RECOMMENDATION : REFUSE

REFERENCE: **P/14/543/FUL**

APPLICANT: MARCOL AFAN ENERGY
C/O MR ROBERT CURRIE INDUSTRIAL SECURITIES 10 UPPER BERKELEY STREET LONDON

LOCATION: **LAND NORTH BRYNHEULOG CAERAU PARK MAESTEG BRIDGEND**

PROPOSAL: 5.1MW SOLAR ARRAY WITH INVERTER STATIONS,SWITCHGEAR CABINS,FENCING,CCTV & ACCESS

RECEIVED: 8th August 2014

SITE INSPECTED: 15th August 2014

APPLICATION/SITE DESCRIPTION

The application seeks consent for a solar array with inverter stations, switches gear, cabins, fencing, CCTV and associated access on land north of Brynheulog, Caerau Park, Maesteg.

The application site is located to the north of Bryn Heulog residential estate in Caerau and is bordered to the east by the A4063 (Cymmer Road) which connects the Llynfi and Afan valleys. The site lies on the upper parts of a south-facing hillside close to the head of the Llynfi valley between 250 AOD and 340 AOD. The landcover is primarily felled coniferous plantation, following clearance due to Phyopthera ramorum infection (larch die back). Overall, the site comprises of a highly undulating mixture of convex and concave slopes that are open and prominent at the head of the valley, exposed to the south and to a lesser extent to the east and west.

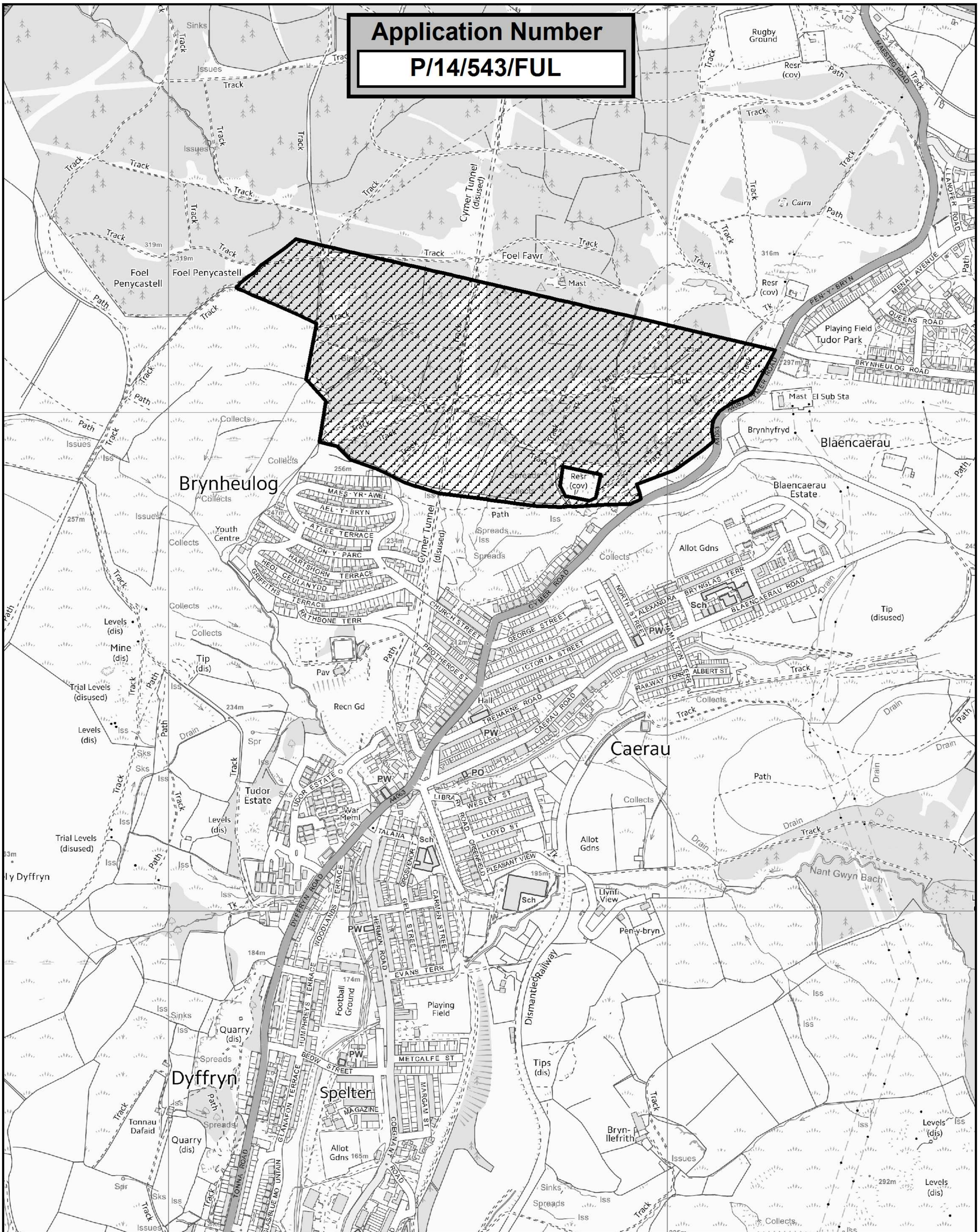
The revised application proposes the construction of a photovoltaic (PV) solar array covering area 10.31 hectares (opposed to the original 30.41 hectares) and includes approximately 26,000 solar panels, inverter stations, Distribution Network Operator (DNO) switchgear cabins, security fencing, CCTV and access. A description of each of these components is provided below.

SOLAR PANELS
The proposed development comprises an array of freestanding solar PV panels with an overall generating capacity of 5.1 MW of renewable energy (reduced from 18.4 MW). The solar panels are designed to absorb sunlight and maximise electricity generation while minimising reflection and glare. The panels will be inclined to 25 degrees with the lowest part of the table approximately 0.6 metres above ground and the highest point 2 metres above ground. The surface of each solar panel will be constructed from toughened glass beneath which is a non-reflective layer, electrical connections, silicon and a backing layer. All of these are set in an aluminium frame.

The solar panels will be mounted on a framework, which will be arranged in rows facing south to maximise sunlight exposure. Each row will vary in length depending on the site topography. The AC current generated by the solar panels will be transferred through suspended cables, which will be located to the rear of the panels. The framework will be mounted on galvanised steel posts secured into the ground by steel piles.

INVERTER STATIONS
In order to convert the direct current (DC) electricity generated by the solar panels to alternating current (AC) suitable for distribution into the local electrical distribution network, 5 inverter

Application Number
P/14/543/FUL



N / W E / S	**Scale 1:10,000**	**Mark Shephard** **Corporate Director-Communities** **Communities Directorate, Bridgend County Borough Council, Civic Offices, Angel Street, Bridgend CF31 4WB.**	**(c) Crown Copyright and database rights (2015) Ordnance Survey (100023405)**	Cyngor Bwrdeistref Sirol Pen-y-bont ar Ogwr BRIDGEND County Borough Council
	Date Issued: 04/06/2015		**(c) Hawlfraint a hawliau cronfa ddata'r Goron (2015) Rhif Trwydded yr Arolwg Ordnans (100023405)**	
	Development-Mapping Tel: 01656 643176	O/Drive/Plandraw/new MI layouts/ Committee DC Plan	**(c) Cities Revealed Aerial Photography copyright, The Geoinformation Group (2009)**	

stations are positioned at strategic locations throughout the solar array. The inverter stations will be 8.6 metres long, 2.6 metres wide and 3.15 metres high. The cabins are typically clad in aluminium in a colour selected to suit the local surroundings.

DNO SWITCHGEAR
Two DNO switchgear cabins containing electrical switchgear for the Local Electricity Distribution Network Operator (DNO) will be required. The cabins will be 6 metres long, 2.55 metres wide and 2.8 metres high. They will be set on a concrete base 6.3m long, 2.7m wide and 0.3m high.

SECURITY FENCE AND CCTV
A perimeter fence will be erected around the outside of the site, set back from the solar panels by approximately 4 metres to avoid shading. The fencing will be 2.5 metres high and each panel section will be set between posts to achieve a width of 2.5 metres. A double leaf gate of the same height with a width of 4 metres will service the entrance to the solar park. The fencing will be a wire meld mesh, typically green in colour.

SECURITY CAMERAS
Infra-red (IR) security cameras will be mounted inside the fenced area on 2.5m high poles. The total height of the poles and security camera fittings will be 2.98 metres. No floodlighting is proposed as part of the scheme.

ACCESS TRACK
Access to the development will be gained from the northeast via an existing access from the A4063 (Cymmer Road). The existing forestry track will be utilised to gain access through the site. Upgrading works will be undertaken where required. The track will be 4.5 metres wide.

GRID CONNECTIONS
The supporting statements indicate that insufficient capacity exists in the network adjacent to the site to connect all of the energy generated by the scheme. As such connections to the grid via the Croeserw substation and Pyle will be required. Western Power has agreed to undertake the connections.

THE CONSTRUCTION PHASE
The construction phase based on the original submission will take approximately 30 weeks to complete and will be carried out Monday to Friday between 08:00 and 19:00 and Saturdays between 08:00 and 13:00. The construction phase will include the preparation of the site, the provision of internal access roads, security fencing, the assembly and erection of panels and the installation of inverters substations and grid connection.

The construction period will include the use of Heavy Goods Vehicles (HGVs) to deliver the scheme equipment and construction material onto the site. Unlike wind farms the construction of a solar array does not require equipment to be delivered by abnormal loads. Further the use of the vehicles will be minimised and deliveries will be managed to reduce the impact of construction traffic. 15.4m articulated vehicles will deliver the majority of the components that are required to construct the scheme. Based on a 30-week construction period and a six-day working week this will equate to, on average, up to three deliveries per day to the site but this may be reduced as a consequence of changes to the submitted scheme.

In addition to the HGV movements identified above there will also be a small number of construction movements associated with smaller vehicles such as those associated with waste management and transporting construction workers and sub-contractors. A maximum of up to 100 construction workers are forecast to be on site during the peak construction period. A temporary car parking area (including spaces for minibuses) will be provided on site within the contractor's compound). Parking during the construction phase will therefore be contained and no parking will be undertaken on the local highway network.

OPERATIONAL ACTIVITIES
Following commissioning, there are anticipated to be around 10 to 20 visits to the site a year to undertake preventative and corrective maintenance. Light van or 4x4 type vehicles would typically facilitate these visits. Whilst the contractor's compound will have been removed, space will remain within the site on the access tracks for such vehicles to turn around to ensure that reversing will not occur onto the highway.

