

# North Wales Wind Farms Connection Project

## Route option selection report

As the Distribution Network Operator in North Wales, SP Manweb (SPM) has a legal duty to connect new sources of electricity in the area to the national electricity network. SPM has agreements in place to connect four proposed wind farms in the Clocaenog Forest area to a substation near St Asaph. The North Wales Wind Farms Connection Project (the Project) will connect these wind farms to the national electricity grid.

The Project involves the construction of a new 132 kilovolt (kV) overhead line connection between the Clocaenog Forest area in Denbighshire to a terminal pole to the south of Glascoed Road, B5381; together with required accesses, construction laydown areas and other integral works. The proposed line would be built on wood poles for the length of the route. A short section of undergrounding would be used in the north to connect into the existing SPM substation at St Asaph.

When we consulted on the Project earlier in 2014, we included two route alignment options in section 3 (Eriviat to Plas Buckley). One route alignment ran approximately 600m west of Henllan (the 'Henllan' option) and the other approximately 1.4km west of Henllan closer to Hafod Wood (the 'Hafod' option).

This document explains the background of the two options and the reasons for SPM's decision to select the 'Hafod' option.

### Consultation background

The Planning Act 2008 prescribes the pre-application process for a Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project (NSIP), which includes statutory public consultation. The Project is classified as an NSIP. The Department for Communities and Local Government has also issued guidance on the pre-application process, which suggests that for some NSIPs early 'non-statutory' consultation can be good practice in addition to 'statutory' consultation. The guidance explains the reasons for this:

52. *To manage the tension between consulting early, but also having project proposals that are firm enough to enable consultees to comment, applicants are encouraged to consider an iterative, phased consultation consisting of two (or more) stages, especially for large projects with long development periods. For example, applicants might wish to consider undertaking informal early consultation at a stage where options are still being considered. This will be helpful in informing proposals and assisting the applicant in establishing a preferred option on which to undertake formal statutory public consultation<sup>1</sup>.*

Three stages of consultation have been completed for the Project. Stages 1 and 2 were 'non-statutory' (or 'informal') consultation stages completed in 2012 and 2013. The recently completed stage 3 consultation was 'statutory' pre-application consultation in accordance with the Planning Act 2008. This is expected to be the last stage of public consultation before SPM submits an application for a development consent order (DCO) in respect of the Project to the Planning Inspectorate.

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<sup>1</sup> 'Planning Act 2008: Guidance on the pre-application process', Department for Communities and Local Government, August 2014.

#### Consultation summary:

- Stage 1 non-statutory consultation was carried out on route corridor options between June 2012 and February 2013. Using feedback from this stage, along with environmental and technical information, a preferred route corridor was selected.
- Stage 2 non-statutory consultation on the preferred route corridor was carried out between June 2013 and July 2013. Using the feedback collected, along with further environmental and technical studies, the proposed route alignments were identified.
- Stage 3 statutory consultation on the proposed route alignments were carried out between March 2014 and June 2014.

### Inclusion of the 'Hafod' option

During stage 2 consultation on the preferred route corridor, a number of respondents suggested a variation to the route outside of the preferred corridor. This route variation was further to the west of Henllan and closer to Hafod Wood (the 'Hafod' option).

Previously, the route variation suggested by the respondents had been discounted by SPM and not included in the route corridor options because it crossed a small section of ancient semi-natural woodland.

In response to the suggested route variation, a detailed review of its potential impact was carried out by SPM and showed the impact on the ancient semi-natural woodland would be balanced against removing potential impacts on the 'Henllan' option such as the proximity to a protected woodland. A thorough review was then carried out to see whether any further variations were appropriate for consideration. No additional variations were identified.

SPM recognises that each stage of consultation may give rise to important new information which can lead to refinements and improvements to its proposals. SPM considers that an iterative approach to consultation is best practice and that such an approach is supported by the Planning Act 2008 and associated guidance.

Therefore, the 'Hafod' option was included in stage 3 consultation (the 'statutory' stage of consultation). It was considered appropriate to consult on both the 'Hafod' and the 'Henllan' options at stage 3 and to provide the same level of detail for both options to ensure informed feedback could be given on the two options. Using feedback from this stage, along with environmental and technical information, a preferred option was selected. The 'Henllan' option sits largely within the preferred corridor and was refined following Stage 2 non-statutory consultation based on consultation feedback, environmental studies and a technical appraisal.

### Decision to select 'Hafod' option

#### **Consultation**

During consultation, responses were received supporting both the 'Hafod' and the 'Henllan' options. Due to the larger population closer to the 'Henllan' option, the number of responses preferring either option was not considered an appropriate factor to consider but the information provided in support of each route has been reviewed and considered as part of the environmental and technical considerations.

Feedback from statutory bodies, the national and regional organisations that SPM is required to consult with on the Project, reported a preference for the 'Hafod' option. Preferences were based

on a lesser adverse impact on the Henllan Conservation Area and on local residents. Consultees also highlighted the reduced impact the 'Hafod' option would have on the landscape and historic environment when compare to the 'Henllan' option.

More information about consultation feedback will be published in SPM's DCO application as part of the Consultation Report.

### **Environmental**

The Preliminary Environment Information Report (section 16) identified a preference for the 'Hafod' option:

*Section 16: Overall it is considered that Option (a): via Hafod is preferred as although effects on the landscape and ancient and semi natural woodland (ASNW) are slightly greater for this option these are outweighed by greater effects on residential amenity and the historic environment for Option (b): via Henllan.<sup>2</sup>*

### **Technical**

The 11kV network surrounding Henllan would be affected by the proposed 'Henllan' option, requiring substantial diversion work. In comparison the 'Hafod' option avoids the 11kV main line and would require less diversion work. No other technical issues were identified on either of the route options.

**Based on the consultation feedback, environmental preference and the technical preference, SPM has chosen the 'Hafod' option.**

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<sup>2</sup> 'North Wales Wind Farms Connection Project: Preliminary Environment Information Report', SP Manweb, March 2014.