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Dear Lana,

**Neath Port Talbot Council – Replacement Local Development Plan (LDP) Preferred Strategy Consultation: Welsh Government Response**

Thank you for consulting the Welsh Government on the Neath Port Talbot Council Replacement Local Development Plan (LDP) – Preferred Strategy. It is essential the authority is covered by an up-to-date LDP to give certainty to local communities and businesses and provide a robust basis for decision making.

Without prejudice to the Minister's powers, the Welsh Government is committed to assisting Local Planning Authorities (LPAs) minimise the risk of submitting unsound plans by making comments at the earliest stages of plan preparation. The Welsh Government looks for clear evidence that the plan is in 'general conformity' with Future Wales: The National Development Framework, aligns with Planning Policy Wales (PPW) and the tests of soundness, as set out in the LDP Manual Edition 3.

National planning policies are currently set out in PPW Edition 12 and seek to deliver high quality, sustainable places through a place-making approach (the LDP should ensure it considers any further iterations of PPW prior to the examination). The implementation of the core policy areas in PPW, such as adopting a sustainable spatial strategy, appropriate housing and economic growth levels, infrastructure delivery and place-making, are articulated in more detail in the LDP Manual (Edition 3). **We expect the core elements of the Manual, in particular Chapter 5 and the 'De-risking Checklist(s)' to be followed. Failure to comply with these key requirements may result in unnecessary delays later in the plan making process.** The development planning system in Wales is evidence-led and demonstrating how a plan is shaped by the evidence is a key requirement of the LDP examination.

**After considering the key issues and policies in Future Wales, the Welsh Government is of the opinion that the Preferred Strategy is in general conformity with Future Wales: The National Development Framework.** Specific comments are set out in the Statement of General Conformity (Annex 1). **Annex 2 also highlights a range of issues that need to be addressed for the plan to align with PPW and the DPM by the time the plan reaches the Deposit stage.** Collectively, our comments highlight a range of issues that need to be addressed for the plan to be considered 'sound' as follows:

## **Annex 1 – General Conformity with Future Wales**

- Regional Collaboration – Continued/further detail regarding the relationship to Swansea’s emerging LDP and one of the key sites in close proximity to Bridgend, Coed Hirwaun.

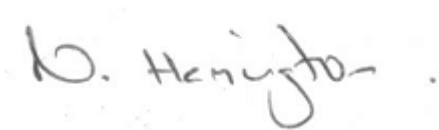
## **Annex 2 – Core matters that need to be addressed (PPW and the DPM)**

- Affordable Housing Provision
- Viability Evidence
- Delivery & Implementation – General/Key Sites
- Gypsy and Travellers
- Minerals

I would urge you to seek your own legal advice to ensure you have met all the procedural requirements, including the Sustainability Appraisal (SA), Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and Habitats Regulation Assessment (HRA), as responsibility for these matters’ rests with your authority. A requirement to undertake a Health Impact Assessment (HIA) arising from the Public Health (Wales) Act 2017, if appropriate, should be carried out to assess the likely effect of the proposed development plan on health, mental well-being, and inequality.

My colleagues and I look forward to meeting you and the team to discuss matters arising from this response.

Yours sincerely,



**Neil Hemington**  
**Chief Planner Welsh Government**

For matters relating to general conformity with Future Wales and planning policy please contact: [PlanningPolicy@gov.wales](mailto:PlanningPolicy@gov.wales) / For matters relating to Local Development Plan procedures and compliance with the Development Plans Manual please contact: [mark.newey@gov.wales](mailto:mark.newey@gov.wales) and [candice.coombs001@gov.wales](mailto:candice.coombs001@gov.wales)

## Annex 1 - Statement of General Conformity

**The Welsh Government is of the opinion that the Neath Port Talbot Council Replacement Local Development Plan (2023-2038) Preferred Strategy is in general conformity with the National Development Framework: Future Wales, as set out in paragraphs 2.16 – 2.18 of the Development Plans Manual (Edition 3).**