The development will operate for a period of approximately 25 years. Following this the development could be decommissioned and the site returned to its current use.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT
The Council issued a Screening Opinion on 21st March 2014 indicating that the proposed development required an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA). Being a Schedule 2 development, it was considered that the proposed scheme would have a significant effect on the environment by virtue of scale and location.

As such, an Environmental Statement (ES) was submitted with the application. The ES sets out the results of the EIA undertaken to consider the environmental effects of the proposed scheme. It contains chapters on the benefits of solar energy, landscape and visual impact, nature conservation and bio-diversity, a Phase 1 Risk Assessment, Phase 2 Coal Working Risk Assessment, archaeology, hydrology and hydrogeology, access and movement, socio-economic and human impact assessment, services and utilities assessment and a planning policy context assessment. A detailed description of the site and project is provided which is summarised in the first part of this report above.

An ES Non-Technical Summary (NTS) has been produced, giving a summary of each of the technical chapters.

A Design and Access Statement (DAS) also supports the application.

Although not a statutory requirement, the applicant undertook voluntary public consultation on the proposal before submitting the planning application. This has comprised a leaflet drop and exhibition held at the Caerau Bowls Club in Caerau Park on the 7th July 2014. Further consultation with local residents on the implications of the proposal was programmed to take place during the processing of the application.

RELEVANT HISTORY

P/01/1132/OUT APPROVED +conditions 01-10-2002
PART OF GOLF COURSE, FORMING PART OF HOLIDAY PARK SCHEME IN NEIGHBOURING AUTHORITY (WITH ENV STATEMENT)

P/02/19/OBS NO OBJECTION 02-09-2002
ADVENURE HOLIDAY PARK INCL 240 LODGES LEISURE VILLAGE HOTEL GOLF COURSE & RESIDENTIAL

P/08/1122/FUL APPROVED +conditions 14-05-2009
CHANGE OF USE FROM FORESTRY/ AGRICULTURAL TO RECREATIONAL/ LEISURE USES

P/14/120/SOR EIA required 21-03-2014
SCREENING OPINION FOR PROPOSED SOLAR FARM

P/14/298/ESO ESO provided 02-06-2014
SCOPING OPINION FOR PROPOSED SOLAR FARM

PUBLICITY

The application has been advertised in the press and on site.

Neighbours have been notified of the receipt of the application.

The period allowed for response to consultations/publicity expired on 3rd April 2015.

NEGOTIATIONS

Commenced in September 2014 and initially related to consultation responses received. Significant changes to the scale/design of the solar array have followed negotiations and a review of the submitted Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment by the Council's consultant.

CONSULTATION RESPONSES

Town/Community Council Observations
Notified on 20th August 2014
Strongly object to the following proposal for the following reasons:

This in in effect a major industrial development on the mountainside overlooking the Llynfi Valley and not in keeping with the current character of the area in terms of scale and would have an adverse effect on the appearance of the landscape.

The development would severely impact on the visual amenity of the whole valley, as due to its mountainside location it will be visible from the whole community area.

The proposal does not comply with the Local Development Plan - Chapter 2, Page 12 Nos 2.3.43/2.3.44/2.3.47/2.3.49/2.3.51/2.3.53 where it states that the rural surrounds and upland character should be utilised to grow tourism opportunities and promote active lifestyles linking to the Afan Forest Park. The LDP strategy will continue to protect and promote the town centre as an important, retail, service and cultural centre by recognising and building on its on-going physical regeneration

This site has already been identified and has outline planning permission for Leisure Park and facilities.

The Council and community were not adequately consulted on this major development and have not had adequate opportunity to understand the proposals and raise concerns. The Council was not advised of the meeting on this proposal held locally in Caerau; it was not adequately advertised within the community. This development will not only have an impact on the Caerau Community but the wider area due to its location.

The local 106 Agreement states that a development of this size should benefit the local community, and Members feel that the local community would certainly not benefit from this proposal.

There were plans to utilise the former railway tunnel running from Caerau to Cymmer as a link from the cycle-track between the two valleys.

Development on top of this tunnel is prevented to protect the infrastructure of the tunnel.

Footpaths must be maintained and protected at the site.

Councillor P J White
I have no objection to this development.

Destination & Countryside Management
No objections subject to conditions.

Head Of Street Scene (Drainage)
No objection subject to conditions.

Rights Of Way Team
As the layout has incorporated the location of the rights of way there will therefore be no need to process any permanent diversions and the Rights of Way Section therefore have no objection to the application.

The applicants must however be careful of the exact siting of the security fencing to ensure this does not obstruct the exact alignment of the routes as per the definitive map.

In addition whilst the main access into the site is to the north of the development it is noted there is a secondary access to the site to the south from the A4063 which is to be used for service vehicles. This runs in part contiguous with Footpath 6 Maesteg and caution may need to be exercised by vehicles using the route to avoid conflict with members of the public on foot.

Whilst no permanent diversion of the Rights of Way are required for the proposed development a temporary diversion of Footpath 7 Maesteg may be considered necessary in order to facilitate construction/installation of the solar arrays/fencing to protect the safety of the public. If this is considered necessary a formal request must be submitted to the Rights of Way Section at least 6 weeks prior to the anticipated start date and there is a fee payable in connection with the same.

Natural Resources Wales
No objection to the application.

Welsh Water Developer Services
No objection subject to conditions.

Crime Prevention Design S.Wales Police
The Crime Prevention Design Advisor has provided general observations in respect of the development which has been forwarded to the applicant's agent.

Glamorgan Gwent Archaeological Trust
The proposals will require archaeological mitigation.

The supporting information includes an Environmental Statement, of which Chapter D: Archaeology and Cultural Heritage, has been supplied by GGAT Projects; this work meets the current professional standards. It has collated and assessed the known archaeological resource within the study area, and proposed mitigation. Thirty four sites were within the study area, four new sites were identified.

In assessing the impact of the proposals, three sites were recommended for mitigation, which would reduce the impact of the development; the Heol y Moch trackway, which is likely to be of pre-historic origin and remains in use, drystone walls and the quarry. It is also recommended that Heol y Moch should be fenced off during the construction phase.

In addition, the chapter's content explains the nature of the upland area and recommends an upland survey to Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historic Monuments of Wales's methodology should be undertaken prior to the commencement of construction works. Given the known nature of the archaeological resource in the area, with evidence of pre-historic activity, it is also recommended that an archaeological watching brief is undertaken during the groundworks, for example, cable trenching, works to tracks, and construction of any structures.

As such we have no objection to the positive determination of this application, subject to the attachment of a suitable condition requiring the applicant to submit a detailed programme of investigation for the archaeological resource, on any consent granted by your Members.

The Coal Authority
No objection subject to conditions.

Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council
No comments.

REPRESENTATIONS RECEIVED

The Owner And/Or The Occupier, 114 Tudor Estate
I support the proposal.

Chris Brown, 1 North Street
I support the proposal.

V2c, C/O Nigel Draper
Valleys to Coast Housing Association have provided a letter in support of the application which is reproduced in full below:

'Valleys to Coast Housing has a demonstrable and well evidenced commitment to the regeneration of disadvantaged communities in the Llynfi Valley, including the communities of Caerau, Blaencaerau and Nantyffyllon. Accordingly we have invested in the refurbishment, improvement and insulation of our housing stock, and the installed roof mounted solar energy schemes. In light of the renewable energy and socio-economic opportunities associated with the proposed Foel Fawr solar array I write now on the behalf of Valleys to Coast Housing to reconfirm our support for the proposed development and to reiterate our commitment to work with Marcol Afan Energy Ltd following the grant of a planning permission.

The proposed solar array will be located at the head of the Llynfi and Afan valleys and will be adjacent to one of housing estates under the ownership and management of Valleys to Coast Housing. We understand from discussions with Marcol Afan Energy that due to working with Bridgend County Borough Council's Planning Department the proposed scheme is considerably reduced in scale, and now covers a land area of 10.31 ha as opposed to the original area of 30.4lha. We also understand that as a result of the reduction in scale the proposed solar array will now provide 5.0MW of power in lieu of the 18.4MW contained within the original scheme. However, following our discussions we still believe that even in its reduced form there remains a mutual advantage in working with Marcol Afan Energy Ltd to ensure that local disadvantaged communities are able to derive a range of benefits from the development.

Through our recent discussions with Marcol Afan Energy Ltd we have explored a number of options to provide Valleys to Coast Housing and its tenants with a supply of a portion of the renewable energy generated by the solar array at a discount against market price. One option that has been discussed in considerable length is a long-term Power Purchase Agreement. We confirm that Valleys to Coast Housing will work with Afan Energy Ltd to further these opportunities following the grant of a planning permission.

We also confirm that Valleys to Coast will work with Marcol Afan Energy Ltd to facilitate the delivery of economic opportunities associated with the proposed development, which were comprehensively identified in the material included in the planning application. In addition to the supply of renewable energy, Valleys to Coast Housing understand that this will include the offer of employment opportunities associated with the construction and operation of the solar array.

Finally we confirm that Valleys to Coast Housing is already exploring the wider implications of adding critical mass to the development proposed by Marcol Afan Energy Ltd. During the past year Valleys to Coast Housing has increased its commitment to the development of solar array and renewable power generation for the benefit of tenants and residents in Bridgend. This includes significant budget commitments to invest in this area over the next 5 years, as well as the commissioning of a formal investigation into legal structures and modelling of 'special purpose vehicles' to enable us to mobilise renewable power opportunities in the most effective ways. This progress is paralleled by our involvement with OFGEM in their consideration of 'non-traditional business models to support transformative change in energy markets'.
In short, Valleys to Coast Housing is committed to a whole-stock solar array programme as well as exploration of small ground mount solar arrays. On this matter we have been working closely with Western Power to identify grid connection and inclusion of community benefits into these renewable energy schemes.

In light of the above please therefore accept this letter as evidence that Valleys to Coast Housing supports the proposed Foel Fawr Solar array development and further that we will continue to work with Marcol Afan Energy Ltd to maximise opportunities for local communities to benefit from this significant renewable energy project'.

Objections Have Been Received From The Following:, .
A.W.G. and L Reid - 18 Cymmer Road (Speaker);
Mr K Carter - 17 Ael y Bryn (Speaker);
Miss Paula Turner and Mr Geraint Thomas - 20 Ael y Bryn;
Mike Daniels - 11 Lon Y Parc (Speaker);
Roger Williams - 11 Cymmer Road;
E Davies - 18 Dan y Bryn;
R W Davies - 27, George Street;
Philip John - 85, Victoria Street
Betty Jones - 30 Hartshorn Terrace;
Mr Des Williams - 66 Caerau Road;
The owner/occupier 18 Treharne Road;
Stacey Green - 123 Caerau Road;

The following is a summary of the main planning objections that have been received in respect of the application:

1. The original submission would have been approximately three times larger than the Estate obscuring much of the land mass at the end of the Valley and as such, would constitute an eyesore on the landscape of the valley, a massive coal black blot on the visible green countryside, totally out of keeping with the residential nature of the immediate community; re-industrialising valleys; the photomontages do not give an adequate portrayal of the impact involved. Proposal will loom over and dominate the village, producing an environment detrimental to people living there.

