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Y Gweinidog Newid Hinsawdd
Minister for Climate Change



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Eich cyf/Your ref P-06-1395
Ein cyf/Our ref JJ/00118/24

Jack Sargeant MS
Chair, Petitions committee
Senedd Cymru
Cardiff Bay
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04 March 2024

Dear Jack,

Thank you for your letter of 18 January regarding the petition P-06-1395 which calls for a Halt regarding significant development on the Gwent Levels.

As a government, tackling the climate and nature emergencies is very much at the heart of everything we do. The Gwent Levels are of national importance for their biodiversity and landscape, being designated by a series of sites of special scientific interest, as well as being a landscape of outstanding historic interest. Their location, adjacent to Cardiff and Newport, and into Monmouthshire, also make them a valuable cultural and recreation asset for locals and visitors. It is also a living landscape and open to many on-going pressures and change. A number of recent planning policy changes which we have brought forward will directly influence any proposed future development on the Levels.

Firstly, in October 2023 we updated chapter 6 of 'Planning Policy Wales' (PPW) to include a stronger protection for all Sites of Special Scientific Interest, those changes came in with immediate effect. PPW clarifies that 'Development in a SSSI which is not necessary for the management of the site must be avoided' and it goes on to say that 'There is a presumption against all other forms of development in a SSSI as a matter of principle and this presumption should be appropriately reflected in development plans and development management decisions'. The revised PPW also clarifies the position in relation to areas outside SSSIs that may impact those SSSIs, in that 'There is also a presumption against development not within a SSSI but likely to damage a SSSI'. We have also strongly mainstreamed biodiversity into this amended PPW to clarify our approach to achieving a net benefit for biodiversity by emphasising the importance of ecosystem resilience and the need to both avoid damage to biodiversity and ecosystems and secure enhancement. Planning decisions and planning policy development relating to the Gwent Levels are now required to adhere to these updates. The updated guidance can be accessed at the following location https://www.gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2024-02/planning-policy-wales-edition-12_1.pdf

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Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

Secondly, 'Future Wales - The National Plan 2040' introduces Policy 9 – 'Resilient Ecological Networks and Green Infrastructure'. This national planning policy highlights the importance of embedding biodiversity and ecosystem resilience into the planning process. The Gwent Levels are specifically named in Policy 9 as a national natural resource area – these are areas where collaboration is needed across administrative boundaries and beyond designated site boundaries to strengthen ecological networks and ecosystem services and achieve net biodiversity benefit. I have approved the development of further planning guidance specifically for the Levels to help put this national policy into practice. The guidance will be a pilot of the 'Future Wales' policy 9 approach with the aim of proactively embedding biodiversity considerations into planning policies within the wider landscape. Work on scoping the delivery of this guidance has now commenced with specific staff resources secured as of late 2023 to bring forward this guidance.

Yours sincerely,



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