



Welsh Government

**Proposed Northern Access Road
St Athan, Vale of Glamorgan
Request for EIA screening opinion**

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WYG Group
Floor 5 Longcross Court
47 Newport Road
Cardiff CF24 0AD

Telephone 029 2032 0765
paul.vining@wyg.com

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1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 On behalf of the Welsh Ministers, the Department for Economy, Science and Transport of the Welsh Government is proposing to make an application for full planning permission to construct a new highway – called the Northern Access Road (NAR) – at St Athan in the Vale of Glamorgan. The road is an essential element of infrastructure to service existing and proposed development in the St Athan Enterprise Zone.
- 1.2 In anticipation of that planning application, the Department is requesting the local planning authority – The Vale of Glamorgan Council – to adopt an EIA screening opinion pursuant to Regulation 5 of *The Town and Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) (Wales) Regulations 2016* (2016 No. 58 (W.28)) – the EIA Regulations – which, with effect from 1 March 2016, replace the 1999 Regulations.
- 1.3 The purpose of the request is to ascertain whether the proposed development is “EIA development” within the meaning of the EIA Regulations, in which event it would be necessary for the application to be accompanied by an environmental statement (ES).
- 1.4 This document sets out the information required by Regulation 5(2) of the EIA Regulations, namely:
 - a plan sufficient to identify the land;
 - a brief description of the nature and purpose of the development and of its possible effects on the environment; and
 - such other information or representations that the applicant may wish to provide.

2.0 The site and its surroundings

- 2.1 The location of the proposed NAR is shown on **Figure 01**. It lies to the north-west of the MoD camp at St Athan and extends from the B4265 road near Llantwit Major in the west to Eglwys Brewis/Picketson in the east.
- 2.2 The NAR will have a junction with the B4265 and then follow the line of a valley at a height of approximately 42m above Ordnance Datum.
- 2.3 The NAR traverses open land which is currently in use for agriculture. Much of the land in this vicinity is classified as Grades 3B and 4; only a small area of the land affected is classified as Grade 3A (best and most versatile agricultural land).
- 2.4 None of the land required for the road has been designated for its environmental value:
- **Landscape:** the site does not lie in a designated landscape. The Glamorgan Heritage Coast lies to the south of the B4265 and the Thaw Valley Special Landscape Area lies to the north-east of Eglwys Brewis.
 - **Cultural heritage:** the site does not contain any scheduled monuments or listed buildings and does not lie within a conservation area or registered historic park, garden or landscape. The nearest listed buildings are the Bethesda'r Fro Chapel, the Church of St Brise and Picketson House. The nearest conservation areas are at Llanmaes to the north-west and Boverton and Llantwit Major to the south-west and west respectively.
 - **Ecology:** the site is not affected by any statutory or non-statutory (for example, SINC) nature conservation designations. The site comprises a variety of habitats including arable land, improved and semi-improved grasslands, semi-natural broadleaved woodland and watercourses. Previous ecology survey data (2009) are out of date and new surveys will be undertaken this year.
 - **Trees:** sections of hedgerow and a number of trees will need to be removed. The trees affected were assessed in connection with previous applications as being principally in Category C (trees of low quality and value).
- 2.5 The NAR will intersect with two public rights of way. These will either be retained on their current alignments (with suitable crossings of the road) or diverted. Any diversions will be subject to separate legal processes.
- 2.6 The NAR will cross a small watercourse, the Llanmaes Brook, which is classified as Zone C2 on the Welsh Government's Development Advice Map for flood risk. The stream will be bridged and a flood consequences assessment undertaken.

2.7 A draft of the application site plan is shown on **Figure 02**, which shows the proposed application site boundary in red. The application site extends to approximately 12.815 hectares (31.7 acres).

3.0 The purpose of the proposed development

3.1 The NAR is required to serve existing and proposed development at St Athan as follows:

- the Welsh Government's Aerospace Business Park, which occupies a large part of the site of the former RAF camp, and includes an operational runway;
- the proposed Aston Martin car manufacturing facility, which will occupy the existing superhangar on the Aerospace Business Park; and
- the proposed residential development on land lying south of the proposed NAR and between it and Eglwys Brewis Road.

The NAR will not serve the MoD camp at St Athan, which will continue to be served via its existing access road.

3.2 The proposal for the NAR accords with the Council's emerging development plan – the *Vale of Glamorgan Local Development Plan 2011-2026* (LDP) – in which it forms an important part of the Council's policies, namely:

- **Policy SP 7(2) Transportation** – pages 45-46 of the *Deposit Plan Written Statement* (November 2013); and
- **Policy MG 16(14) Transport Proposals** – pages 77-84.

Paragraph 6.109 of the explanatory text to Policy MG 16 (pages 81-82) describes the proposal thus:

'As part of the St Athan Enterprise Zone a new Northern Access Road (NAR) is proposed from the B4265 between Boverton and Llanmaes Traffic Signal Junctions, to accord generally with the scheme previously approved in full by applications ref. 2009/00500/OUT and 2009/00501/OUT for the Defence Technical College and Aerospace Business Park. The NAR is considered essential to facilitate development at the Enterprise Zone and deliver the economic benefits to the Vale of Glamorgan and wider region.'