2. The approved leisure development would be less visually intrusive than the proposed development.

3. Proposed screening will have only limited benefits to those closest to the site - the applicant's own landscape assessment still indicates no reduction of impact on longer distance views.

4. Development will obstruct existing public rights of way; the development represents a health and safety hazard to the children of the area who are inquisitive and exploratory by nature.

5. Noise pollution - particularly during construction

6. The recent removal of forestation from the site of the proposed Solar Farm left the area in a devastated condition without any recourse to landscaping; tree removal and loss of habitats not justified and was only undertaken to allow development; new planting should take place on site.

7. The investment proposed would be substantive yet the financial resources, professional and technical status and experience of Marcol Afan Energy, the Company having been only formed 4 months ago, is unclear and unsubstantiated. Does the Company have the financial resources, experience and expertise to undertake and deliver such a proposal?

8. The Company's proposal to offer subsidised electrical power, jobs and maintenance contracts to Valleys to Coast suggest the promise of incentives to militate against objections to the Proposal. They are significantly disproportionate, to the severe adverse effect upon the visual environment of the Llynfi Valley and Caerau community.

9. Not all residents in Caerau have been made aware of the development.

10. No investigations have been undertaken in respect of health risks associated with solar arrays.

11. Development will devalue properties in Caerau.

COMMENTS ON REPRESENTATIONS RECEIVED

REPRESENTATIONS FROM MAESTEG TOWN COUNCIL

Under the current planning legislation, the developer is not obliged to undertake pre-application consultation with residents and the respective town/community councils. The Design and Access Statement submitted with the application does however indicate that a community engagement exercise was undertaken and this is detailed in the introduction to this report. Furthermore extensive consultations/publicity has taken place following receipt of this application.

The Ground Condition Survey and Risk Assessment submitted as part of the application indicates that the development will not affect the structural integrity of the Cymmer-Caerau tunnel so should not prejudice the development of any cycle route.

REPRESENTATIONS FROM RESIDENTS

Those objections offered by residents and the town council with regard to conflicts with planning policy, landscape and visual impacts and the adequacies of the proposed mitigation are considered in the next section of this report. The remaining objections are addressed as follows:

1. Reference has been made to the approved leisure development being less intrusive to the proposed solar array. Historical records confirm that permission was granted for a golf course on this application site as part of a larger tourism/recreation facility in Neath Port Talbot. The consent that related to the golf course has long since expired.

2. The Rights of Way Officer has indicated that the proposed layout incorporates the existing rights of way. Any diversion/obstruction would however be dealt with under the Highways Act or a separate section of the Town and Country Planning Act. It would not be reasonable to withhold planning permission on this basis. General access across the land might have been enjoyed by the community and children but this has been at the discretion of the landowner. Should the development proceed, security fencing will be preventing any future, unauthorised access.

3. There is no evidence to indicate that the solar arrays, inverters and other apparatus will generate significant noise. If the Council were minded to approve the scheme a condition would be imposed requiring the submission and agreement of a Construction Method Statement which would include controls over timing of construction, to reasonably safeguard the amenities of residents.

4. In the case of infected larch trees, the only course of action is the felling of the affected trees and, whilst this has changed the appearance of the area, it is understood that such action is required under law. The loss of habitat is also regrettable but necessary in this case. Where re-planting has taken place and other affected areas this has generally been on Welsh Government woodland estates. There is no requirement for private landowners to re-plant.

5. Should permission be granted the Council would require the payment of monies through a Section 106 Obligation to cover the de-commissioning of the solar arrays.

6. The community benefits offered by the developer are beyond those considered as necessary mitigation to enable the development to proceed. Accordingly, they are not considered material to the determination of this planning application. Whilst a local authority can play a role in helping communities to benefit from renewable energy development, such negotiations may run in parallel to the planning application but are kept completely separate.

7. The publicity associated with the application accords with the requirements of the legislation and over 1000 residents have been notified of the receipt of the original application. The re-consultation undertaken in respect of the revised scheme concentrated on those that offered comments on the original application.

8. Welsh Government has not published guidance on the health risks associated with solar farms as evidence suggests that any risk is negligible. It is therefore not material to the consideration of this application.

9. Property devaluation is not material to the determination of this application.

The applicant's agent has prepared a closing statement which explains the changes that the applicant has made to the design and layout of the proposed solar array scheme and identified what effect these changes have had on the capacity of the scheme to deliver socio-economic opportunities to the local area. This statement also addresses the landscape and visual impact of the scheme. A copy of the statement is attached as Appendix A to this report.

APPRAISAL

The application is referred to the Development Control Committee for determination in view of the number of objections received from local residents and the town council.

The applicant has provided a comprehensive assessment of the proposed development

(through the submission of an Environmental Statement (ES)) and it is on the basis of this information, local and national policy, technical guidance (TAN 8), the responses of statutory and other consultees and third party public responses that this proposal is to be considered.

There are a wide range of policy documents relating to renewable and low carbon energy and these include policies at both a UK and Welsh Government level and at a local development plan level. They are all generally consistent in that they support the development of renewable energy, subject to a range of environmental considerations against which any application should be assessed.

The main issues in the consideration of this application are the acceptability of the proposed solar farm having regard to local and national policy, the effect of the proposal on landscape character and visual amenity, the impact on ecology and nature conservation, archaeology, highway/traffic/access issues, the effect on surface and ground water systems and the socio-economic impact of the development.

The likely level of impact and any harm must be balanced against the benefits of the proposal and the contribution it would make to the generation of renewable energy.

LOCAL AND NATIONAL POLICY
Section 38 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires that where the development plan is material to the determination of a planning application 'the determination must be made in accordance with the plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise.'

National Policy in relation to renewable energy developments is contained within Planning Policy Wales (7th edition 2014) (PPW) and Technical Advice Note 8: Renewable Energy (TAN8).

The Welsh Government's aim is to secure an appropriate mix of energy provision for Wales, whilst minimising potential environmental and social impacts. Planning Policy Wales confirms that the UK is subject to the requirements of the European Union Renewable Energy Directive 2009, which includes a UK target of 15% of energy from renewables by 2020. The Welsh Government is committed to playing its part by delivering an energy programme which contributes to reducing carbon emissions as part of the approach to tackling climate change. Planning policy at all levels should facilitate delivery of the ambition set out in Energy Wales, (Energy Wales: A Low Carbon Transition 2012) and UK/EU targets on renewable energy.

PPW aims at para 12.1.4 to promote the generation of energy from renewable (and low carbon) sources at all scales and para 12.8.6 seeks to maximise its benefits to the economy and communities, whilst minimising potential environmental and social impacts. Para 12.10.1 of PPW states in determining applications for renewable and low carbon energy development and associated infrastructure planning authorities should take the following into account:-

* The contribution a proposal will play in meeting identified national, UK and European targets and potential for renewable energy, including the contribution to cutting greenhouse gases;

* The wider environmental, social and economic benefits and opportunities from renewable energy and low carbon development;

* The impact on the national heritage, the coast and the historic environment;

* The need to minimize impacts on local communities, to safeguard quality of life for existing and future generations;

* Ways to avoid, mitigate or compensate identified adverse impacts;

* The impacts of climate change on the location, design, build and operation of renewable and

low carbon energy development. In doing so consider whether measures to adapt to climate change impacts give rise to additional impacts;

* Grid connection issues where renewable (electricity) energy developments are proposed; and

* The capacity of and effects on the transportation network relating to the construction and operation of the proposal

Technical Advice Note 8- Planning for Renewable Energy (TAN 8) states at para 1.6 'As well as developing new sources of renewable energy which are essential to meeting the targets set by energy policy, the Assembly Government is fully committed to promoting energy efficiency and energy conservation. The land use planning system is one of a number of mechanisms which can help deliver improved energy efficiency and local planning authorities are expected to consider matters of energy efficiency when considering planning policy and applications.'

TAN 8 at paragraph 3.15 indicates that, except where the visual impact would be critically damaging to a listed building, ancient monument or conservation area vista, proposals for appropriately designed solar pv systems should be supported.

In addition to PPW and the Technical Advice Notes, the Welsh Government issued "Practice Guidance - Planning Implications of Renewable and Low Carbon Energy" in February 2011. This document updates the advice contained in TAN 8 as well as providing detailed criteria for the assessment of renewable energy schemes. "Energy Wales: A Low Carbon Transition" (March 2012) was also issued by the Welsh Government and outlines aims and objectives as to how Wales can move towards a low carbon economy with specific reference to the planning process and renewable energy schemes.

Other Relevant Policy and Technical Advice Notes are Climate Change Strategy for Wales 2010, 'Planning for Renewable and Low Carbon Energy' - A Toolkit for Planners 2010, TAN5 - Nature Conservation and Planning and TAN 12 - Design.

National Policy is translated at a local level via the Local Development Plan (LDP), which was adopted by the County Borough Council in September 2013.

The LDP Vision will be delivered through four strategic LDP objectives which seek to address the national, regional and local issues facing the County Borough. These four strategic objectives are at the centre of the LDP and form the basis for its policy development. Promoting, conserving and enhancing the natural historic and built environment of the County Borough and contributing towards the energy needs of Wales, with a focus on the promotion of renewable energy are two measures of achieving one of the strategic objectives of protecting and enhancing the environment.

The application site is located in the countryside and should be assessed in the context of Policy ENV1 which strictly controls development except for specific identified purposes. Policy ENV1 (6) identifies utilities infrastructure as an appropriate exception. Paragraphs 4.1.11 and 4.1.12 of the LDP, which expand upon Policy ENV1, make it clear that whilst certain development maybe appropriate in the countryside, the policy forms the starting point for assessment and all proposals will need to satisfy other relevant policies in the LDP.

The LDP will ensure that the County Borough's energy requirements are fully satisfied whilst having the minimum impact on the environment and local communities. Accordingly, Strategic Policy SP8 - Renewable Energy states:

'Development proposals which contribute to meeting national renewable energy and energy efficiency targets will be permitted where it can be demonstrated that there will be no significant adverse impacts on the local environment and communities.'

Development for renewable energy will therefore be encouraged in principle. The location of the development will however need to be balanced against its impact on the environment (including the landscape) and nearby communities.

