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7 October 2024

Dear Peter,

**Powys County Council – Replacement Local Development Plan (LDP) Preferred Strategy
Consultation: Welsh Government Response**

Thank you for consulting the Welsh Government on the Powys County Council Replacement Local Development Plan (LDP) – Preferred Strategy. It is essential the authority is covered by an up-to-date LDP to give certainty to local communities and businesses and provide a robust basis for decision making.

Without prejudice to the Minister's powers, the Welsh Government is committed to assisting Local Planning Authorities (LPAs) minimise the risk of submitting unsound plans by making comments at the earliest stages of plan preparation. The Welsh Government looks for clear evidence that the plan is in 'general conformity' with Future Wales: The National Development Framework, aligns with Planning Policy Wales (PPW) and the tests of soundness, as set out in the LDP Manual.

National planning policies are set out in Planning Policy Wales (PPW) Edition 12 and seek to deliver high quality, sustainable places through a place-making approach (the LDP should ensure it considers any further iterations of PPW prior to the examination). The implementation of the core policy areas in PPW, such as adopting a sustainable spatial strategy, appropriate housing and economic growth levels, infrastructure delivery and place-making, are articulated in more detail in the LDP Manual (Edition 3). **We expect the core elements of the Manual, in particular Chapter 5 and the 'De-risking Checklist(s)' to be followed. Failure to comply with these key requirements may result in unnecessary delays later in the plan making process.** The development planning system in Wales is evidence-led and demonstrating how a plan is shaped by the evidence is a key requirement of the LDP examination.

After considering the key issues and policies in Future Wales, the Welsh Government is of the opinion that the Preferred Strategy is in general conformity with Future Wales: The National Development Framework. Specific comments are set out in the Statement of General Conformity (Annex 1). **Annex 2 also highlights a range of issues that need to be addressed for the plan to align with PPW and the DPM.** Collectively, our comments highlight a range of issues that need to be addressed for the plan to be considered 'sound' as follows:

Annex 1 – General Conformity with Future Wales

- Regional Collaboration - Further clarity required

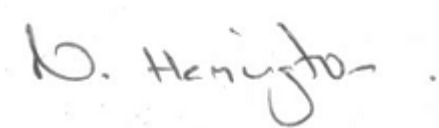
Annex 2 – Core matters that need to be addressed (PPW and the DPM)

- Maximising Affordable Housing Provision
- Delivery & Implementation – General
- Gypsy and Travellers
- Minerals
- Best and Most Versatile Agricultural Land (BMV)

I would urge you to seek your own legal advice to ensure you have met all the procedural requirements, including the Sustainability Appraisal (SA), Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and Habitats Regulation Assessment (HRA), as responsibility for these matters' rests with your authority. A requirement to undertake a Health Impact Assessment (HIA) arising from the Public Health (Wales) Act 2017, if appropriate, should be carried out to assess the likely effect of the proposed development plan on health, mental well-being, and inequality.

My colleagues and I look forward to meeting you and the team to discuss matters arising from this response.

Yours sincerely,



Neil Hemington
Chief Planner Welsh Government

For matters relating to general conformity with Future Wales and planning policy please contact: PlanningPolicy@gov.wales / For matters relating to Local Development Plan procedures and compliance with the Development Plans Manual please contact: mark.newey@gov.wales and candice.coombs001@gov.wales

Annex 1 - Statement of General Conformity

The Welsh Government is of the opinion that the Powys County Council Replacement Local Development Plan (2022-2037) Preferred Strategy is in general conformity with the National Development Framework: Future Wales, as set out in paragraphs 2.16 – 2.18 of the Development Plans Manual (Edition 3).

This conformity statement is based upon the evidence currently available. Welsh Government reserves its formal position until the full suite of policies, proposals and finalised evidence base is available to scrutinise at Deposit Stage. The Welsh Government supports the Mid Wales Growth Deal and Growing Mid Wales Partnership, but it is currently unclear how the wider region, particularly Ceredigion and adjoining Local Authorities have been involved in shaping the scale and spatial choices made in the plan. Further evidence is required to demonstrate how regional collaboration has influenced the scale of growth in Powys and the relationship to all adjoining authorities, including Ceredigion County Council and Brecon Beacons NPA.