This conformity statement is based upon the evidence currently available. Welsh Government reserves its formal position until the full suite of policies, proposals and finalised evidence base is available to scrutinise at Deposit Stage. The Welsh Government supports the Swansea Bay City Deal, but it is currently unclear how the wider region, particularly Swansea and adjoining Local Authorities, for example Bridgend, have been involved in shaping the scale and spatial choices made in the plan. Further evidence is required to demonstrate how regional/cross regional collaboration has influenced the scale of growth in Neath Port Talbot and the relationship to all adjoining authorities.

### **Reasons**

Future Wales places emphasis on the development of National Growth Areas in a sustainable manner. Growth areas must be sustainably planned, reduce the need to travel by car, encourage walking and cycling (active travel), maximise public transport usage and incorporate green infrastructure. Growth areas must embed these principles within a wider regional consensus, focussing on the opportunities they bring to promote social and economic benefits across a broader geographical area. The Welsh Government supports sustainable growth in a National Growth Areas to respond to the climate change and nature emergencies and make the best use of our resources.

Policy 1 and Policy 28 of Future Wales state that a National Growth Area centred around Swansea Bay and Llanelli (including Neath and Port Talbot) will be the main focus for growth and investment in the region, strategic diagram (p146). The Swansea Bay and Llanelli National Growth Area Definition Report Research (January 2023) is welcomed as it seeks to cover issues that would inform the definition of the National Growth Area which Neath Port Talbot is within. However, continued/further detail on how adjoining Local Authorities, for example Bridgend, in relation to the Coed Hirwaun proposal and Swansea, with regard to their imminent LDP Preferred Strategy have shaped the scale and spatial choices made in the plan would be beneficial as the plan progresses through the statutory process.

**Annex 2** explains our comments in respect of the scale and location of growth. On balance, (and subject to the comments in Annex 2), the Welsh Government considers that the Preferred Strategy, including the scale and distribution of growth, is in general conformity with key policies in Future Wales namely (not exhaustive):

Policy 1: Where will Wales grow

Policy 2: Shaping Urban Growth and Regeneration – Strategic Placemaking

Policy 6: Town Centre First

Policy 18: Renewable and Low Carbon Energy Developments of National Significance

Policy 28: National Growth Area – Swansea Bay and Llanelli

Policy 31: South-West Metro

Moving forward to Deposit, continued work would be beneficial to understand how the Preferred Strategy has been developed within the wider regional context as **Future Wales brings a new perspective that all LDPs have to embrace on how each plan sits within the region as a whole and the relationship to other LDPs, in essence, a strategic approach to cross boundary relationships in advance of the formal commencement of an SDP.**

## Annex 2 – Core matters that need to be addressed (PPW and the DPM)

### Spatial Strategy - Location of Growth

The Council has tested 6 spatial options:

Option A – Continuation of the adopted LDP growth strategy

Option B – Dispersed Growth

Option C – National Growth Area and Sustainable Transport Infrastructure

Option D – Building on key opportunities in the valleys

Option E – Town Centre First approach

Option F – Hybrid of Options C & D

The Council has chosen Option F: Hybrid of Options C & D for its Preferred Strategy. The National Growth Area Spatial Option is a focussed growth spatial option that directs the majority of growth to the National Growth Area, approximately along the coastal belt encompassing Port Talbot, Neath and potentially Pontardawe. Opportunities in the valleys are proportionate in scale to existing settlements. This strategy is supported by a settlement analysis looking at services, functionality and linkages to other settlements.

The Council have supported this approach by separating the 51 settlements into 5 Tiers of hierarchy, again based on a functional analysis). There are thorough background papers to support these conclusions, although it will be for the Council to justify the rankings. (Settlement Assessment Paper 2004).