Policy ENV18 provides a robust basis for assessing renewable energy schemes. It states:

'Proposals for renewable energy developments will be permitted provided that:

(1) In the case of wind farm developments of 25MW or more, the preference will be for them to be located within the boundary of the refined Strategic Search Area;

(2) The availability of identified mineral resources or reserves will not be sterilised;

(3) Appropriate monitoring and investigation can demonstrate that the development will not have any significant impacts on nature conservation;

(4) Appropriate arrangements have been made for the preservation and/or recording of features of local archaeological, architectural or historic interest;

(5) They can be safely accessed to permit regular maintenance without detriment to the environment or the public rights of way network;

(6) They will not detrimentally affect local amenity by reason of noise emission, visual dominance, shadow flicker, reflected light, the emission of smoke, fumes, harmful gases, dust, nor otherwise cause pollution to the local environment;

(7) They will not lead to electromagnetic disturbance to existing transmitting and receiving systems (which includes navigation and emergency services), thereby prejudicing public safety;

(8) Local receptors of heat and energy from the proposal are identified and, where appropriate, are connected to/benefit from the facility; and

(9) Provision has been made for the removal of all infrastructures from and reinstatement of the site following termination of the use.

Relevant criteria are commented upon in turn below:-

Criterion 2 - The application site is located on a sandstone resource which is afforded a level of protection under Policy ENV9 which states:

'Development proposals within mineral safeguarding areas, either permanent or temporary, will need to demonstrate that:

1. If permanent development, the mineral can be extracted prior to the development and/or the mineral is present in such limited quantity or quality to make extraction of no or little value as a finite resource; and

2. In the case of residential development, the scale and location of the development, e.g. limited infill/house extensions, would have no significant impact on the possible working of the resource; and

3. In the case of temporary development, it can be implemented and the site restored within the timescale the mineral is likely to be required'.

The policy accepts that temporary development will be acceptable where the proposal can be implemented and the site restored within the timescales the mineral is likely to be required.

Paragraph 4.3.1 of the LDP identifies that, in 2009, the aggregates reserves for Bridgend was estimated at 40 years. In light of this and other preferable sites for quarrying before this site could be realistically considered, this development is acceptable in the context of Policy ENV9 (3) and criterion 2 of Policy ENV18.

Criteria 3, 4, 5 & 6 - The impact of the development on ecology, archaeology, historic buildings, highways and visual amenities/landscape are fully considered later on in this section of the report.

Criterion 8 - Although the scheme has reduced in scale the applicant's agent maintains that the socio-economic benefits of the scheme remain significant. The 5MW will be capable of supplying power to approximately 1,375 households and offset 2,375 tonnes of carbon emissions each year. The applicant remains committed to working with Valleys to Coast Housing Association to provide the households immediately adjacent to the development site with energy at a discount against market price. This arrangement would still be achieved via a long-term Power Purchase Agreement. Should a contract not be placed with Valleys to Coast Housing Association, a Community Energy Fund Trust will be established by the applicant. In addition to the social benefits the applicant's agent has confirmed that the revised scheme will still deliver employment opportunities during the construction and operational phases. The construction of the original scheme would require 100 construction workers during the height of the works and facilitate a minimum of 20 training placements to local people. The revised scheme is not likely require or deliver this number, but it is anticipated that approximately 60 construction workers will be required on the site during the height of the works and approximately 10 training placements provided. Marcol Afan Energy has engaged with Valleys to Coast Housing to discuss and agree the best way to implement this programme and Valleys to Coast has agreed in principle to help establish the training programme and identify suitable trainees. Marcol Afan Energy again propose to work with Valleys to Coast to unlock these benefits, through the possibility of contracting the Valleys to Coast maintenance team to manage the operational development and security of the completed solar farm development. Members should be mindful that many of the matters discussed above lie outside the planning process.

Criterion 9 - Provision has been made for de-commissioning and this is set out as follows in the Environmental Statement:

The development will operate for a period of approximately 25 years. Following this the development could be decommissioned and the site returned to its current use. The decommissioning process will be similar to construction, although undertaken in reverse order and will include:

* Removal and, where possible, recycling of all PV panels;
* Removal, dismantling and recycling of the steel PV framework supports;
* Removal of security fencing and compounds, including the inverter cabins and DNO switchgear;
* Reinstating disturbed site features;

In light of the above, the applicant has satisfactorily demonstrated the acceptability of the proposal in the context of criteria 8 and 9 of Policy ENV18 of the LDP.

Policy ENV18 of the LDP together with strategic Policy SP8 ensures that consideration of proposal is balanced between the desire to generate increased levels of renewable energy with the need to protect the environment and local communities.

Strategic Policy SP4 of the LDP is also relevant to the proposed development. Policy SP4 states that development which will conserve and, wherever possible, enhance the natural environment of the County Borough will be favoured. Development proposals will not be permitted where they will have an adverse impact upon the integrity of the County Borough's countryside, the

character of its landscape, its biodiversity and habitats or the quality of its natural resource including water, air and soil.

The impact of the development on landscape is further discussed in the Landscape and Visual amenity section of this Appraisal.

To the south and east of the site is the Foel Dyffryn Special Landscape Area (SLA) as defined by Policy ENV3 (7) of the LDP. The proposal is also considered in the context of Policy SP2 of the LDP which considers general issues associated with amenity and design. Many of the issues which are the subject of Policy SP2 are also considered in the context of Policy ENV18 and of significant importance, in respect of the proposed Solar Park, is criterion 2 of Policy SP2, which states that all development should have:

'A design of the highest quality possible, whilst respecting and enhancing local character and distinctiveness and landscape character'

The County Borough has been subject to a Landscape Character Assessment, the results of which have been used to inform a landscape sensitivity assessment which considers the impact of different scales of wind and solar developments in the landscape of the County Borough titled 'Renewables in the Landscape: DRAFT Supplementary Planning Guidance' (SPG). However, this document is still in draft form and, although it has been subject to formal consultation, only limited weight can be attached to this document in the determination of the application.

2. LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL AMENITY
A Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment prepared by 'The Urbanists' accompanied the planning application and a revised report has been submitted in respect of the modified scheme which, as described in the introduction, proposes a reduction in the size of the solar array, a re-orientation of the PV panels and additional mitigation planting.

The report details the assessment of the potential effects upon the landscape character and visual amenity resulting from the proposed solar array development. In undertaking this updated assessment the emerging 'Renewables in the Landscape SPG has been reviewed. The report considers the wider context, the site and reviews the relevant planning policies. The methodology is clearly stated and follows the Landscape Institute's guidelines. The sensitivity of receptors both in terms of the landscape resource and the visual receptors is evaluated followed by an assessment of the magnitude of the effects that are likely to arise from the development. The significance of impact is determined by combining the significance of the landscape and visual effects with reference to:

* Existing landform, landscape planning context, landscape character and land use;
* Viewpoints from the surrounding area and significant landscape features;
* The sensitivity of landscape and visual receptors;
* The magnitude and significance of landscape and visual effects;

The evaluation of effects is both objective and subjective but is based on the judgements of a Chartered Landscape Architect and this is relevant both in terms of the applicant's submission and assessment undertaken by the Council's consultant.

Based on the revised scheme the landscape effects are summarised as follows:

'There will be temporary adverse effects on the landscape fabric of the site as a result of some localised ground disturbance, temporary site buildings, machinery such as cranes and piling rigs, access tracks etc. The landscape character of the site will change with the construction of the steel frameworks to take the PV panels and the associated metering, transformer, inverter switchgear cabinets and access tracks. Areas where panels are not proposed will be retained as rough grassland. A broadleaved landscape buffer will be provided to the boundaries of the

site, planting blocks of native tree and shrubs.

The landscape sensitivity of the site to the type of development proposed is low and the construction activities would result in a moderate adverse landscape effect and therefore a moderate effect on the Landscape Character with reference to the underlying LANDMAP Aspect Areas within which the site lies.

The landscape within the site has a low to medium capacity to accept change of this type without unacceptable adverse effects on the character of the landscape. However the major magnitude of change resulting from the proposed development would result in a moderate and therefore significant adverse effect on the Landscape Character within the confines of the site. With particular reference to the LANDMAP Visual and Sensory Aspect, the effects will be limited to the extreme northern area of this large mapped aspect area VS473. The remainder of the Aspect Area will be unaffected by the development, and the key qualities will remain. It must however be recognised that one of the key qualities of the development site has already been lost, as a result of the deforestation that has occurred because of Phytophthora ramorum'.

The visual effects are considered with reference to construction, operational and residual effects.

Residential receptors along the southern and southeasten boundaries of the site in the settlements of Brynheulog and Caerau, the consultant's report acknowledges, will experience significant adverse visual effects resulting from the PV solar array development. There will also be significant adverse visual effects from more distant views along Tonna Road, Heol Tywith (opposite Spelter Industrial Estate) and on recreational receptors including local public rights of ways and the Coed Morgannwg Way.

The LVIA describes the strategic landscape framework and design mitigation which includes 10m-20m landscape buffers between the edge of the development and the south, east and western boundaries. This will comprise native broadleaved species with a mixture of blocks of trees, shrubs and edge planting which will provide an immediate buffer to residential properties in close proximity to the southern boundary.

Based on the proposed mitigation, the residual effects of the development have been assessed. In terms of the landscaping, whilst the planting will improve the landscape edge, the development will still have a significant adverse effect on the landscape character of the site. It is indicated that the proposed planting will reduce the significant (moderate) adverse visual effects on residential receptors to minor particularly for those properties in Brynheulog. It is noted that the residual effects have been based on when the planting reaches 4-5m in height which will be some 15 years after the development has been completed. The LVIA does acknowledge that for those residential and recreational receptors, including other properties in Caerau and more distant public rights of way's etc., the mitigation will have less effect - the impact of the development will remain significant.

The Local Authority has limited capacity to properly assess the submitted LVIA and, consequently, the Local Authority commissioned White Consultants to carry out an assessment and to provide 'expert opinion' as to whether the proposed solar array and associated works are likely to have a detrimental impact on visual amenities and the local landscape.

The evaluation of the LVIA assessment of effects considers the development in relation to the emerging 'Renewables in the Landscape' SPG, the effects on Landscape Character, the Visual Effects and the Cumulative Effects. The discussion of the expected effects includes reference to design and mitigation issues, planning policy and offers a final conclusion on the proposal.

