



Foel Fach Wind Farm Limited.

Foel Fach Wind Farm – Environmental Statement Volume III

Appendix 9.5: Special Landscape Areas Assessment

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Energy for
generations





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APPENDIX 9.5 – SPECIAL LANDSCAPE AREAS ASSESSMENT

1.1 Introduction

Filtering Exercise

Special Landscape Areas

1.1.1 Within the 35 km LVIA study area there are 19 Special Landscape Areas (SLA), as shown in part on Environmental Statement (ES) Volume IV, **Figure 9.17: Landscape Designations to 20 km with Blade Tip ZTV with Viewpoints**.

1.1.2 **ES Volume IV, Figure 9.17** shows the landscape designations within 20 km of the Site and the visibility of the Proposed Development. Beyond 10 km from the Site boundary, theoretical visibility from the SLAs is generally limited to small intermittent parts of the SLAs, where elevated areas allow views towards the Site. For those SLAs beyond 10 km where theoretical visibility is more extensive, the distance from the Site and the nature of the intervening landscape would mean that any indirect effects on available views would generally not be considered significant.

1.1.3 The filtering exercise undertaken has compiled a list of SLAs within 35 km of the Site to identify which have the potential to be significantly affected by the Proposed Development.

1.1.4 The intention has been to ensure that the level of assessment given to each visual receptor is proportionate to the likelihood of significant effects arising. **Table 1** below lists all SLAs in the 35 km study area and identifies which have the potential to experience significant effects and therefore required detailed assessment.

Table 1 Preliminary Assessment of Special Landscape Areas

SLA	Local Authority	Distance and Direction from Site	Potential for Significant Effects	Detailed Assessment Required
Bala Hinterland (formerly Penllyn)	Gwynedd Council (GC)	The Proposed Development is located within the SLA	Yes - Host SLA with extensive theoretical visibility	Yes
Corris	Gwynedd Council (GC)	Approximately 32 km to the south-west at its closest point	No - Very distant and majority lies outside of the Zone of Theoretical Visibility (ZTV) coverage	No
Glaswyn & Dywryd Estuary Landscapes	Gwynedd Council (GC)	Approximately 31 km to the south-west at its closest point	No - Lower lying coastal landscape and very distant	No

SLA	Local Authority	Distance and Direction from Site	Potential for Significant Effects	Detailed Assessment Required
Llandderfel Mosaic	Gwynedd Council (GC)	Approximately 5 km to the south-east	No - Lower lying agricultural landscape with limited theoretical visibility	No
Tryweryn Valley	Gwynedd Council (GC)	Approximately 6 km to the west	No - Enclosed valley with minimal theoretical visibility, screened by topography	No
Southern Snowdonia Foothills	Gwynedd Council (GC)	Approximately 4.5 km to the west	No - Limited theoretical visibility due to intervening topography of Arenig mountains	No
Afon Ceirw valley mosaic	Conwy County Borough Council (CCBC)	Approximately 250 m to the north of closest turbine	Yes - Very close proximity with extensive theoretical visibility	Yes
Mynydd Hiraethog upland mosaic	Conwy County Borough Council (CCBC)	Approximately 8.5 km to the north	Yes - Elevated areas with theoretical visibility of turbines	Yes
Conwy Valley	Conwy County Borough Council (CCBC)	Approximately 21 km to the north-west at its closest point	No - distant enclosed valley landscape and majority lies outside of the ZTV coverage	No
Betws yn Rhos	Conwy County Borough Council (CCBC)	Approximately 31 km to the south-west at its closest point	No - Lower lying coastal landscape and very distant	No
Afon Aled valley mosaic	Conwy County Borough Council (CCBC)	Approximately 20 km to the north	No - Enclosed valley showing no theoretical visibility, screened by topography	No
Dee Valley (Dyffryn Dyfrdwy)	Denbighshire County Council (DCC)	Approximately 9 km to the east	No - Valley location with very limited theoretical visibility from small, elevated areas only	No