The analysis set out in the Growth and Spatial Options background paper considered Option F to best meet the needs of the Plan area, whilst providing sufficient flexibility to avoid constrained areas and address any changing needs up to 2038. It is considered the option that best aligns with Future Wales, PPW, Llwybr Newydd, and reflects stakeholder feedback. It recognises the plan area's role in the South-West Wales region and would enable the delivery of the Vision and Objectives.

PPW Paragraphs 3.58 and 3.59 and Policy 9 of Future Wales, state Best and Most Versatile Land (BMV) should be taken into account at the earliest point in the process and throughout plan preparation. BMV policy application should be sufficiently evidenced and justified in the plan, sustainability appraisal, spatial strategy and site selection process. The LPA has demonstrated that the BMV Policy has been considered robustly from the outset and throughout the process of developing the Preferred Strategy through the use of the Predictive Agriculture Land Classification (ALC) Map in assessing the spatial options.

The strategy encompasses the Council's largest and most sustainable settlements in the National Growth Area and the Council considers that focussing development here will reduce the need to travel and will co-locate housing with employment opportunities, services, and community facilities. It is seeking to minimise private car use whilst maximising public transport and active travel.

**The Welsh Government supports the spatial strategy, which accords with Planning Policy Wales (PPW) and is in general conformity with Future Wales.**

### Spatial Strategy - Primary Settlements

The Council have undertaken a settlement analysis of 51 settlements, concluding on 5 Tiers, based on role/function and services and facilities. The 5 Tiers comprise:

Tier 1 – Principal Centre: Port Talbot, Neath and Pontardawe. These are the larger towns in the plan area and are considered to be the most sustainable places for growth. They provide a wide

range of services and facilities, bus / train services, active travel routes and. It is estimated that the 3 Principal Centres will accommodate approximately 43% of new allocations.

Tier 2 – Key Settlements (8 in number): These offer a narrower range of services and facilities compared to Tier 1 settlements but are important service hubs for their immediate and surrounding communities. They benefit from bus services (some with rail) and host a range of facilities which residents can access via active travel. It is estimated that the 8 Key Settlements will accommodate approximately 33% of new allocations.

Tier 3 – Local Settlements (16 in number): These have more limited services and employment opportunities which can meet some needs of residents, but residents are likely to travel to a higher tier settlement to access some services such as supermarkets, high schools and health care provision. It is estimated that the 16 Local Settlements will accommodate approximately 22% of new allocations.

Tier 4 – Villages (15 in number): These are smaller in size and host less services than Tier 3 settlements. However, many are located in close proximity, often in walking or cycling distance, to a Tier 1/2 settlement. It is estimated that the 15 Tier 4 Villages will accommodate approximately 3% of new allocations.

Tier 5 – Minor Settlements (9 in number): Development in these settlements will be small-scale to meet local needs, with an emphasis on affordable housing and creating opportunities to retain the working age population. It is estimated that the 9 Minor Settlements will accommodate 0% of new allocations.

Tiers 1 & 2 settlements reside primarily in the National Growth Area, delivering approximately 76% of the plans housing growth (new allocations) and 70% of the windfall assessment (Population and Housing Topic Paper). Focussing growth in/adjoining the most sustainable settlements, maximising public transport and delivering accessibility to the majority of the population, aligns with PPW and Future Wales. **The Welsh Government supports this approach in principle**, although the precise definitions of settlements and Tiers designated is for the Council to justify.

### **Key Site – Coed Hirwaun**

The proposal is identified as a Key Site in the LDP (Para 9.2) comprising of 128.1 Ha for approximately 900 dwellings (400 within the plan period) and a Welsh Medium Primary School. The proposal builds around an existing residential development, albeit with a primary school and local retail outlet. The site is at the eastern end of the Council area within approximately 1 mile of Pyle and North Cornelly in Bridgend County Borough Council (BCBC). BCBC benefits from a recently adopted replacement LDP.

