shown in para 2.22. The application was refused and an appeal against that refusal was dismissed in 2016. The appeal decision was the subject of a successful legal challenge and a fresh Inquiry was held in 2017. The appeal proposal was by then a DNS development and was refused by the Cabinet Secretary for Energy, Planning and Rural Affairs. The ES that accompanied the application was found to be complete (at the initial application stage and in both appeals).
7. The ES sets out how the proposal was re-designed in 2020 and 2021 in paragraphs 2.25 to 2.33. The Applicant consulted the necessary consultees as prescribed by the Developments of National Significance (Procedure) (Wales) Order 2016. As a result of the comments of Cadw and Natural Resources Wales (NRW), the scheme was reduced from 5 to 3 turbines. Chapter 2 demonstrates that environmental factors have determined the final design and I find the description of the alternatives to be satisfactory.

Description of the Development

8. Chapter 1 provides a summary of the development, the site and the relevant applicant, operator and consultant details. The consultants' qualifications and experience are provided. A full description of the development is provided in Chapter 3 and shown in Figure 1.1. Figures 1.3, 1.4, 1.5 and 1.6 detail the layout, turbine design and ancillary development. A construction programme is included. The Applicant is seeking 50 m flexibility in the turbine micro-siting.
9. The Proposed Development would have an operational lifetime of 35 years from the date of commissioning, after which the above ground infrastructure would be removed and the land reinstated. In general, the description of the development is satisfactory.

Description of the aspects of the environment likely to be significantly affected

10. The ES explains that the initial 2013 scoping response, consultation throughout the initial EIA process and the planning application and appeals process for the previous proposal has informed the subjects that have been technically assessed in this ES. The technical assessments are presented in chapters 5 to 14 of the ES (set out above). Each chapter sets out the existing environment or baseline conditions and sensitive receptors.
11. Baselines were established using a combination of desk based assessments, consultations with relevant stakeholders and surveys. Surveys are up to date, apart from the background noise surveys, which were undertaken in 2013. The reasons for this decision are set out in detail in paragraphs 10.22 to 10.25. In summary, this is considered to be acceptable as the noise levels have not significantly changed in the intervening period. I accept the reasons given. The selection of the subjects to be technically assessed has taken into account the initial 2013 scoping response, consultation throughout the initial EIA process and the planning application and appeals process for the previous proposal. The reasons for the selection of the aspects of the environment that are likely to be significantly affected are explained at paragraphs 2.34 and 2.35 of the ES and I conclude that they are sufficiently described.

² Taken from the chapter titles in the ES rather than in those in Chapter 1 or in the document index

Assessment Methodology

12. Chapter 2 of the ES sets out the over-arching methodology for the technical assessments as: i). Assessment of methodology; ii). Description of baseline conditions in the context of the relevant planning policy and guidance; iii). Prediction of potential effects including cumulative effects; iv). Assessment of effects on the identified relevant receptors; v). Identification of appropriate mitigation measures; vi). Assessment of residual environmental effects after proposed mitigation has been incorporated. Paragraph 2.50 sets out the basis of the cumulative assessment, which includes consideration of other wind farm or renewable energy developments in the area. The consultation reply from NRW raises no particular concern on this issue.
13. Topic specific methodologies comply with recognised relevant standards and guidelines. The individual chapters set out how these methodologies have been followed in the preparation of the ES. I find that the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) methodology is described clearly in the ES.

Description of the likely significant effects of the development on the environment

14. The likely significant effects of the development on the environment have been systematically assessed. Chapter 5 sets out the landscape, seascape and visual impact of the proposed development. The assessment includes consideration of the impact on the Pembrokeshire Coast National Park, local residents and for users of national and local paths.
15. The assessment concludes that significant adverse effects on landscape character and visual amenity would be very limited in extent and would not harm living conditions for residents around the site. Significant effects on the National Park would be limited to a small area (which is already characterised by views of the nearby oil refinery) and therefore the development would not significantly affect the special qualities of the Park.
16. Chapter 7 considers ecology and the impact on habitats and species. The information requested by NRW is stated to have been provided. I note that a CEMP and Habitat Regulations Assessment have been included in the appendices. The likely impacts on protected species have been assessed and where appropriate additional mitigation measures suggested. None of the residual effects are considered to be significant.
17. Chapter 8 assesses the effect of the proposal on heritage assets. The scope of the impact assessment has been guided by the 2017 planning appeal decision, which identified a general consensus on the historic assets that would be affected by a windfarm on the site. The ES therefore concentrates on the effect on those assets. The views of Cadw have been taken into account as noted above.
18. There would be no significant impacts on heritage assets within the site. The effects of the development on the setting of the identified listed buildings, scheduled monuments and the Milford Haven Waterway Landscape of Outstanding Historic Interest are assessed with the aid of additional photomontages from appropriate viewpoints. Cumulative effects are also assessed. The chapter concludes that there would be some adverse effects on two designated heritage assets, but the predicted impact is considered to be not EIA significant.
19. I have considered the remaining technical assessments (EIA of the following topics: noise, transport, shadow flicker, socio-economic issues, hydrology & hydrogeology, geology/soils and impact on aviation/telecommunications) and conclude the impacts have been identified correctly.
20. I conclude that the likely significant effects of the development on the environment are sufficiently described.

Prevention and / or mitigation measures

21. For each technical assessment chapter the ES describes relevant mitigation measures embedded within the design of the development and additional mitigation measures where significant environmental effects are identified.

22. A draft Construction Environmental Management Plan (CEMP) has been provided. This sets out how the environmental impacts of construction activities will be mitigated and controlled. The CEMP will be updated and reviewed as the project progresses in agreement with the Local Planning Authority and Natural Resources Wales (NRW). This approach has been endorsed by NRW.
23. The ES concludes that the identified residual environment effects after the proposed mitigation measures would not be significant. The ES sufficiently describes the mitigation measures that have been identified to address significant impacts on the environment.

Indication of any difficulties in compiling the required information

24. The general assumptions made and limitations identified have been set out in Chapter 2. For example, these relate to the dynamic nature of the baseline information and that information provided by third parties, including publicly available information and databases is correct at the time of publication. The assumptions and difficulties are set out in each technical assessment chapter. Examples include: the methodology sets out limitations on the visualisations used in chapter 5. The ES assumes that the necessary conditions to control the identified mitigation measures will be attached to any planning permission. The assumptions made in light of these difficulties are clearly set out in the ES.

Provision of a Non-Technical Summary

25. A non-technical summary has been provided which includes the information provided under Regulation 17 and paragraphs 1 to 8 of Schedule 4 of the 2017 EIA Regulations. The non-technical summary is sufficient.

Overall Conclusions

26. I conclude that the Environmental Statement submitted by Rhoscrowther Wind Farm Limited dated October 2021 should be confirmed as containing the level of information identified in Regulation 17 and Schedule 4 of the 2017 EIA Regulations and being complete for the purposes of those Regulations.

A L McCooey

Inspector