3.3 The Aerospace Business Park and the proposed residential developments do not form part of the current request for an EIA screening opinion but it should be noted that they, too, form part of the Council's emerging development plan, as follows:

- **Policy MG 9(3) Employment Allocations:** Aerospace Business Park, St Athan – page 69 of the *Deposit Plan Written Statement*;
- **Policy MG 2(6) Housing Allocations:** land adjacent to Froglands Farm – page 57; and
- **Policy MG 2(7) Housing Allocations:** land between new Northern Access Road and Eglwys Brewis Road – page 57.

4.0 The nature of the proposed development

4.1 The Department proposes to submit an application for full planning permission for the NAR. The application will include detailed engineering and landscape design drawings for the entire length of the proposed road and its junctions.

4.2 The design of the NAR will depart from that approved previously by the Council (applications 2009/00500/OUT and 2009/00501/OUT). The principal differences are that:

- It is intended that the NAR will terminate, at its eastern end, just east of the access to the superhangar.
- The width of the carriageway will be reduced to approximately 7.3m.

These changes reflect the fact that the previously approved road was designed to cater for the much larger development of the MoD's Defence Technical College, which is no longer proceeding.

4.3 The proposal includes approximately 1.8km of new carriageway incorporating a new single-span bridge over the Llanmaes Brook, together with approximately 0.5km of on-line widening improvements to Eglwys Brewis Road at the eastern end. At its western end, the NAR will connect with the B4265, at a new traffic signal controlled junction

5.0 Possible effects on the environment

5.1 The site forms part of an area that has been extensively studied in connection with the previously approved planning applications for:

- the Defence Technical College: application no. 2009/00500/OUT; and
- the Aerospace Business Park: application no. 009/00501/OUT.

Both applications, which received planning permission on 1 December 2009, included the NAR, albeit in a different, larger form from that now proposed (see paragraph 4.2 above).

5.2 The Department will commission new, up-to-date environmental studies to support the application for planning permission for the NAR. These studies will cover all relevant aspects, including the following:

- cultural heritage;
- ecology;
- flood risk and surface water drainage;
- transport;
- air quality and noise;
- landscape and visual amenity; and
- trees.

5.2 The EIA Regulations (Schedule 4, Part I, clause 3) require that it is only the significant effects of development that should be considered. On the basis of existing information, no "significant" environmental effects of the proposed development of the NAR have been identified.

5.3 Other (that is, non-significant) effects of the development can be avoided or mitigated in various ways, such as:

- spanning the C2 flood risk zone and ensuring no detrimental off-site flooding effects;
- producing a sustainable surface water drainage strategy;
- mitigating for any adverse effects on flora and fauna;
- appropriate landscape design of the envelope of the proposed road, to include new tree and shrub planting;
- adopting a watching brief during construction to record any archaeology.

6.0 Consideration of the EIA Regulations and Circular advice

6.1 Regulation 2 of the EIA Regulations defines "EIA development" as:

- Schedule 1 development; or
- Schedule 2 development "*likely to have significant effects on the environment by virtue of factors such as its nature, size or location.*"

6.2 The proposed development does not fall within Schedule 1.

6.3 The proposed development falls within Schedule 2 as an infrastructure project: Class 10(f) – construction of roads.

6.4 Regulation 4(6) states that where a local planning authority has to decide whether Schedule 2 development is "EIA development" it must take into account such of the selection criteria set out in Schedule 3 that are relevant to the development. These are:

- the characteristics of the development;
- the location of the development; and
- the characteristics of the potential impact.

Our assessment of the site and the proposal in relation to the Schedule 3 criteria is set out in the **Appendix**.

6.5 We have also had regard to Welsh Office Circular 11/99 *Environmental Impact Assessment*. Paragraph 33 of the circular states the Government's view that, in general, EIA will be required for Schedule 2 developments in three main types of case:

- for major developments which are of more than local importance;
- for developments which are proposed for particularly environmentally sensitive or vulnerable locations; and
- for developments with unusually complex and potentially hazardous environmental effects.

In our opinion, the proposal does not fall within these categories.

6.6 Annex A of the circular sets out indicative thresholds and criteria for identifying Schedule 2 development requiring EIA. Paragraph A.22, which covers the construction of roads, states that: '*EIA is more likely to be required for new development over two km in length.*' The length of the proposed new carriageway for the NAR is approximately 1.8km.

6.6 We conclude that the proposed development does not comprise "EIA development" and that, therefore, there is no necessity for the application for planning permission to be accompanied by an environmental statement.