Reasons

Future Wales places emphasis on the development of Regional Growth Areas in a sustainable manner. Growth areas must be sustainably planned, reduce the need to travel by car, encourage walking and cycling (active travel), maximise public transport usage and incorporate green infrastructure. Growth areas must embed these principles within a wider regional consensus, focussing on the opportunities they bring to promote social and economic benefits across a broader geographical area. The Welsh Government supports sustainable growth in Regional Growth Areas to respond to the climate change and biodiversity emergencies and make the best use of our resources.

Policy 1 and Policy 25 of Future Wales states that the regional growth areas centred around Builth Wells/Llandrindod Wells and Newtown/Welshpool will be the main focus for growth and investment in the region, strategic diagram (p129). The Powys replacement Local Development Plan (LDP) requires further evidence to clarify/demonstrate how the wider region, including the adjoining authorities of Ceredigion and Brecon Beacons NPA have helped to influence and shape growth levels in the replacement plan.

Annex 2 explains our comments in respect of the scale and location of growth. On balance, (and subject to the comments in Annex 2), the Welsh Government considers that the Preferred Strategy, including the scale and distribution of growth, is in general conformity with key policies in Future Wales namely (not exhaustive):

Policy 1: Where will Wales grow

Policy 2: Shaping Urban Growth and Regeneration – Strategic Placemaking

Policy 6: Town Centre First

Policy 18: Renewable and Low Carbon Energy Developments of National Significance

Policy 25: Regional Growth Areas – Mid Wales

Policy 26: Growing the Mid Wales Economy

Policy 27: Movement in Mid Wales

Regional Collaboration – Further clarity and justification: The Welsh Government supports the Mid Wales Growth Deal and Growing Mid Wales Partnership. Whilst these two opportunities focus on increasing economic prosperity through joint working, **it is currently unclear how the wider region, particularly Ceredigion and adjoining Local Authorities have been involved in shaping and agreeing the scale and spatial choices made and the consequences of any decisions taken by Powys for other plans in the region and future SDP.**

Moving forward to Deposit, further work will be required to understand how the Preferred Strategy has been developed within the wider regional context as **Future Wales brings a new perspective that all LDPs have to embrace on how each plan sits within the region as a whole and the relationship to other LDPs, in essence, a strategic approach to cross boundary relationships in advance of the formal commencement of an SDP.**

Annex 2 – Core matters that need to be addressed (PPW and the DPM)

Spatial Strategy - Location of Growth

The Council has tested 4 spatial options:

- Option 1 – Continuation of the adopted LDP growth strategy
- Option 2 – Affordable Housing led Growth
- Option 3 – Population Apportionment (Dispersed Growth)
- Option 4 – Regional Growth Area led (Focused Growth)

The Council has chosen a variation on Option 4: Regional Growth Area led (Focused Growth) for its Preferred Strategy. The Regional Growth Area Spatial Option is a focussed growth spatial option that directs the majority of growth to the two Regional Growth Areas, approximately Builth Wells north to Rhayader, the second being Llanidloes north-east to Welshpool. This strategy is supported by several local growth areas, all of which are based on a settlement analysis looking at services, functionality and linkages to other settlements

The Council have supported this approach by separating the 162 settlements into 6 Tiers of hierarchy, again based on a functional analysis. There are thorough background papers to support these conclusions, although it will be for the Council to justify the rankings. Strong influences on the conclusions were connectivity linkages, i.e. the Cambrian railway line and Welshpool to Machynlleth. Furthermore, bus connectivity, active travel isochrones (TfW derived data) and functional links were also considered. Lower levels of growth are enabled in other parts of the Plan area, in accordance with the sustainable settlement hierarchy, local aspirations and identified needs.

