

Planning Inspectorate Examination EN010137: Mona Offshore Wind

**Cefn Meiriadog Community Council
MNOW-ISP002**

Deadline 7, 14 January 2025

Submission by Cefn Meiriadog Community Council for Deadline 7

1. Cefn Meiriadog Community Council (CMCC/the Council), is fully cognisant of the need to replace fossil-fuel based energy generation by the increasing use of renewable energy sources. It therefore fully understands the Welsh Government's (WG) long-term commitment to net zero and to supporting the development of green energy projects.
2. Equally, the Council wholly endorses the WG commitment to the well-being of communities as expressed across numerous documents covering the whole range of its activities, but in particular as set out in its Deadline 1 submissions to this Examination. Identifying as it does the need "to ensure local communities are protected", and "to secure and sustain vibrant, cohesive and sustainable communities that promote and protect culture, heritage and the Welsh language", this commitment is profoundly important to the survival and well-being of Wales's smallest communities, not least to the community of Cefn Meiriadog with its 359 people occupying an area of just 5 square miles.
3. Under current circumstances, however, it is clear that the two commitments are incompatible. The realisation of WG aims relating to renewable energy is wholly dependent on the bringing forward and developing of projects by private commercial interests which necessarily seek to maximise the returns on their investments, without reference to the interests of the communities affected by these projects except in the unlikely event that they happen to coincide.
4. In this situation, the only way in which the incompatibility of the two commitments can be addressed is by a strategic and coordinated approach to the siting of large-scale infrastructure projects. In its Design Review Report, submitted to this Examination for Deadline 5, the Design Commission for Wales stated: "Given the context for renewable energy in Wales, the local authority working with neighbouring authorities, Welsh Government, National Grid and other stakeholders should take steps to develop a comprehensive strategic masterplan that addresses this particular location and its landscape capacity as renewable energy development proposals increase in number and at pace". Similarly that "large scale energy infrastructure is developing in a piecemeal and uncoordinated way... We again urge the key stakeholders to engage in a landscape-led 'masterplanning' approach to the area". And further that "substantial new and expanded National Grid infrastructure and supplier substations are inevitable across Wales, therefore similar strategic work is needed at a national level. This is a national issue that would benefit from Welsh Government attention".

5. It is clear that only a strategic, coordinated approach has the potential to resolve the incompatibilities of the two commitments referred to above. It is to be regretted therefore that at ISH6 the Applicant's representative confirmed that they had not participated in any form of 'masterplanning' approach in relation to their proposed project.

6. In the absence of any such approach, by default the only 'strategy' being applied to the siting of infrastructure in the area is in effect that of National Grid (NG) directing Mona and other developers to connect to its 'Bodelwyddan' (i.e. Cefn Meiriadog) substation, obviously in accordance with its own interests. Beyond this, the nature and substance of the project proposals are determined purely on the basis of the interests of the various individual developers.

7. The result of the incompatibility and the priority which, in the absence of any strategic approach which might be used to protect the communities affected, is in effect being given to the commitment to developing renewables, is exemplified in the 'free for all' which has hit Cefn Meiriadog, resulting in four large-scale substations, rising to five if Mona is consented, being located in this small rural community. The chaotic and even absurd nature of the situation has been thrown into even sharper relief by the unforeseen emergence recently of a 16-acre battery energy storage system (BESS) proposal on land adjacent to both Mona and NG. Indeed, it would seem that it overlaps with the latter's proposal to extend their substation, at a time when Mona and NG appear themselves to have their differences over the relationship of their respective projects.

8. The consequence of the lack of a strategic and coordinated approach is succinctly expressed in the conclusion of the Denbighshire County Council/Conwy County Borough Council Local Impact Report submitted to this Examination, as follows: "The Councils are of the opinion that in combination, these schemes [i.e. the existing and consented substations] and the proposed development would have the cumulative effect of altering the landscape and visual environment to the extent that energy infrastructure would become a prominent or defining aspect of the local landscape and views".

9. Clearly, the inimical effects on the community of Cefn Meiriadog of "energy infrastructure (becoming) a defining aspect of the local landscape and views" cannot be overstated given the way the community's well-being and sense of identity is tied so intimately to its historic rural landscape, and the fact that living in a small rural community of this nature involves frequent movement through the landscape, something which the Applicant's Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment largely fails to account for given its assumption of static view/visual receptor points in assessing visual impacts.

10. If, then, it is to be ensured that the local Community of Cefn Meiriadog is to be protected, secured and sustained as one of the "vibrant, cohesive and sustainable communities that promote and protect culture, heritage and the Welsh language", the siting of the proposed Mona onshore substation must be reconsidered, both on its own terms as a 65,000 square metre development being wholly inappropriately inserted into a settled rural and agricultural landscape, and in terms of the cumulative effects which will mean "energy infrastructure would become a defining

aspect of the local landscape and views”.

11. If however the Mona project is consented, taking the above into account it is imperative that a strategic approach now be developed, albeit at this very late stage, to ensure that future projects, such as the BESS referred to above and the other planned schemes, are directed elsewhere and not allowed to cause the community further damage and suffering than it will see already with the construction of the consented Awel y Môr substation and would see with the Mona onshore substation. Wales will undoubtedly benefit from its policy of developing renewables, as will the United Kingdom generally, but that benefit cannot be at the cost of one of its most vulnerable communities being irreparably blighted and its identity permanently scarred.

Cefn Meiriadog Community Council
13 January 2025