The **Welsh Government is not objecting to the principle of this site, however there will need to be further detailed evidence to support the sites inclusion in the plan** as it progresses through the statutory process. Such matters include (albeit not exhaustive):

- What level of affordable housing will the site be able to contribute
- Is there sufficient viability to deliver a Welsh Medium Primary School
- Are the transport infrastructure improvements compatible with the conclusions of a Transport Assessment
- Can active travel links be provided to Pyle
- What will be the impact on the A48 of increased crossings/speed reductions
- Is there sufficient 'flex' in the site boundary proposed to accommodate the overall 900 units with what appears some 'unknowns' yet to be identified

### **The Level of Growth - Homes and Jobs**

The Preferred Strategy (Policy SP8) makes provision for 4,176 homes to deliver a housing requirement of 3,480 new homes (232 p/a) over the plan period 2023-2038. It is currently unclear as to the level of affordable provision being delivered through the plan. The flexibility allowance proposed by the Council is 20%. The delivery of new jobs is 232 p/a, totalling 3,555 new jobs over the plan period through the allocation of 57Ha of Class B employment land.

Not every site with planning permission is developed in full and as a result not all dwellings permitted become new housing completions. To account for this a non-delivery allowance can be applied, based on the take up rate of dwellings on Housing Commitments included in the Adopted LDP (2011-2026). This has currently not been applied as the Council considers it has, through agreement with site promoters of sites in the housing supply, included a figure that can be delivered, hence no need for a non-delivery allowance. It is noted that the windfall allowance large & small sites have been excluded from the first two years of the projected supply calculations to prevent double counting. **The latter aligns with the Development Plans Manual (Edition 3).**

**Homes:** The 2018 WG Principal projections are the latest projections for this Preferred Strategy. **Any future population and household projections based on the latest 2021 Census will need to be considered by the Council if they are published before the plan is examined.** The 2018 principal projection would result in a requirement of 285 units p/a or 4,275 units over the plan period. The level of housing growth proposed in the plan is around 875 units below the WG 2018 principal projection, approximately 80% of the WG 2018 principal projection.

The Economic and Housing Growth Assessment (EGHA) was prepared by consultants Turley in association with SQW and Edge analytics using a common methodology for both NPTC and Swansea Council to address key considerations when developing a plan's growth strategy set out in PPW and the DPM.

The background evidence identifies various growth option scenarios which were distilled down to seven growth options, as set out in Table 6.1.1 of the LDP. The preferred housing requirement is based on an 'Adjusted Supplementary' approach which facilitates the most positive economic forecast reflecting a more ambitious assumption around future investment and assumes a higher level of growth arising from further investment opportunities associated with the Celtic Freeport. This relates to a projected job growth of 237/year, 85/year above the 2018 WG principal projection.

The scale of growth is considered by the Council to be compatible with Future Wales and the role the authority plays within the wider South-West region, specifically the National Growth Areas set out in Future Wales and the ambition of the South-West Wales Growth Deal.

The WG note that the existing Coed Darcy development is not included in the housing supply, on the basis of delivery issues. However, it could be that potentially up to 500 units may be possible to come forward over the plan period, depending on demonstrating robust delivery. If these additional units could come forward this would increase the housing supply to within 200 units of the WG 2018 principal projections. This could better reflect the National Growth Area status, albeit **the Council would be reliant on the developer to provide this evidence to support this position.**

**The Welsh Government does not object to the level of housing proposed in the plan.**

**Jobs:** The Council's Adjusted Supplementary growth option results in a requirement for 3,555 new jobs (237 p/a) over the plan period. This equates to a total of 57ha of land over the plan period.

The WG notes that the proposed job growth in the plan is above 152 p/a (2,280 jobs over the plan period). However, the plan has factored in a potential increase in the activity arriving from the Freeport designation, as well as reflecting on recent events at Tata Steel. The WG consider that planning positively and proactively to address recent economic events is appropriate. The WG are

also aware there are sufficient underused/vacant sites, as well as WG land at the Baglan Energy Park which could be an added driver for delivery.