The analysis set out in the Spatial Options background paper considered this as the best option to meet the needs of the Plan area, whilst providing sufficient flexibility to avoid constrained areas and address any changing needs up to 2037. It is the option that best aligns with Future Wales, PPW, Llwybr Newydd, and reflects stakeholder feedback. It recognises the plan area's role in the Mid Wales region and would enable the delivery of the Vision and Objectives.

However, to meet the requirements of PPW Paragraph 3.58 and 3.59 and Policy 9 of Future Wales, BMVL should be taken into account at the earliest point in the process and throughout. BMV policy application should be sufficiently evidenced and justified in the plan, sustainability appraisal, spatial strategy and site selection process. It is expected plans should clearly demonstrate the evidence sources used, the weight given to BMV land, and how BMV policy has been applied in the spatial strategy and site selection process. **This is currently lacking sufficient evidence and will require further technical work.**

The strategy encompasses the Council's largest and most sustainable settlements in the regional growth areas and the Council considers that focussing development here will reduce the need to travel and will co-locate housing with employment opportunities, services, and community facilities. It is seeking to minimise private car use whilst maximising public transport and active travel. This is particularly significant noting the County's large geographical area and often dispersed population.

The Welsh Government supports the spatial strategy, which accords with Planning Policy Wales (PPW) and is in general conformity with Future Wales, subject to further BMV evidence. A specific topic paper demonstrating how the policy has been considered, evidenced and delivered by the plan is required.

Spatial Strategy - Primary Settlements

The Council have undertaken a settlement analysis of 162 settlements, concluding on 6 Tiers, based on role/function and services and facilities. The 6 Tiers comprise:

Tier 1: Newtown, Knighton, Welshpool, Ystradgynlais area, Llandrindod Wells, Machynlleth, Built Wells and Llanelwedd. These are the larger towns in the plan area and are considered to be the most sustainable places for growth. They provide a wide range of services, bus / train services, active travel routes and electric vehicle charging facilities. It is estimated that the seven Tier 1 settlements will accommodate approximately 40% of growth.

Tier 2: These offer a narrower range of services and facilities compared to Tier 1 settlements but are important service hubs for their immediate and surrounding communities. They benefit from bus services and host a range of facilities which residents can access via active travel. It is estimated that the ten Tier 2 settlements will accommodate approximately 15% of growth.

Tier 3: These have more limited services and employment opportunities which can meet some needs of residents, but residents are likely to travel to a higher tier settlement to access some services such as supermarkets, high schools and health care provision. Tier 3 settlements in a recognised Regional Growth Area Cluster or Local Cluster have available sustainable transport choices for accessing such services. Where there are capacity constraints in Tier 1 and Tier 2 settlements, the Tier 3 settlements located within a Cluster are considered as suitable places to accommodate development. It is estimated that the 41 Tier 3 settlements will accommodate approximately 25% of growth.

Tier 4: These are smaller in size and host less services than Tier 3 settlements. However, many are located in close proximity, often in walking or cycling distance, to a Tier 1 settlement. Where the Tier 4 settlement is located in a Regional Growth Area Cluster or Local Cluster these close connections are well placed to accommodate development that cannot be provided within a Tier 1 or 2 settlement due to constraints and capacity issues. It is estimated that the 18 Tier 4 settlements will accommodate approximately 5% of growth.

Tier 5: No development boundaries are identified and there are no allocations for development within this tier. They have an important role in rural areas and are small in size with fewer services than settlements in higher tiers. Development in these settlements will be small-scale to meet local needs, with an emphasis on affordable housing and creating opportunities to retain the working age population. It is estimated that the 63 Tier 5 settlements will accommodate approximately 5% of growth.

Tier 6: No development boundaries are identified and there are no allocations for development within this tier, proposals for development will need to meet the exceptions policies as set out in national or local policy. Open market housing development will not be permitted. Single affordable homes to meet local need will be permitted on suitable sites where integrated into the settlement.

Tiers 1 to 3 settlements reside primarily in the regional and local growth areas, delivering approximately 80% of the plans housing growth. Recognising the primarily rural nature of the County, focussing growth in/adjoining the most sustainable settlements, maximising public transport and delivering accessibility to the majority of the population, aligns with PPW and Future Wales.