SLA	Local Authority	Distance and Direction from Site	Potential for Significant Effects	Detailed Assessment Required
Berwyn Foothills	Denbighshire County Council (DCC)	Approximately 7 km to the south-east	No - Limited visibility restricted to isolated hilltops, intervening topography provides screening	No
Hirnant Valley	Powys County Council (PCC)	Approximately 8 km to the south	No - Enclosed valley location with no theoretical visibility	No
Tanat Valley	Powys County Council (PCC)	Approximately 9.5 km to the south-east	No - Deeply incised valley with no theoretical visibility	No
Pant Field, Rhosllannerch	Wrexham Unitary Authority	Approximately 34 km to the east	No - Very small SLA, distant and outside of the ZTV	No
Gardden Wood, Ruabon	Wrexham Unitary Authority	Approximately 34 km to the east	No - Very small SLA, distant and outside of the ZTV	No
Whitehurst	Wrexham Unitary Authority	Approximately 33 km to the east	No - Very small SLA, distant and outside of the ZTV	No
Bwlchgwyn north	Wrexham Unitary Authority	Approximately 32 km to the north-east	No - Enclosed wooded valley SLA, distant and majority lies outside of the ZTV	No
Ruabon Mountain	Wrexham Unitary Authority	Approximately 23 km to the east	No - distant upland SLA but majority of elevated areas lying outside of the ZTV	No
Isycoed	Wrexham Unitary Authority	Approximately 14 km to the south-east	No- large SLA lower lying with majority screened by intervening woodland, topography and settlements	No

1.1.5 The filtering exercise identified that only three SLAs, which are all within 10 km, have the potential to experience significant effects from the Proposed Development. These are:

- Bala Hinterland (formerly Penllyn) - as the host SLA
- Afon Ceirw valley mosaic - due to very close proximity (250 m), and
- Mynydd Hiraethog upland mosaic - due to elevated position with theoretical visibility.

1.1.6 The remaining SLAs within 10 km are either located in enclosed valley positions with no theoretical visibility, or have very limited theoretical visibility restricted to small, isolated areas where any effects would not be significant given the limited geographical extent and/or intervening screening elements.

1.1.7 SLAs beyond 10 km were also reviewed but none were identified as requiring detailed assessment due to the combination of distance and limited theoretical visibility restricting the potential for any significant effects to arise.

1.2 Effects on Special Landscape Areas

1.2.1 The designation and management of Special Landscape Areas in Wales is guided by local planning policies which seek to protect areas of particular landscape value at the local level. The following assessments consider the effects of the Proposed Development on the landscape qualities and features for which each SLA has been designated.

Effects on Bala Hinterland SLA

1.2.2 The Bala Hinterland SLA (formerly referred to as Penllyn) is identified in the Review of Special Landscape Areas in Gwynedd and Anglesey (LUC, December 2012) as covering a scenic upland fringe landscape which abuts the eastern edge of Snowdonia National Park.

1.2.3 According to the Statement of Value & Significance for this SLA, it comprises a rolling agricultural and wooded landscape which rises up to 500 metres and includes impressive mountains such as Moel y Gydros, Moel Darren, Foel Fach and Moel Emoel. The Site is located within this SLA, specifically on and around the Foel Goch uplands.

1.2.4 The designated Special Qualities of the Bala Hinterland SLA, as set out in the Statement of Value & Significance, are:

- The intimate, tranquil and rural character of the landscape
- The elevated and open position of the upland areas – creating strong intervisibility across the landscape, including with Snowdonia National Park
- Internationally and nationally valued pockets of semi-natural habitat, including alder carr and mire (Cors y Sarnau SSSI), species-rich hay meadows and wet pasture (Caernau Uchaf SSSI), riparian habitats and species (River Dee SSSI and SAC) and pockets of dry heath and blanket bog (Berwyn SSSI, SAC and SPA)
- Its strong historic character, particularly along the River Dee (a Landscape of Special Historic Interest)
- The dispersed settlement pattern of nucleated villages, hamlets and scattered farmsteads, and

- The landscape's important role as a setting to the Snowdonia National Park and other uplands outside the study area (e.g. Berwyn Mountains).