In summary, the Council's consultant believes the site reads as part of the slopes of the Llynfi Valley and therefore has to be considered with this area and not the forestry. The susceptibility of

the area to large scale solar PV is considered to be moderately high, the value of the Landscape Character Area (LCA) overall is moderately high. Although the development only affects part of the LCA, by virtue of its size, the scale of change is valued as medium. The site lies on prominent slopes at the northern end of the LCA, inter-visible with the Foel Fawr Special Landscape Area and thus affecting the qualities of the area. The Council's consultant recognises that, whilst the estate at Brynheulog already climbs the valley sides to an extent close to the Special Landscape Area, the proposed development is larger and rises up the hill/valley sides and so would be out of character with the general pattern of development within the Llynfi Valley. Mitigating factors are that it has a broadly coherent layout which avoids the higher slopes and skyline and the more uneven and prominent landform to the east. Planting on the fringes is positive but will have limited screening effect from many viewpoints. The development is still out of character and the effect is adverse as it does not reflect any of the characteristics of the area, with arrays climbing the undeveloped valley sides.

The reporter acknowledges that the value of the site in landscape terms is lower than the Landscape Character Area in which it is located. In part this is caused by its current condition and management but nevertheless, the consultant maintains that the susceptibility of the site itself lies in its steep, prominent and open slopes, its highly undulating landform and high points which are not conducive to accommodating the rigid pattern of solar panel arrays and its role as an important backdrop to Caerau and other nearby communities. The level of effect is therefore significant on the site as the development does not reflect the characteristics of the site, with arrays climbing the undeveloped valley/hill sides.

The susceptibility of the Foel y Dyffryn Special Landscape Area (adjacent to the application site) to change would be similar to the Landscape Character Area and its value would be slightly higher. Effects would also be similar to the effects on the LCA but more intense due to the proximity. The development would therefore significantly affect the Special Landscape Area setting.

Based on the review of the LVIA the Council's consultant is of the opinion that residents in parts of Caerau, Brynheulog and Dyffryn will be significantly adversely affected in the short term with residual effects on Caerau and Dyffryn remaining in the long term. The development would be prominent in views of the hillside which currently acts as a green backcloth to the settlements. The effect will only be mitigated in the longer term by planting for dwellings very close to the development (e.g. at the top edge of Brynheulog) but less so further away as the slopes would rise significantly above the planting height. Users of the PROWs to the south and west and open access land to the south and south east would have open views of the proposed development. The effects from Viewpoints 6, 13 and 14 indicate significant adverse effects.

The Consultant has also commented on the proposal in the context of the emerging supplementary planning guidance - Renewables in the Landscape and suggests that the development fails to address all of the relevant criteria.

As a final note, the consultant concludes:

'Overall, it is considered that the proposed development would still cause significant adverse effects on landscape character and visual receptors. The revised scheme reduces the scale of development and level of effects and improves the design layout compared to the previous highly detractive and insensitive proposal. The degree to which the effect has been minimised is a matter for judgement. The proposal still lies on an intrinsically unsuitable site according to the Renewables SPG criteria.

It is accepted that landscape and visual issues are one factor in the decision making process. It is understood that there are benefits from renewable energy. These factors, combined with other issues, need to be put into the balance to arrive at a planning decision on the acceptability of the proposed development'.

From the above sections of the report there is an apparent difference in the level of impact of the development on the landscape and the visual amenities of the area when reviewing the applicant's Landscape Visual Impact Assessment and the Council's consultant's response. The degree to which any impacts are outweighed by the accepted benefits of generating electricity from a renewable source will be discussed in more detail in the concluding section of this report.

3. ECOLOGY

A comprehensive ecological assessment (Pryce Consultant Ecologists) has been submitted as part of the Environmental Statement which includes a Phase 1 habitat survey, breeding bird survey, bat use assessment, herpetile survey and ecological assessment. The recommendations and opportunities section of the report addresses the areas of blanket bog, dwarf shrub heath and trackside and forest edge habitats and recommends a series of works to manage these areas with bio-diversity interest. It is likely that the natural re-establishment of acid grassland - dwarf-shrub habitat between and under the solar panels, following installation, will allow reptile and amphibian populations to thrive across the site. Where possible attenuation features will incorporate amphibian breeding habitat but it is also proposed that two or three small ponds are constructed specifically to provide new amphibian breeding habitat in suitable locations, their siting to be agreed with the site ecologists.

Following the construction phase, the principal aim will be to allow for the re-colonisation of natural vegetation. A further aim should be to reduce the dominance of Bracken, Bramble and Soft Rush which annual cutting is likely to achieve in the medium to longer terms. It is strongly recommended that site maintenance does not seek to establish a regularly mown, strimmed or grazed agricultural grassland sward.

A series of general recommendations and opportunities are also included in the ecological report and they range from taking all reasonable precautions to avoid damage to any habitat or feature of ecological significance to the construction of new bat and bird-friendly features.

The ecologist has confirmed that all works will only be carried out during the appropriate seasons, in order to comply with current legislation and best practice principles. New plantings will also incorporate only locally native tree and shrub species, where possible of local provenance.

The Council's Ecologist and Natural Resources Wales have considered the submitted reports and have offered no objection to the development subject to conditions which require the submission and agreement of a Construction and Environment Management Plan, an Ecological Design Strategy, a Landscape and Ecological Management Plan and a habitat protection plan for the blanket bog.

4. HIGHWAY/TRAFFIC/ACCESS

Transport Planning Associates (TPA) on behalf of the applicant company has submitted a report as part of the Environmental Impact Assessment which considers the development in terms of traffic and transport during the construction phase. The study area for the purposes of assessing the transportation impacts of the development has been defined and the designated route for construction traffic has been identified.

The application site will be accessed via the A4063 (Maesteg Road) which runs along its eastern periphery. Recorded AADT data from the ATC (Automated Traffic Counts) has been used as a means of establishing the existing usage of the local highway network to assess the impact of the development on the local highway network. Impact magnitudes have been defined for the construction phase with regard to 'Guidelines for the Environmental Assessment of Road Traffic', which identifies two rules which set out general thresholds for traffic flow increases of 10% and 30%. The assessment indicates that the proposed solar farm will have an impact of less than 10% on the local highway network and the level of impact is considered to be minor or negligible and, as such, not significant. Mitigation has been provided in the form of a Construction

Traffic Management Plan to reduce the impacts of the construction phase.

The Head of Street Scene (Highways) has examined the submitted report and accepts its findings. Subject to conditions, there is no objection to the development on highway safety grounds.

5. ARCHAEOLOGY
The Glamorgan-Gwent Archaeological Trust, Projects Division (GGAT Projects) have undertaken an assessment of the effect of the development on the potential archaeological resource of the area on behalf of the applicant company. The assessment reviewed information held by the regional Historic Environment Record (HER) and the National Monuments Record (NMR), as well as cartographic and documentary sources. Zones of Theoretical Visibility (ZTV) and selected Viewpoints (VP) were also examined, in order to assess the visual impact of the development on the archaeological resource.

A total of 34 sites of known archaeological interest have been identified within the study area. Of these, six are located within or adjacent to the proposed development area - Heol Y Moch (a possible prehistoric or medieval trackway), the Llynfi Inn, the Cymmer Tunnel, a Trial Level, Drystone Walls and a Quarry.

Three sites of known interest will be subject to a 'minor' effect and require archaeological mitigation. It is recommended that a Level 2, photographic survey and watching brief be conducted at Heol Y Moch as well as temporary fencing to be set up during the construction phase. Level 2 and photographic surveys should also be carried out on any Drystone Walls. It is considered that the proposed mitigation will reduce the 'minor' effect of the development on the three known sites of archaeological interest to a residual effect of 'none'.

Furthermore an upland survey of the development area should be conducted, prior to any construction works, followed by a general watching brief during any ground intrusion works. This will provide suitable mitigation for any currently unknown sites located within the development area.

Glamorgan Gwent Archaeological Trust have assessed the submitted report and although the proposed works will require archaeological mitigation they have no objection to the positive determination of the application subject to the attachment of suitable planning conditions requiring the submission of a programme of investigation for the archaeological resource.

6. GROUND CONDITIONS/HYDROLOGY/HYDROGEOLOGY
RPS Health, Safety & Environment have undertaken a Phase 1 Preliminary Risk Assessment of the proposed development with the principle objectives of the assessment being to:

· To review the historical land uses to assess the potential for ground contamination;
· To review the environmental setting to assess the sensitivity of the surrounding area to contamination/pollution;
· Consult with the regulatory authorities to establish whether any significant environmental issues have been recorded, which may impact on the site;
· To undertake a qualitative environmental risk assessment of the site's current and proposed use; and
· Produce an outline Conceptual Site Model (CSM) detailing pollutant linkages associated with the redevelopment of the site.

In conclusion, the report acknowledged that in limited areas of very steep slope where the depth to impenetrable un-weathered bedrock is also present near the ground surface, the placement of solar panels may not be feasible. Based on available information, these conditions may be encountered in certain locations near the northern and south-eastern boundaries of the site. Significant excavation works is not anticipated to be required as part of the proposed

development. Where required, excavation within superficial soils and weathered layers of the Rhondda Formation should be possible with conventional earth moving plant. A breaker may be required if it is necessary to excavate into the un-weathered layers of the Rhondda Formation. Perched water was recorded in isolated locations on site and where it may be encountered within shallow soils during excavation works on site, limited groundwater control measures may be required comprising pumping from a localised sump.

Waterman Infrastructure and Environment Ltd. (WIE) have investigated the hydrological regime associated with the proposed development. The comprehensive report that forms part of the Environmental Statement evaluates topography, geology, ecological issues, establishes the baseline site conditions with regard to hydrology and flood risk and considers the likely effects from construction, the proposed mitigation effects and the residual and cumulative impacts. All the assessment is referenced to the relevant national and local planning policies.

The report establishes that the local hydrological regime is dominated by the variability in the characteristics of the surface and near surface deposits and the depth of rockhead below ground level. The Report has identified minor instances where impermeable areas will increase and, in these instances, mitigation measures have been recommended.

The Natural Resources Wales Flood Maps and the TAN 15 Development Advice Maps indicate that the site is not liable to flooding from the fluvial regimes associated with the Afon Llynfi and the Afon Afan. The various watercourses that pass through the site and the wetland areas (created by surface water flow and emerging groundwater) do however pose the potential to flood parts of the proposed development areas. The flood risk has been found to be minor with flooding being initiated by high overland flows and increase groundwater flows during periods of high rainfall. Such occurrences in the hydrological regime can be effectively addressed by the implementation of appropriate but minor mitigation measures. The mitigation measures both permanent and temporary (during construction) can be secured by the use of planning conditions. Given that there will be a minor increase in impermeable surfaces as a result of the Proposed Development it is inevitable that there will be a minor and negligible increase in the rate and volume of surface water runoff unless appropriate mitigation measures are implemented. Again these can be secured through the agreement of a comprehensive and integrated site drainage scheme. It should be noted that the report has been examined by consultees and no adverse representations have been received.