The Welsh Government supports this approach in principle, although the precise definitions of settlements and Tiers designated is for the Council to justify.

However, **it is not clear how BMV agricultural land policy has been considered, nor the evidence base used in the appraisal of the growth and spatial options and selection of the**

BMV needs to be considered at the earliest opportunity in the plan development. Evidence demonstrating the considerable weight given to protecting this finite resource, including how BMV policy is considered and addressed for each option and in the determination of the preferred option. The Predictive Agricultural Land Classification (ALC) Map 2^[1] should be used in the first instance to determine the presence of BMV land and survey evidence^[2] is also available. If BMV land is predicted on site a survey should be undertaken to confirm the grading. If confirmed BMV is on sites to be taken forward for the housing supply, then over-riding need for developing BMV land must be demonstrated.

The Level of Growth - Homes and Jobs

The Preferred Strategy (Policy SP1) makes provision for 4,810 homes to deliver a housing requirement of 3,975 new homes (265 p/a) over the plan period 2022-2037, of which 1,036 homes will be affordable. The flexibility allowance proposed by the Council is 21% (previously 24% in the adopted LDP). The delivery of new jobs is for up to 2,295 new jobs over the plan period. To note the adopted plan has a requirement of 4,500 units and a provision of 5,588. The replacement plan is a reduction of 525 (approx. 11.5%).

Not every site with planning permission is developed or developed in full, and as a result not all dwellings permitted become new housing completions. To account for this a 44% non-delivery allowance has been applied to Row C, with the results presented in Row D. The 44% is based on the take up rate of dwellings on Housing Commitments included in the Adopted LDP (2011-2026). In accordance with the calculation used to determine the windfall allowance large site windfalls have been excluded from the first two years of the projected supply calculations to prevent double counting. **Both align with the Development Plans Manual (Edition 3).**

Homes: The 2018 WG Principal projections are the latest projections for this Preferred Strategy. **Any future population and household projections based on the latest 2021 Census will need to be considered by the Council if they are published before the plan is examined.** The 2018 principal projection would result in a requirement of 73 units p/a or 1,095 units over the plan period (using a 10% vacancy rate). The level of housing growth proposed in the plan is around +2,865 units above the WG 2018 principal projection. However, it is based on an average annual build rate of 264 dwellings over the ten-year period 2012/2013 to 2022/2023.

The demographic evidence (February 2023 Edge Analytics) tested 12 growth scenarios comprising: demographic-led, dwelling-led, and employment-led scenarios. The preferred housing requirement is based on a 10-year dwelling-led scenario (265 dpa) that would result in a population growth of 5.7% over the plan period. The Council considers that this level of housing growth is deliverable delivering a forecast increase of 2,295 jobs, rather than a loss of 510. Moreover, the scale of growth is considered by the Council to be compatible with Future Wales and the role the authority plays within the wider Mid Wales, specifically the Regional Growth Areas set out in Future Wales and the ambition of the Mid Wales Growth Deal.

One of the identified Replacement LDP key issues (Key Issue 5: Population - responding to demographic needs and challenges) that the Replacement LDP is seeking to address is that Powys has an increasing ageing population and faces the issue of an unbalanced population between an older and younger Demographic. The increasing retired, non-working population relative to the working age population is a challenge facing Powys, recognised in both the Powys Well-being Plan and the Corporate Plan. To support more age-balanced communities, the Replacement LDP needs to create jobs, homes and opportunities to retain and attract more of the working age population. The Development Plans Manual requires that "LPAs should not consider employment forecasts in isolation, but the relationship between economic and demographic/population projections.

[1] https://datamap.gov.wales/layers/inspire-wg:wg_predictive_alc2

[2] https://datamap.gov.wales/layers/inspire-wg:Post_1988_ALC_Wales_Surveys

Demographic and population projections are a key consideration in understanding the potential of a future population to accommodate economic Growth Options (and vice versa)".