1.2.5 With reference to **ES Volume IV, Figure 9.17**, theoretical visibility of the proposed turbines would extend across parts the SLA, which is to be expected given the Proposed Development is located within the SLA. There is however variable visibility of the Proposed Development across this part of the landscape, with some sections of the SLA having no visibility, many areas having only glimpses views and then some more open areas where the turbines would be more prominent. These areas being primarily in the immediate environs of the Site.

1.2.6 The introduction of 10 turbines at 200 m – 220 m height would represent a change to the character of those parts of the SLA from which it would be visible. The turbines would impact some of the SLA's special qualities to some degree:

- The intimate, tranquil and rural character would be altered in part in the immediate vicinity of the turbines and across the northern upland parts of the SLA,
- The elevated and open position creating strong intervisibility would result in the turbines being visible both within parts of the SLA and from parts of the surrounding landscapes, and
- The landscape's role as a setting to Snowdonia National Park would be partly affected, with the turbines located around 2 km from the National Park boundary, but clearly separated from the landscape of the National Park.

1.2.7 From locations within the SLA to the south of the Site, including areas around Bala and the northern shores of Lake Bala, the turbines would appear as noticeable features at distances of 4 - 8 km as evidenced by the **ES Volume III, Appendix 9.9: Viewpoint Assessment**.

1.2.8 The Statement of Value notes that the SLA already contains the operational Braich Ddu Wind Farm in its eastern part and therefore the presence of wind energy development is an existing characteristic of the SLA. In addition, the relatively large size of the SLA means that substantial areas would remain unaffected by the Proposed Development, particularly the more intimate enclosed valleys and the some parts of the landscape in and around Lake Bala where topography would limit visibility.

1.2.9 The effects would be greatest in the immediate vicinity of the Site and across the open upland areas within approximately 5 km, particularly the Foel Goch uplands.

1.2.10 Overall, there would be some **significant** effects on the character and visual qualities of the Bala Hinterland SLA, particularly within 5 km of the Site. The magnitude of change would be **high** in the immediate vicinity of the turbines, reducing to **medium** at 5 km distance. The introduction of the wind farm would result in a moderate-major adverse effect on the SLA, which is considered significant. However, for much of the SLA, landscape effects would be less, with either no effect or no greater than a moderate, not significant effect arising.

Effects on Afon Ceirw Valley Mosaic SLA (CCBC)

1.2.11 The Afon Ceirw valley mosaic SLA (formerly part of the Cerrigydruddion and the A5 corridor SLA) is located immediately to the north of the Site, with the closest proposed turbine approximately 250 m from the SLA boundary.

1.2.12 The Conwy Revised Background Paper 27 – Special Landscape Areas (August 2012), set out that this SLA was designated because:

- It is a locally important landscape with high value visual, geological, and historical characteristics and outstanding cultural qualities
- It is a key access point into the county along the A5 and is a historic route through Conwy's rural landscape
- The landscape type is both locally and regionally rare, and
- The area has been defended from inappropriate development, especially significant wind turbine development, in the interests of landscape and ecology.

1.2.13 The Conwy Landscape Sensitivity and Capacity Assessment identifies this area as having a **highly scenic landscape**.

1.2.14 Key characteristics include:

- High scenic quality
- Remote and tranquil character away from the A5 road corridor
- Extensive panoramic views to and from Snowdonia National Park
- Gateway landscape providing the setting for the historic A5 tourist route into the National Park, and
- Setting for low key outdoor recreation including the Clwydian Way and Hiraethog Trail.

1.2.15 The LANDMAP Landscape Habitat area CNWLH086 - Afon Ceirw valley mosaic - which forms part of this SLA is described as having high value and comprises an intimate valley landscape with a mosaic of woodland, pasture and moorland creating visual diversity.