7. UTILITIES AND SERVICES ASSESSMENT

Waterman Infrastructure and Environment Ltd. (WIE) have investigated the utilities provision associated with an existing development site. It provides an assessment of the likely impact of the proposed development on the existing services provision to the site and the distribution of services on the site. The enhancements proposed to the on-site services supplies will facilitate the electricity generation operation and, as such, this provision should result in considerable betterment in the long term.

No adverse comments have been received from any statutory consultees in respect of the impact on existing utilities and infrastructure.

8. SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND HUMAN IMPACT ANALYSIS

The Urbanists have identified and analysed the potential socio-economic aspects of the proposed development. Establishing the socio-economic baseline through an assessment of Welsh Indices of Multiple Deprivation (2011) (WIMD), community insight profiles and Welsh Government's Fuel Poverty Projection Tool: 2011/2012 report (2013) has informed this assessment.

The analysis concludes that Caerau is facing a range of socio-economic challenges on most economic indices with the area performing poorly when compared to national averages. The report which forms part of the Environmental Impact Assessment confirms that the area has

received significant public sector funding to facilitate regeneration and this has had a positive impact. However, this funding must be matched by private sector investment if the area is to comprehensively address the socio-economic challenges that it faces. While the development may not deliver the type and quantum of investment that will enable the widespread regeneration of Caerau, the applicant's agent maintains that the analysis demonstrates that it does have the potential to deliver socio-economic outcomes that will improve the quality of life enjoyed by local residents. The provision of discounted energy via Valleys to Coast Housing or the foundation of a Community Energy fund trust will clearly benefit the domestic budgets of local residents and help them to avoid fuel poverty, while the training and employment opportunities will be welcomed by a community where such opportunities have become increasingly rare and difficult to find. Beyond Caerau and the immediate site area, it is claimed that the energy generated by the scheme has the capacity to support a significant number of households, reduce carbon emissions and support the growth of local business and industry.

CONCLUSION

The preceding section of this report recognises the strong national support for renewable energy and identifies the main issues in the consideration of this planning application. The impacts on nature conservation, archaeology, site drainage and highway safety have been comprehensively assessed in the Environmental Statement and, on the basis of the consultation responses received, no significant adverse impacts have been identified. The main issue in this case is, therefore, the effect of the proposed development on the character and appearance of the landscape and the visual amenities of the area as the development will not have an unacceptable harm on any other interests of acknowledged importance.

The contribution the proposal will make to meet the national, UK and European targets for renewable energy and the consequential reduction in greenhouse gases is fully acknowledged and clearly stated in the applicant's submission. Although the scheme has been reduced in scale, the proposed solar array has the potential to generate 5MW which will be capable of supplying energy to approximately 1,375 households and offsetting 2,375 tonnes of carbon emissions each year; a small but material contribution to Welsh Government's target

At a local level, one of the strategic objectives of Bridgend's Local Development Plan is the protection and enhancement of the environment which will be achieved by development contributing towards the energy needs of Wales with a focus on the promotion of renewable energy. Strategic Policy SP8 supports this objective by permitting proposals which contribute to meeting national renewable and energy efficiency targets. It is therefore concluded that the proposed development would be beneficial in terms of the generation of electricity from this solar array.

Notwithstanding the broad national policy support for the delivery of renewable energy, at a local level this is subject to schemes demonstrating that there will be no significant adverse impacts on the local environment (including landscape) and communities. Strategic Policy SP4 supports this approach and indicates that development which will conserve and where possible enhance the natural environment of the County Borough may be acceptable. Proposals that have an adverse impact upon the integrity of the County Borough's countryside and the character of the landscape will not, however, be permitted. Policy SP2 of the LDP establishes criteria by which all applications should be assessed. Making a positive contribution towards tackling the causes of and adapting to the impacts of Climate Change is one such criterion as is having a design of the highest quality that respects and enhances landscape character.

The applicant's own landscape and visual impact assessment (LVIA) recognises that the location and geography of the site means that it is a sensitive location but claims that the revised layout will have only a moderate residual effect on landscape features within the site and on its nature conservation value. It accepts however that the effect on landscape character is major adverse. With respect to visual impact, the LVIA concludes that there will be moderate visual

effects on the visual amenity of residential properties in close proximity of the site, a reduced impact by virtue of the proposed planting which the same report acknowledges will only provide mitigation after 15 years. Major adverse impacts on residential properties in the wider Caerau village and recreational receptors (PROWS etc.) are also predicted in the applicant's LVIA. In acknowledging these impacts, the applicant agent in a recently submitted 'Closing Statement' reminds the decision maker that landscape and visual issues are only one factor that must be weighed against the renewable energy and economic benefits the scheme will provide.

The Council's consultant recognises that the revised scheme reduces the scale of development and accordingly the level of effects. Furthermore, the layout design is an improvement when compared to the previous highly detractive and, in the consultant's words, 'insensitive proposal'. There remains, however, significant concerns as to the impact the development will have on the landscape character area, the site itself, the setting of the adjacent Foel y Dyffryn Special Landscape Area and also the visual amenities of nearby residents and more distant recreational areas.

The susceptibility of the Landscape Character Area, the adjacent Special Landscape Area and the site itself to the proposed development lies in its steep, prominent and open slopes, its highly undulating landform and high points which are not conducive to accommodating the rigid pattern of solar panel arrays given that the land forms an important landscape and visual backdrop to Caerau and other nearby communities. The Consultant expresses the view that the proposed development will not reflect any of the characteristics of the area, with the arrays climbing the undeveloped valley sides, detracting from the character of the landscape area, the setting of the Special Landscape Area and the countryside generally.

In visual terms, the consultant identifies significant impacts on residents in parts of Caerau, Brynheulog and Dyffryn with the proposed development being prominent in views of the hillside which currently acts as a green backcloth to the settlements. Any mitigation will only be effective long term and then only for those properties close to the development. Users of PROWs and open access land to the south and west will be similarly affected with the mitigation being of no significant benefit. Overall, it is considered that the proposed development would still cause significant adverse effects on landscape character and visual receptors.

The benefits of providing electricity from renewable sources are not questioned in the assessment of this application and this proposal will deliver a small but material contribution. Furthermore, beyond the issues of the impact on landscape character, visual amenities and the precedent the development could set, there are no other grounds for refusing this application. In this case however, the benefits of the scheme have to be weighed against the landscape and visual impacts that are set out above and, whilst acknowledging that there is broad national and local support for renewables scheme, policies at both levels still seek to protect the countryside and communities from unacceptable impacts which the Council's consultant has identified.

In reaching a recommendation on this proposal it is recognised that the site enjoys a geographical advantage in terms of its orientation and position relative to the passage of the sun. As such the location may be ideal for the establishment of a solar facility. However, it is this advantageous location which creates the most significant issue in terms of landscape and visual impact as described above. In this case the benefit of the facility in terms of energy generation are not considered to outweigh the serious impact on the wider community and countryside and to allow this development would encourage the submission of similar application on sites in the county borough that may be geographically appropriate but equally sensitive in terms of landscape and visual impacts.

It is therefore considered that a recommendation to refuse the scheme is, on balance, the correct approach on this occasion.

RECOMMENDATION

(R30) That permission be REFUSED for the following reason(s):-

1 The proposal solar array and associated works would, by virtue of its prominent location, form and scale, adversely impact upon the integrity of the countryside and the character of the landscape (comprising the Landscape Character Area - LCA 1: Llangynwyd Rolling Uplands and Forestry in which it is located and the adjacent Foel y Dyffryn Special Landscape Area) and would set an undesirable precedent for further applications for similar development in the County Borough, contrary to Policies SP2, SP4, SP8 and ENV3 of the Bridgend Local Development Plan and the emerging Supplementary Planning Guidance: Renewables in the Landscape.

2 Notwithstanding the proposed mitigation works, the proposal solar array and associated works would, by virtue of its prominent location, form and scale, adversely impact upon the visual amenities of the residents in Brynheulog (including Maes yr Awel, Ael Y Bryn and Lon Y Parc), Caerau (including Cymmer Road, Bryn Terrace and Church Street) and users of the Open Access Land and Public Rights of Way to the south, east and west of the development site and would set an undesirable precedent for further applications for similar development in the County Borough, contrary to Policies SP2 (criteria 2 and 12), SP8 and ENV18 (criterion 6) of the Bridgend Local Development Plan and the emerging Supplementary Planning Guidance: Renewables in the Landscape.