The Welsh Government does not object to the level of housing proposed in the plan but demonstrating delivery of the more generic small-scale sites will be essential moving forward to Deposit stage as required by Planning Policy Wales, Future Wales, and the Development Plan Manual.

However, in order to assess the impact on BMV the plan should provide detail of the number of sites on predicted BMV using the ALC Predictive Map 2. If BMV land is predicted on site a survey should be undertaken to confirm the grading. If confirmed BMV is on sites to be taken forward for the housing supply, then over-riding need for developing BMV land must be demonstrated.

Jobs: The Council's 10-year dwelling-led growth option results in a requirement for 2,295 new jobs (153 p/a) over the plan period. This equates to a total of 40ha over the plan period.

The Replacement LDP includes for 40 hectares of Class B employment land, with 8.16 hectares in the committed supply and a further 31.84 hectares provided for on new employment allocations. Alongside other Replacement LDP policies supporting the foundational and rural economy, the 40 hectares of employment land will serve an increase of 2,295 people into the labour force

Due to the estimated reduction in the size of the labour force and the ageing population profile, the WG-2018 scenario suggests a reduction in the level of employment that could be supported, at -34 per year. The WG-2018-Zero Migration scenario illustrates the impact of natural change upon population growth in isolation and shows that without incoming migration there would be a significant decline in the size of the labour force. The level of employment growth proposed 40ha over the plan period is below the target in the currently adopted plan 45ha. On this basis, **the Welsh Government has no significant concerns on the level of job growth/land proposed in the plan.**

For sites over the recommended need and involving BMV a site survey as per published guidance^[4], justification should be provided in the plan as to how PPW paragraph 3.58 and 3.59 is addressed and how this is considered within the spatial options.

In summary, (and subject to the above clarification - BMV), the Welsh Government has no significant concerns with the level of homes and jobs proposed in the plan, which is in general conformity with Future Wales.

Affordable Housing Provision

The LHMA (2024) identifies that for the period 2022-2037, there is a need for 1,036 new affordable homes, 69 homes per annum. This comprises:

- 700 units of social rented accommodation.
- 336 units of intermediate rented housing.

The Local Housing Market Assessment (LHMA) adopts the 13 Localities approach currently used by Powys County Council as Housing Market Areas. It calculates affordable housing need over the replacement plan period using the 'policy neutral' Welsh Government 2018 Principal Projection and the preferred growth option (10 year build rate). The calculation of affordable housing need projected against a 10-year dwelling-led scenario results in a requirement for 1,036 affordable homes over the plan period (69 p/a) with a tenure split of 70% social rent and 30% intermediate.

The plan (Policy SP5) identifies a target of delivering a optimise the delivery of 1,036 affordable homes Detailed policies and proposals will be provided in the Deposit Plan setting out thresholds,

^[4] <https://www.gov.wales/agricultural-land-classification-predictive-map-guidance>

targets and site allocations and will be based on the outcome of the emerging evidence on development viability work. To contribute to the Affordable Homes target, affordable housing led sites will be included within the Replacement LDP where needed. Affordable housing led sites are defined as those where at least 50% of homes on a site are affordable.

On this basis, the Welsh Government reserves the right to comment in further detail at the deposit stage.

Affordable Housing Led Sites - To deliver additional affordable housing above which market led housing can provide, the authority proposes (in Policy SP5) to permit small scale affordable housing-led developments that provide a minimum of 50% affordable housing on sites (there is currently no further criteria on this point, i.e. scale of sites). **The principle of this approach is supported.** These sites must be in addition to the market housing led requirement and identified in the LDP. This policy approach is justified by the high level of affordable housing need evidence by the LHMA and must be accompanied by additional control over the land by the local planning authority to ensure effective delivery. Evidence should include ownership of the land, a binding legal agreement where the land is in private ownership or a resolution of the council to use compulsory purchase powers. At present the plan is unclear where sites will be located within or on the edge of settlement boundaries. In addition, the scale and location of these sites is unclear, no spatial locations or dwelling numbers are attributed to them.