**The Welsh Government has no significant concerns with the level of homes or jobs proposed in the plan, which is in general conformity with Future Wales.**

### **Affordable Housing Provision**

The Draft LHMA (2023) identifies that for the period 2021-2036, there is a need for 2,465 new affordable homes. This is based on 361/yr over the first 5 years and 66 p/a over the remaining 10 years. The split between social rented accommodation and intermediate rented housing is at this point unclear and will need to be defined by deposit stage.

The Local Housing Market Assessment (LHMA) adopts the 8 market areas approach currently used by the Council. It calculates affordable housing need over the replacement plan period using the 'policy neutral' Welsh Government 2018 Principal Projection and the preferred growth option (10-year build rate). The calculation of affordable housing need projected against a 10-year dwelling-led scenario results in a requirement for 2,465 affordable homes over the plan period (164 p/a).

The plan (Policy SP8) does **not identify a numerical affordable housing target**, but paragraph 8.10.6 of the plan refers to 164 p/a, equating to 2,460 units over the plan period (the difference between this figure and the previous paragraph, 5 units, is due to rounding up/down.) **The plan will need to set a numerical affordable housing target by deposit stage.** Reference is made to detailed policies and proposals will be provided in the Deposit Plan setting out thresholds, targets and site allocations and will be based on the outcome of the emerging evidence on development viability work.

**On the basis of the above comments, the Welsh Government reserves the right to comment in further detail at the deposit stage.**

**Affordable Housing Led Sites** - To deliver additional affordable housing above which market led housing can provide, PPW encourages the provision of affordable housing led developments that provide a minimum of 50% affordable housing. These sites would be in addition to the market housing led requirement and identified in the LDP. This policy approach would be justified by the high level of affordable housing need evidence by the LHMA and must be accompanied by additional control over the land by the local planning authority to ensure effective delivery. Evidence should include ownership of the land, a binding legal agreement where the land is in private ownership, or a resolution of the council to use compulsory purchase powers. **At present the plan is unclear if, or where such sites could be identified. Such an approach for this plan would provide a valuable contribution to the high level of affordable housing need identified in the plan and would be supported.**

Affordable housing led sites that have a market element to them must be located within a settlement boundary in order to comply with the requirements in TAN 2. Only 100% affordable housing exception sites can be located outside a settlement boundary where they comply with PPW/TAN and any threshold/policy requirements set in the development plan. **The approach to affordable housing led developments, their scale and location requires clarification. The plan could make a stronger emphasis on delivering affordable housing led sites.**

### **Delivery and Implementation**

In line with key requirements in PPW, the DPM Edition 3 (Chapter 5) also contains guidance on the requirements in respect of the delivery and implementation of plans. The Deposit Plan should set out site-specific details for significant sites for the plan that include general phasing timescales, key infrastructure requirements, placemaking principles (including concept / schematic masterplans), constraints, and developer requirements, where appropriate.

The Council will also need to demonstrate that these key sites and all other housing components are deliverable through a housing trajectory prepared by the Council and Housing Stakeholder Group. Statements of Common Ground for significant allocations, especially those that have 'rolled over' from the adopted plan, would be advantageous to demonstrate the sites are deliverable in the timescales set out.

**The Deposit plan will need to be supported by a high-level affordable housing study and site-specific viability appraisals for significant sites, where appropriate. All viability work must be prepared in conjunction with the Viability Steering Group and site-specific promoters taking into account relevant infrastructure requirements.**

### **Gypsy and Travellers**

The Council prepared a Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment (GTAA) in accordance with part 3 of the Housing (Wales) Act 2014 during the course of 2021. The GTAA was submitted in 2022 and following WG approval, was published in June 2024. The GTAA (2022) identified a need for 0 pitches in the short term and 10 pitches in the long term with no need for transit site provision or temporary stopping places. The Welsh Government is of the view that the total number of pitches should be met within the plan period.