MARK SHEPHARD
CORPORATE DIRECTOR COMMUNITIES

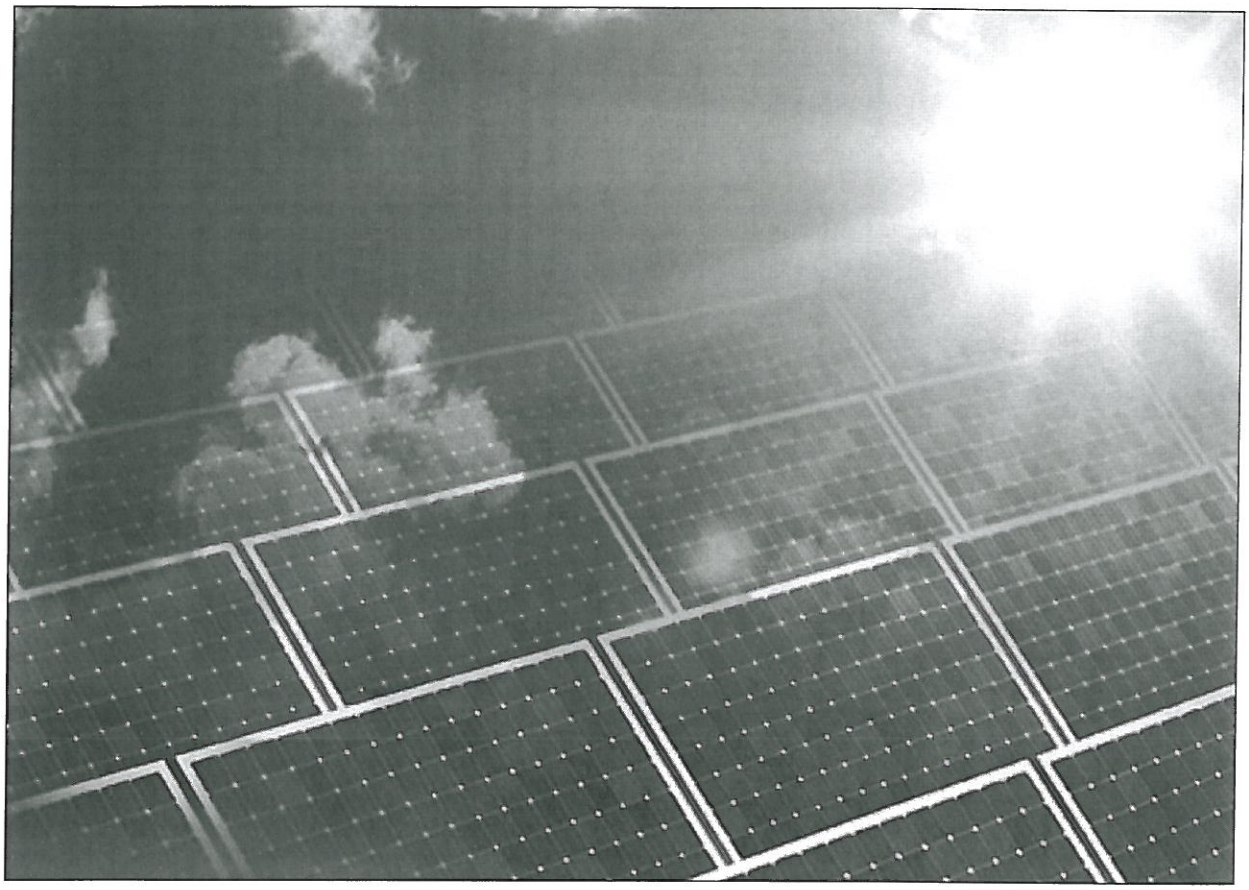
Background Papers
None

APPENDIX A

Foel Fawr Solar Array

Closing Planning Statement

May 2015



the urbanists
planning & design

This document has been prepared by The Urbanists on behalf of:

Marcol Afan Energy

UG1459, May 2015

Prepared by:

Prepared by: Liam Hopkins
liam.hopkins@theurbanists.net
The Urbanists
Creative Quarter
8a Morgan Arcade
Cardiff
CF10 1AF

Contents Page

1. Introduction

1.1 Purpose of the Statement

This planning statement has been prepared to provide a closing statement from Marcol Afan Energy, the applicant for the proposed Foel Fawr Solar Array Scheme (application reference: P/14/543/FUL). The planning application, which was subject to a comprehensive and inclusive Environmental Impact Assessment, was submitted to Bridgend County Borough Council in August 2014, and during this time the applicant and the Council has engaged in proactive discussions regarding the design of the development and the associated environmental impact.

The key matter discussed during the determination period to date concerned the Landscape and Visual Impact of the development. On this matter the Council were informed by the services of White Consultants, which flagged concern over the scale of the proposals and the subsequent landscape and visual impact. To respond to these concerns the applicant has modified the scheme design significantly during the determination period to minimise the landscape and visual impact as much as possible.

This planning statement explains the changes that the applicant has made to the design and layout of the proposed solar array scheme and identifies what effect these changes have had on the capacity of the scheme to deliver socio-economic opportunities to the local area. This statement also addresses the landscape and visual impact of the scheme.

2. Design Evolution

2.1 Phase 1: December 2014 - January 2015

Discussions between the applicant and the Council regarding amendments to the design and layout of the proposed solar array development commenced via a meeting on the 3rd December 2014. Following this meeting a modified scheme was developed to respond to the Council's feedback. The revised layout (refer to Figure 1) sought to:

- Break up the mass of the solar panels by compartmentalising them into cells that sit within the contours of the site.
- Remove the solar panels from the higher ground.
- Reduce the overall coverage to less than 15ha of solar panels.
- Include more landscape mitigation (tree and shrub planting)

Following receipt of the revised layout the Council undertook a review and on the 19th January provided the following further recommendations:

- Increase the proposed landscape mitigation and omit cell one.
- Omit cell six and seven from the proposed layout and introduce native broad-leafed planting in lieu of the cells.
- Omit frames and arrays where there is a significant change in level to create corridors within the cells.
- Further omit solar array from the higher ground to the north of the development.

To demonstrate the application of these recommendations the Council also provided an illustrative revised layout (refer to Figure 2).

2.2 Phase 2: January 2015 - March 2015

To reasonably include and develop the recommendations provided by the Council the applicant's design team examined the Council feedback and undertook further modifications to the development design and layout. The outcome of this stage of the redesign process constitutes the Final' submission from the applicant, which was formally issued to the Council the 4th March (refer to Figure 3). It is this layout and design that was used by the Council to reconsult statutory consultees, and which Members have been requested to determine. The 'Final' scheme has:

- Omitted solar panels from the north west corner of the site and the east of the site.

- Removed the panels from the north of the site so that that they are now located significantly lower down the site.
- Reorientated the remaining panels so that they respond to changes in site level and create the recommended corridors.
- Increased the landscape mitigation to provide a more extensive landscape buffer to the solar panels and associated plant.

(Note: The planting proposed in Figure 2 has been removed from the 'Final' scheme as discussions regarding the future replanting of the wider application site and adjacent areas requires further viability consideration which needs to be informed by discussions with Nature Resources Wales (refer to section 4.3).

2.3 Summary

Through amending the development design and layout the proposed solar array now covers a considerably reduced land area of 10.31ha as opposed to the original 30.41ha (a reduction of 33.90%). The 'Final' layout represents an improved development design and the associated landscape and visual effects are reduced. While the most recent evaluation report provided by White Consultants retains concern over the suitability of the site to accommodate solar array (this is responded to in Chapter 4 of this statement) it also acknowledges that the 'Final' layout represents an improved scheme that will result in reduced landscape and visual effects (May, p. 13). As a result of the reduction of the scale of the development the 'Final' layout will provide 5MWp of renewable energy as opposed to 18.4MWp. The applicant is disappointed in this reduction as it will limit the positive outcomes of the scheme (refer to Chapter 3), but the development will still be an important contributor of solar renewable energy to the National Grid and it will still help to support the local area's infrastructure and power requirements.

3. Socio-Economic Impacts

As a result of the applicant's agreement to reduce the scale of the proposed solar array development its capacity to generate green energy and deliver employment and training opportunities has inevitably been reduced. This is regrettable, however, opportunities in these areas remain and the applicant is committed to working with local stakeholders like Valleys to Coast Housing to maximise the benefits for the local area. The difference between the socio-economic benefits of the original development layout and the 'Final' layout is identified below.

3.1 The Original Scheme

3.1.1 Energy Generation

The 18.4MWp generated by the original scheme was capable of providing energy to around 5,000 households and displacing 8,687 tonnes of carbon emission per year. As there is insufficient capacity in the local sub station adjacent to the site to accommodate all of the renewable energy generated it was proposed that 2MWp of the total power output would have been connected locally to the National Grid in Croeserw, and the remaining 16.4 MWp routed to the Pyle sub station 14 kilometres to the south. Western Power had agreed to undertake both connections and the connection to the Croeserw had been reserved for the development.

The 2MWp connected to the National Grid in Croeserw would have been sufficient to provide energy to around 550 local households and offset 940 tonnes of carbon emissions each year. At the time of submitting the application it was intended that this energy would be supplied at a discounted rate to local residents through a Power Purchase Agreement with Valleys to Coast Housing or alternatively through a Community Energy Trust Fund. The discounted supply of energy offered to local residents would have diversified the energy supply in the local area, helped to address fuel poverty and reduce the monthly energy bills of residents. In light of the employment, income and health issues afflicting Caerau Park and the wider Caerau such outcomes would have had a significant positive impact and would have been welcomed by the majority of local residents.

The remaining 16.4MWp to be connected to the National Grid via the Pyle sub station was sufficient to provide energy to around 4,500 households and offset carbon emissions by 7,747 tonnes each year. It was proposed that this energy would either be contracted to local industry via a long term Power Purchase Agreement or alternatively contracted to the local utility supply company who will in turn sell the renewable energy to a domestic or nominated commercial supplier. This would have helped the wider local area to diversify its energy supply and reduce its reliance on fossil fuels. Should the energy have been supplied to local industry and business, it

would have helped these companies to reduce operating costs and increase its capacity to invest in the local area and the labour market.

3.1.2 Employment Opportunities

During the construction of the original scheme approximately 100 construction workers would have been employed at the site. The applicant is committed to ensuring that the local labour force benefits from the development and proposed to ensure that a minimum of 20 vacancies were provided to local community members during the construction programme. The applicant engaged with Valleys to Coast Housing to discuss and agree the best way to implement this programme, and Valleys to Coast agreed in principle to help establish the training programme and identify suitable trainees.

In addition to the employment opportunities created during the construction programme there would also have been employment opportunities associated with the operation and maintenance of the development. Marcol Afan Energy again proposed to work with Valleys to Coast to unlock these benefits, through the possibility of contracting the Valleys to Coast maintenance team to manage the operational development and security of the completed solar farm development. Appropriate training would have been provided to ensure that the maintenance team was equipped to manage the development and it was anticipated that the team would undergo minor expansion to accommodate the additional responsibility.

3.2 The 'Final' Scheme

3.2.1 Energy Generation

The 5MWp generated by the 'Final' scheme will be capable of supplying energy to approximately 1,375 households and offsetting 2,375 tonnes of carbon emissions each year. As there is insufficient capacity in the local sub station adjacent to the site to accommodate all of the renewable energy generated it is still proposed that 2MWp of the total power output will be connected locally to the National Grid in Croeserw. The remaining 3MWp will now be utilised to pump prime the wider development of the application site and surrounding area (refer to Section 4.3) and/or service the adjacent Bryn Heulog residential estate. The agreement for Western Power to undertake the connection to the Croeserw sub station remains in place.

The reduction of energy generated by the proposed solar array to 5MWp down from 18MWp is significant, but it will still have a positive impact on the lives of local people and the local energy market. The energy generated at the development will again be contracted to local industry via a long term Power Purchase Agreement or alternatively contracted to the local utility supply company who will sell the renewable energy to a domestic or nominated commercial supplier.

Should the energy be supplied to local businesses the latter will benefit from reduced operating costs and increased capacity to invest in growth and job creation. Alternatively if the energy is supplied to the local domestic market it will diversify the market's supply and reduce reliance on fossil fuels.

Given the reduction in the scale of energy that the solar array will now be able to generate it is less viable to provide energy that is discounted against market value. However, the applicant remains committed to collaborating with Valleys to Coast Housing Association to explore opportunities to provide the 6,000 properties that it manages throughout Bridgend County Borough with energy at a discount against market price. The updated letter of support provided directly to the Council by by Valleys to Coast Housing demonstrates that it too remains equally committed to further exploring these opportunities (refer to Appendix 1).