Affordable housing led sites that have a market element to them must be located within a settlement boundary in order to comply with the requirements in TAN 2. Only 100% affordable housing exception sites can be located outside a settlement boundary where they comply with PPW/TAN and any threshold/policy requirements set in the development plan. **The approach to affordable housing led developments, their scale and location requires clarification and ensure compliance with national policy. The plan should make a stronger emphasis on delivering affordable housing led sites.**

Employment Land

The Council's strategic policy SP7 identifies a requirement for 40ha of employment land, based on an Employment Needs Assessment (2024) 8.16 hectares being in the committed supply and 32 hectares of new employment sites. The Demographic Evidence Report forecast that the size of the labour force could increase by 153 people per year, 2,295 for the period 2022–2037, based on the preferred growth strategy. The provision of 40 hectares of employment land for B-Class industries will support some of this increase, although growth will occur in other sectors. On this basis, **the Welsh Government does not object to the provision of employment land in the plan.**

The availability of a portfolio of modern employment sites and premises is probably one of the key constraints frequently raised by the businesses within Powys. The availability of commercial sites and premises aligned to regional strengths has been outlined as a key priority within the Mid Wales Regional Economic Framework. It is widely acknowledged that a lack of good quality employment sites and premises is a constraint on economic development and investment. A lack of private investment and availability of suitable commercial property across the region is a critical draw-back to achieving long-term growth ambitions. There is by now a lack of available land to support commercial development across Powys, being most acute within key settlements, particularly along the Severn Valley where most sites have by now been largely built out and where demand is high. This is constraining the ability to respond to business need and often puts the area at a disadvantage in comparison with neighbouring strategic employment sites across the border into Shropshire which are now being actively developed. The replacement Powys LDP allows for new commercial sites to be promoted and brought into the plan to facilitate future growth via new allocations.

Delivery and Implementation

In line with key requirements in Planning Policy Wales, the Development Plans Manual (Chapter 5) also contains guidance on the requirements in respect of the delivery and implementation of plans. The Deposit Plan should set out site-specific details for significant sites for the plan that include general phasing timescales, key infrastructure requirements, placemaking principles (including concept / schematic masterplans), constraints, and developer requirements, where appropriate.

The Council will also need to demonstrate that these significant sites and all other housing components are deliverable through a housing trajectory prepared by the Council and Housing Stakeholder Group. Statements of Common Ground for significant allocations, especially those that have 'rolled over' from the adopted plan, would be advantageous to demonstrate the sites are deliverable in the timescales set out.

The Deposit plan will need to be supported by a high-level affordable housing study and site-specific viability appraisals for significant sites, where appropriate. All viability work and must be prepared in conjunction with the Viability Steering Group and site-specific promoters taking into account relevant infrastructure requirements.

Gypsy and Travellers

The Powys Replacement LDP Position Statement: Gypsy & Traveller Accommodation Needs (July 2024) established an unmet short-term need in the Powys LDP area as follows:

- 12 new pitches related to Leighton Arches, Welshpool (a rise of 2 pitches from the GTAA).
- 0 new pitches related to Machynlleth.

Based on the corroborated figures the Council has developed an Action Plan (Section 8) to provide 12 new pitches for the Welshpool community. Given the physical site constraints associated with the public site at Leighton Arches, the identified need will need to be met at a new site.

The Longer-Term Need for Powys is an additional 6 pitches by 2037. The Welsh Government is of the view that the total number of pitches should be met within the plan period.

By Deposit stage, the authority must meet its statutory duty and comply with requirements in Planning Policy Wales (4.2.35), Circular 005/2018 (paragraph 35) and the Development Plans Manual (5.80-5.85) to allocate sufficient and deliverable sites in the plan for unmet gypsy and traveller need. The Council will also need to ensure that any sites are supported by a transparent and robust site selection process that aligns with the requirements of Circular 005/2018 and any relevant guidance. The views of the relevant statutory bodies must also be agreed before Deposit stage with no outstanding objections to the delivery of the sites.