7.0 Further information and representations

7.1 The site is not located in a "sensitive area" as defined in Regulation 2 of the EIA Regulations.

7.2 The application site does not contain any features that have been designated for their environmental significance. In particular:

- The site does not lie within a designated conservation area and does not contain any scheduled monuments, listed buildings or sites of archaeological importance.
- The site does not comprise a landscape of historical, cultural or archaeological significance and does not lie within a registered historic park or garden.
- The site is not designated for its nature conservation interest.

7.3 Although the proposed development is not considered to be "EIA development", the Department nevertheless intends that its planning application for planning permission will be accompanied by a comprehensive range of supporting documents, as follows:

- Planning statement
- Design and access statement
- Transport assessment
- Extended Phase 1 habitat assessment and Phase 2 botanical and protected species assessment
- Ground conditions assessment
- Flood consequences assessment
- Surface water drainage strategy
- Geo-environmental assessment
- Tree survey and arboricultural assessment
- Agricultural land classification
- Air quality and noise assessment
- Landscape and visual impact assessment
- Cultural heritage assessment
- Road safety audit.

7.4 The proposals will address all relevant issues including the following:

- **Traffic:** the issue of traffic using the NAR will be addressed in a transport assessment, the parameters of which will be agreed with the highway authority. The basis for the assessment will be the proposed use of the superhangar by Aston Martin together with the LDP proposals in for the Aerospace Business Park and the allocated housing sites.
- **Flood risk and surface water drainage:** the issue of flood risk and surface water drainage will be addressed in a flood consequences assessment and surface water drainage strategy prepared in accordance with *TAN 15: Development and Flood Risk* (Welsh Government, July 2004).

- ***Flora and fauna:*** new ecology surveys will be undertaken in 2016 to refresh previous survey data. The surveys will include those for European protected species, including dormouse, bats, otter and great crested newt.
- ***Landscape and visual amenity:*** the landscape and visual effects of the NAR (including lighting) will be assessed and the design will include proposals to mitigate any adverse effects.
- ***Air quality and noise:*** these aspects will be addressed by appropriate surveys at receptor sites, the results of which will inform the design of the road and its means of enclosure and any requirement for mitigation.

In light of the above, there is no necessity for these or other aspects of the proposed development to be additionally considered as part of an environmental impact assessment.

8.0 Conclusion

- 8.1 In our opinion, and having regard to the selection criteria set out in Schedule 3 of the EIA Regulations and the advice in Welsh Office Circular 11/99, it should not be necessary for this proposed development to be subject to environmental impact assessment. We respectfully request that you exercise your discretion under the Regulations to issue a screening opinion confirming that the proposal is not "EIA development".

Appendix: application of Schedule 3 selection criteria

#	Criterion	Response
1.	Characteristics of the development	
a.	The size of the development	The application site is approximately 12.815 hectares in extent The length of new carriageway is approximately 1.8km.
b.	The cumulation with other development	The road is intended to service existing approved employment uses (the Aerospace Business Park and the superhangar) and proposed residential development.
c.	The use of natural resources	The proposal is not for an extractive or energy project. The use of natural resources will be confined to the use of building materials such as sand and gravel. These will not be sourced on site.
d.	The production of waste	No demolition is entailed in the development. Excavated materials (top soil; and subsoil) will be reused on site where appropriate or exported off-site for use elsewhere.
e.	Pollution and nuisances	The greenfield site is unlikely to be contaminated.
f.	The risk of accidents	The road will be designed to the adoptable standards of the highway authority and will include highway drainage and lighting. The design and construction of the road will be subject to road safety audit. Construction activities on site will be controlled through health and safety legislation and practices.
2. Location of the development		
a.	The existing land use	The existing land use is agriculture.
b.	The relative abundance, quality and regenerative capacity of natural resources in the area	This is not applicable to this development.
c.	The absorption capacity of the natural environment:	The site will be subject to up-to-date extended Phase 1 habitat survey and protected species surveys. The recommendations of the ecology assessments will be incorporated into the design of the development.
i	Wetlands	There are no wetlands on the site.
ii	Coastal zones	The site is not a coastal site.
iii	Mountain and forestry areas	The site is not in a mountainous or afforested area.
iv	Nature reserves and parks	There are no nature reserves or parks on or in the near vicinity of the site.
v	Natural conservation areas	The site does not contain any statutory or non-statutory nature conservation designations.
vi	Areas in which EU environmental quality standards have already been exceeded	The site is not located in an air quality management area.
vii	Densely populated areas	The site is not located in a densely populated area.
viii	Landscapes of historical, cultural or archaeological significance	The site does not contain any scheduled monuments or listed buildings; it is not located in a designated conservation area or a registered park, garden or landscape of historic interest.

3. Characteristics of the potential development		
a.	The extent of the impact	No significant impacts have been identified.
b.	The transfrontier nature of the impact	This is not applicable to this development.
c.	The magnitude and complexity of the impact	No significant impacts have been identified.
d.	The probability of the impact	No significant impacts have been identified.
e.	The duration, frequency and reversibility of the impact	No significant impacts have been identified.

Figures