1.2.16 With reference to **ES Volume IV, Figure 9.17** theoretical visibility of the proposed turbines extends across part of the SLA, particularly the southern parts closest to the Site. There are however large parts of the SLA landscape that would have no views of the Proposed Development, or limited views of a small number of the turbines, primarily blade tips. This reflects the valley nature of the majority of the SLA, whereby the topography of the valley sides would screen potential views of the turbines.

1.2.17 Given the proximity of the SLA to the Site (250 m at closest point), the proposed turbines would be prominent from the southern parts of the SLA. The turbines would appear as large-scale features on the immediate skyline, introducing vertical elements that would impact the landscape context but would retain visual permeability and would not be dominant in the context of the overall open nature of the landscape.

1.2.18 The intimate valley landscape of the Afon Ceirw, with its mosaic of woodland, pasture and moorland, would for the most part however have either no views or very limited views of the Proposed Development. .

1.2.19 Overall, given the close proximity of the turbines to the SLA boundary and their prominence in some views from within the designation, there would be **significant** effects on limited parts of the Afon Ceirw valley mosaic SLA. The magnitude of change would be medium to high across the southern parts of the SLA, resulting in a **moderate-major adverse effect**, which is considered **significant**, however from the majority of the SLA there would be no significant effects due to the limited visibility of the turbines, with effects being no greater than **moderate/minor**.

Effects on Mynydd Hiraethog Upland Mosaic SLA (CCBC)

1.2.20 The Mynydd Hiraethog upland mosaic SLA (formerly Hiraethog SLA) is located approximately 8.5 km to the north of the Site. This SLA covers an extensive area including parts of the Mynydd Hiraethog (Denbigh Moors) upland moorland plateau.

1.2.21 According to the Conwy Revised Background Paper 27 – Special Landscape Areas (August 2012), the Mynydd Hiraethog upland mosaic SLA was designated because:

- It is a locally important landscape with visual, cultural, historical, geological and ecological characteristics of such concentration to be worthy of SLA designation
- The landscape type is both locally and regionally rare, representing an increasingly rare survival of heather moorland
- It is a key area for tourism with walking trails and links to the reservoirs of Llyn Brenig and Llyn Aled
- It has been defended from inappropriate development, especially significant wind turbine development, in the interests of visual landscape and ecology, and
- It is widely overlooked from views from within Snowdonia National Park.

1.2.22 The SLA designation notes that:

- The Hiraethog is largely covered by SSSI and unimproved moor and grassland
- Without SLA designation, the value of the landscape would not be differentiable from lower value landscapes and would be less defendable against inappropriate forms of development, and
- The landscape has limited capacity for change or further cumulative change without significantly deteriorating in character, quality and local landscape value.

1.2.23 With reference to **ES Volume IV, Figure 9.17**, theoretical visibility of the proposed turbines is shown across parts of the SLA, particularly from the more elevated areas and south-facing slopes. Much of the SLA would however have no visibility of the Proposed Development.

1.2.24 At a distance of 8.5 km, the proposed turbines would appear as noticeable but not dominant features on the southern horizon. From elevated viewpoints within the SLA, the turbines would be visible on the distant skyline, introducing new vertical elements into expansive moorland views.

1.2.25 However, at this distance, the turbines would appear at a much reduced scale compared to closer viewpoints. They would form one element within extensive panoramic views that take in multiple horizons and landscape features and as such would not be out of scale with the landscape as a whole. The sense of openness and the panoramic nature of views from the SLA would not be fundamentally altered.

1.2.26 The moorland character of the SLA itself would remain intact, with the turbines appearing as distant features associated with the uplands to the south. The key tourism and recreational functions of the SLA, including walking trails and links to the reservoirs, would not be directly affected.

1.2.27 Overall, while the turbines would be visible from some limited parts of the Mynydd Hiraethog upland mosaic SLA, the distance involved and their appearance as relatively distant features means that the turbines would not be out of scale with their landscape context and effects on the special qualities of the SLA would be limited. The magnitude of change would be **low**, resulting in a **minor-moderate adverse effect**, which is considered **not significant**.