Renewable Energy

Future Wales identifies Pre-Assessed Areas for Wind Energy where the Welsh Government has already modelled the likely impact on the landscape and has found them to be capable of accommodating development in an acceptable way. There is a presumption in favour of large-scale wind energy development (including repowering) in these areas, subject to the criteria in policy 18. Where those developments are >10Mw they will be considered by Ministers in accordance with the policies in Future Wales. **The pre-assessed areas (3, 4 & 5) should be reflected in the plan via policy SP25.**

Minerals

The South Wales Regional Technical Statement (RTS 2nd Review 2020) identifies a nil apportionment for land-won sand and gravel provision in the Powys. As there is a surplus of crushed rock reserves and a lack of sand and gravel production in Powys, no specific allocations are required in the replacement plan. At Deposit the plan should be supported by a Statement of

Sub-Regional Collaboration with adjoining authorities in the Mid Wales sub-region to explain how any shortfall will be met across the region, particularly for crushed rock.

BMV Agricultural Land

The Welsh Government has not been able to consider how the evidence to the Preferred Strategy in respect of Best and Most Versatile (BMV) agricultural land and how this has impacted on sites, or the scale of growth, as no sites are identified nor is there a background paper on BMV land. **The Council need to resolve this position by the deposit stage, in line with PPW.** In addition:

Renewable Energy – Strategic Policy SP25 – It is unclear how the plan policy for renewable energy projects and search areas addresses BMV agricultural land policy as well as high carbon soils (e.g. Peatlands).^[2] **It is therefore unclear how the plan conforms with Policies 9 and 17 of Future Wales and PPW in this respect which needs addressing.**

Green infrastructure assessment – Peatlands are considered within Strategic Policy – Natural Environment (Section 5.1). The policy refers to adverse impacts on the ‘quality’ of peat. PPW does not consider peat ‘quality’, but that considerable weight should be given to protection of the peat resource *in-situ* (PPW para 6.4.34) and that development on irreplaceable peatland habitats would only be permitted in wholly exceptional circumstances and should be avoided (PPW 6.4.15, 1a/1b).

ISA and Evidence Base

BMV agricultural land policy is partly considered under SP19 – Natural Environment and SP22 – Protecting Strategic Resources. It is unclear how the policies have been addressed in the ISA or the evidence used for the appraisal. **There is no evidence to demonstrate how BMV policy has been considered within the spatial strategy assessment, site selection process or how the choices made in the plan impact the BMV resource over the plan period.**

It is not clear that the Authority is using the most up to date evidence available or how the evidence has been used in considering site selection. ISA Topic: Land Use, Soils & Geology Table D-7 identifies 95% of the Powys area as agricultural land Grade 4 or 5. While the ‘Agricultural Land Classification System of England and Wales is referenced, it is not clear if the ALC Predictive Map (Version 2 2019) has been used and how the BMV resource is affected by the plan. The area of Grade 4 & 5 agricultural land also differs from Welsh Government published statistics from the Predictive Map (2019)^[3], that calculate 51.6% of Powys at ALC Grade 4 & 5, and BMV Grades 1, 2 & 3a representing 9.4% of agricultural land. It is unclear how peat soils and peatland habitats have been addressed in the ISA or the evidence used for the appraisal.

Welsh Language

Assessing the impacts on issues such as the Welsh language, should be fully aligned with the development of the plan/strategy early in the plan making process. WG note that further policies will be include in the deposit plan and reserve the right to comment more fully at a later stage. I note that the ISA does not consider the impact economic development would have on the language. The economy is a significant factor to the sustainability of many Welsh-speaking communities and therefore the economy and in particular the growth area should be acknowledged as a positive factor.

The RLDP should also be in tangent with the Powys Welsh in Education Strategic Plan recognising the provision of adequate Welsh language education / Welsh-medium education in the plan’s area.

We would advise the authority to make contract with the local Welsh Language Initiative for further help and support.

^[3] <https://www.gov.wales/agricultural-land-quality-statistics-planning-authorities-2020>