**At Deposit stage the authority must meet its statutory duty and comply with requirements in PPW (4.2.35), Circular 005/2018 (paragraph 35) and the DPM Edition 3 (5.80-5.85) to allocate sufficient and deliverable sites in the plan for unmet gypsy and traveller need.** The Council will also need to ensure that any sites are supported by a transparent and robust site selection process that aligns with the requirements of Circular 005/2018 and any relevant guidance. The views of the relevant statutory bodies must also be agreed before Deposit Stage with no outstanding objections to the delivery of the sites.

### **Renewable Energy**

Future Wales identifies Pre-Assessed Areas for Wind Energy where the Welsh Government has already modelled the likely impact on the landscape and has found them to be capable of accommodating development in an acceptable way. There is a presumption in favour of large-scale wind energy development (including repowering) in these areas, subject to the criteria in Future Wales (FW) Policy 18. Where those developments are >10Mw they will be considered by Ministers in accordance with the policies in FW. **The pre-assessed Area 9 should be reflected in the plan.**

It is welcome that the Renewable Energy Assessment has considered BMV policy, specifically for solar PV, and use of the Predictive ALC Map. The assessment would benefit from referencing the clarification provided in the DCPO letter of 1st March 2022 in respect of solar PV and BMV agricultural land for completeness.

The constraints assessment for onshore wind potential is unclear if peat soils and 'irreplaceable' peatland habitats have been considered. Clarification will be expected for deposit stage. We recommend that the Peatland of Wales Evidence Score Map<sup>[1]</sup> is used as the evidence base for the initial assessment.

### **BMV Agricultural Land**

The LPA has produced a specific topic paper on BMV policy application. This is welcomed and has made the assessment of the preferred strategy much clearer – we would recommend all LPA's take this approach going forward. The paper covers the policy, relevant guidance and the amount and distribution of BMV land in the LPA using the Predictive ALC map.

The topic paper is clear on the application of BMV policy in the Key Site and Candidate site assessment process of the LDP linking back to the ISA Criteria 8(k). The paper would benefit, for

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[1] [https://datamap.gov.wales/layers/geonode:peatlands\\_of\\_wales\\_evidence\\_2nss](https://datamap.gov.wales/layers/geonode:peatlands_of_wales_evidence_2nss)



Deposit stage, commentary on the application of BMV policy in the spatial strategy for completeness. This would demonstrate how the policy has been applied to the entire LDP development process.

In line with published departmental guidance, the Key Site (Coed Hirwaun, Margam – approx. 33ha of BMV) has been identified as containing Predictive BMV agricultural land, have been surveyed in full detail. The report for the LDP as well as a number of proposed candidate site ALC surveys is currently being validated. The LPA has engaged with the Welsh Government at an early stage in the plan development, for land quality and policy application advice and technical validation of surveys. In conclusion, it is the Welsh Government is of the view that the LPA has so far demonstrated a sensible and pragmatic approach to considering BMV loss in the context of national planning policy, and on that basis **no objection** is offered at this stage.

### **Minerals**

Whilst it is noted that the general principles regarding Minerals supply, buffer zones, land-bank etc. are referenced in Policy SP13, the deposit plan will need to add further clarity to ensure it fully complies with PPW and relevant MTANs.

### **ISA and Evidence Base**

Agricultural land quality is considered under Criteria 8 (k). The ISA is clear on the application of BMV policy, evidence base, and the weight given in the assessment both for the Preferred Strategy, Objectives and initial candidate site assessment process.

### **Welsh Language**

Assessing the impacts on issues such as the Welsh language should be fully aligned with the development of the plan/strategy early in the plan making process. WG note that further policies will be included in the deposit plan and reserve the right to comment more fully at a later stage.