3.2.2 Employment Opportunities

The 'Final' scheme will still deliver employment opportunities during the construction and operational phases. It is anticipated that the 'Final' scheme will require approximately 60 construction workers on site during the height of the construction programme. As a result of the decrease (the original scheme would have required approximately 100 workers) it is proposed that approximately 10 vacancies will be offered to the local communtiy. It is still intended that Valleys to Coast Housing will be the key partner in helping to establish and facilitate the training programme and identify suitable trainees.

In addition to the training programme and employment opportunities created during the construction programme employment opportunities associated with the operation and maintenance of the development. Marcol Afan Energy again propose to work with Valleys to Coast to unlock these benefits, through the possibility of contracting the Valleys to Coast maintenance team to manage the operational development and security of the completed solar farm development if commercially viable. Appropriate training will be provided to ensure that the maintenance team is equipped to manage the development and it is anticipated that the team will undergo minor expansion to accommodate the additional responsibility.

3.3 Summary

The applicant's agreement to reduce the scale of the proposed development to respond to the Council's concern regarding the development's landscape and visual impact has reduced the development's capacity to generate green energy and deliver employment and training opportunities. The applicant is understandably disappointed in this reduction. However, the

applicant remains committed to ensuring that the positive socio-economic impacts that will still be delivered by the 'Final' scheme will be maximised for the benefit of the local area.

4. Landscape and Visual Impact

4.1 Landscape Impact

The landscape and visual impact assessment (LVIA) included in the application recognises that the location and geography of the site means that it is a sensitive location. It therefore robustly assesses the impact of the scheme on the landscape and visual impact of the development. The LVIA also recognises that all effects assessed are adverse.

On landscape impact the LVIA concludes that the 'Final' layout will have a moderate residual effect on landscape features within the site and on the nature conservation value of the site and a major adverse residual effect on the landscape character of the area surrounding the site.

With respect to visual impact the LVIA concludes that there will be moderate visual effects on the visual amenity of residential receptors in close proximity of the site (by virtue of the proposed 10m-20m landscape buffer planting) and a major adverse effect on residential properties in the wider Caerau village. This difference is explained by the function performed by the 10-20m landscape buffer planting proposed in the landscape mitigation strategy (refer to Figure 3). On recreational receptors the LVIA identifies that there will be a major adverse residual effect.

However, the LVIA also identifies that the landscape and visual impacts should be considered within the context of a changing landscape. The application site has recently undergone deforestation due to Phytophthora ramorum and is now characterised by uneven ground, haulage tracks and stumps remaining on the site. As a result of this the LVIA considers the site to have a 'Low' landscape value and that it is is not representative of the 'High' landscape value allocated to the wider Landmap Visual and Sensory Aspect Area that the development site is located in. In evidence of this the LVIA identifies that the adjacent Landmap Visual and Sensory Aspect Area (located immediately to the north and north east of the development site) is allocated a 'Low' value (refer to Figure 4). This Aspect Area includes the remainder of the applicant's land ownership, which has been subject to the same programmed deforestation and which is not different in character and appearance from the development site.

The landscape character of the area will also likely undergo further significant change over the coming years, as the area to the west of the site (located in Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council) has been identified as a Strategic Search Area for large scale (>25MW) wind farms by Welsh Government (refer to Figure 5). The Deposit Neath Port Talbot Local Development Plan, which is currently undergoing examination, identifies the Strategic Search Areas *"represent the maximum potential for the development of large scale wind farms within the County Borough without creating unacceptable impacts on the communities and landscape"* (LDP, p.68).

Furthermore the LDP notes that since the designation of the Strategic Search Areas in the County Borough have been subject to *"considerable interest from developers"* (LDP, p.4).

The policy context of the site should also be noted when reviewing the effects, as although the Foel y Dyffryn Special Landscape Area (SLA) is located directly to the south west of the site and Foel Trawsnant is located to the west of that the site itself is not designated for its landscape quality.

4.2 Landscape Mitigation

Chapter 2 identifies the amendments that have been made to the scheme design and layout to reduce the landscape impact of the development. The landscape strategy will ensure that 10m-20m landscape buffer distance will be maintained between the edges of the development and the south, east and western boundaries. No buffer is proposed along the northern boundary as it was felt that this would create a noticeable linear edge to the development. The buffer to the southern edge will be continuous. To the eastern and western boundaries of the site, planting will be in smaller blocks, to avoid a linear 'feature' climbing the hillside and ensure that the vegetation fits more within the framework of the open uplands landscape character emerging from the deforestation of coniferous plantations and their sharp, dark edges in the landscape.

The planting proposed in the strategy will be native, broadleaved species with a mixture of blocks of trees, shrubs and edge planting. This will enhance the boundary treatments and as it matures, provide a buffer to residential receptors in close proximity to the southern development boundary. The species selected for the buffer have also been selected to provide appropriate opportunities for local biodiversity.

The applicant accepts that the landscape mitigation proposed will take time to bear fruition, but when it is established it will screen significant portions of the development site and have a particularly positive impact in screening views from the adjacent residential areas.

It is anticipated that the development site and landscape strategy will be subject to management and maintenance of an integrated landscape and ecology management plan. Such a plan will successfully deliver the proposed landscape mitigation and also ensure that opportunities for landscape and biodiversity enhancement within the solar arrays are are exploited in unison.

4.3 Wider Reforestation

In addition to delivering the landscape mitigation strategy the applicant is investigating opportunities to contribute to Natural Resources Wales' ambition to restructure the area's conifer plantations. Specifically the applicant is exploring opportunities to replant the area surrounding the

site with broad leaf and conifer tree species. At present the applicant is seeking to collaborate with Natural Resources Wales via the Glastir Woodland Restoration programme. The latter is part of Glastir Woodlands under the Rural Development Programme for Wales (2014 to 2020) and provides a 10 year commitment to replant plantations that are effected or have been felled as a result of Phytophthora Ramorum.

The applicant's approach is in this matter is in line with wider aspirations for the area surrounding the application site. Historically the application site plus the land immediately to the north (in Neath Port Talbot County Borough) was subject to a planning application for a holiday, tourism and recreational destination, which was granted planning permission by Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council on the 19th March 2010. The applicant intends to evolve and progress these recreational proposals in due course and considers the provision of appropriate replacement planting an essential ingredient to establishing a high-quality recreational destination.

4.4 Summary

The applicant acknowledges that the applicant site is in a sensitive location and for this reason has undertaken a robust and comprehensive Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment. This assessment fairly identifies the effects that the development will have on landscape and visual amenity. However, it also identifies the context in which these views should be interpreted. Key to this context is the non-designated status of the application site and the changing landscape context, which has been effected by de-forestation and which will likely be further effected by adjacent wind farm developments. Further consideration should also be given to the ecology and landscape mitigation that will be delivered by the scheme, which will reduce the effects where possible, and the intention to replant the area surrounding the application site as part of the future development of recreational uses on the remaining development site.

Importantly it must be accepted that the landscape and visual issues are one factor in the application decision making process, and must be weighted against the renewable energy and economic benefits identified in Chapter 3. Indeed this is recognised by the concluding paragraph of White Consultant's May 2015 evaluation report. Although the benefits of the scheme have had to be reduced to respond to the Council's concern over the Landscape and Visual Impact of the proposed scheme the applicant considers that the benefits of the scheme still remain sufficiently significant to warrant the grant of planning permission.

5. Conclusion

This planning statement has been prepared to provide a closing statement from Marcol Afan Energy, the applicant for the proposed Foel Fawr Solar Array Scheme (application reference: P/14/543/FUL). This statement has explained the changes that the applicant has made to the design and layout of the proposed solar array scheme and identifies what effect these changes have had on the capacity of the scheme to deliver socio-economic opportunities to the local area. This statement also identifies the landscape and visual impact of the scheme and sets it within context.

The solar array proposed in the development will be able to provide a reliable source of energy with relatively little long term environmental impact, and will be resilient to changes in supply and distribution at a time when there is less certainty and reliability about traditional sources of coal fired and nuclear energy generation. The development will also create social and economic opportunities in an area where they are desperately required. The design iterations demonstrate that the applicant has openly engaged with the Council during the determination period to reduce the landscape and visual impact of the scheme, which was identified by the Council as being the most sensitive environmental issue.

The applicant accepts that the geography of the application site establishes the site as a sensitive location, and the submitted application openly identifies the adverse landscape and visual effects. Clearly the Authority's decision on the planning application must be taken in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. The weight to be given to the national need for sustainable energy generation, and the local benefits to be accrued from the project, should be given sufficient regard in this consideration, and balanced against the temporary landscape impact.

When determining the planning application consideration should also be given to the wider findings of the Environmental Impact Assessment that was included in the planning application. In summary:

- The development will help to achieve the strategy and targets for renewable energy at a national, regional and local level.

- The development will make a significant contribution to renewable energy generation in the Llynfi Valley and wider Bridgend County Borough.

- The development is in line with policies of the Bridgend Local Development Plan.

- The development will be easily reversible and the development site could be restored back to its existing use following the removal of the scheme.

- The development will not require the loss of high grade agricultural land (the development site is classified as Grade 3 agricultural land).

- The development will not result in unacceptable ecological impacts and will be subject to a management plan that will deliver integrated biodiversity and landscape enhancement.

- The development will not be at risk of flooding or exasperate flood risk in the area surrounding the development site.

- The development will not impact on known features of archaeological significance.

- The development will not impact on services and utilities.

- The development will not have an unacceptable impact on the highway network.

- The development will not impact on any public rights of way or bridleways.

- The development will result in minimal noise omissions and will not harm residential amenity.

- The development will not have unacceptable harm to interests of acknowledged importance.

To conclude, the increase in renewable energy generation is of paramount importance within the UK and is key to reducing ambitions to reduce green house gas emissions by 80% by 2050 (relative to 1990 levels). The Welsh Government's stance to renewable and low carbon energy is set out in Planning Policy Wales (2014), which advises that *"local planning authorities should facilitate the development of all forms of renewable and low carbon energy to move towards a low carbon economy to tackle the causes of climate change"* (p.168). At the local level policy SP8 (Renewable Energy) supports this national ambition and policy ENV18 (Renewable Energy Developments) identifies the criteria that proposals for renewable energy should satisfy. In light of the design changes that have been undertaken to reduce the development's landscape and visual impact, the positive socio-economic opportunities that will be delivered through its implementation and the limited impact that it will have on all other environmental features it is deemed that the development is in accord with these these policies.

On balance it is therefore considered that the benefits associated with the proposed Foel Fawr solar array development will outweigh any negative impacts and it is respectfully requested that it is granted planning permission.