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Dear Bob,

Pembrokeshire County Council – Replacement Local Development Plan (LDP) Second Deposit Plan Consultation: Welsh Government Response

Thank you for consulting the Welsh Government on the Pembrokeshire County Council Replacement Local Development Plan (LDP) – Second Deposit Plan. 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.

National planning policies are set out in Planning Policy Wales (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 Second Deposit Plan 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 sets out the WG comments on specific issues and how they have, or have not, been addressed in response to our previous representations.** Collectively, our comments are as follows:

Annex 1 – General Conformity with Future Wales

- Regional Collaboration - Further clarity would be beneficial

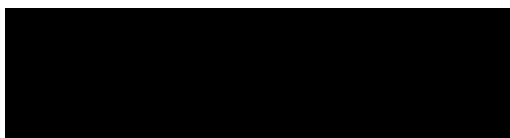
Annex 2 – Current WG Response to 2nd Deposit Replacement LDP

- Housing Growth Level
- Delivery of Key Sites
- Housing Trajectory
- Affordable Housing
- Spatial Distribution and Settlement Hierarchy
- Gypsy and Travellers
- Employment Provision
- Haven Waterway Enterprise Zone
- Best and Most Versatile Agricultural Land (BMV)
- Renewable Energy & 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,

A large black rectangular box redacting the signature of Neil Hemington.

Neil Hemington
Chief Planner Welsh Government

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

The Welsh Government is of the opinion that the Pembrokeshire County Council Replacement Local Development Plan (2022-2037) Second Deposit Plan 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. The Welsh Government supports the Swansea Bay City Deal but it is currently unclear how the wider region and adjoining Local Authorities have been involved in shaping the scale of choices made in the plan. The plan would benefit from further evidence to demonstrate how regional collaboration has influenced the scale of growth in Pembrokeshire.

Annex 1 - Statement of General Conformity

Reasons

Future Wales places emphasis on the development of Regional 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 Regional Growth Areas to respond to the climate change and biodiversity emergencies, making the best use of resources.

Policy 1 and Policy 29 of Future Wales states that the regional growth areas centred around the Haven Towns will be the main focus for growth and investment in the region, strategic diagram (p145). The plans spatial strategy aligns with this approach.

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. The Welsh Government supports the Swansea Bay City Deal providing opportunities to focus on increasing economic prosperity through joint working. However, **it could be clearer how the wider region, particularly Pembrokeshire National Park Authority, Carmarthenshire and Ceredigion have been involved in shaping and agreeing the scale and spatial choices made and the consequences of any decisions taken by Pembrokeshire for other plans in the region and future SDP, including not prejudicing future options.**

The WG notes a background has been prepared on wider working, but this primarily relates to the neighbouring National Park Authority and not the wider region. Further articulation would assist in justifying the role that Pembrokeshire has in the region and assist the examination process. This is **not** a general conformity issue.

On balance, (and subject to the comments in Annex 2), the Welsh Government considers that the Second Deposit Plan, 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 10:	International Connectivity
Policy 12:	Regional Connectivity
Policies 17 & 18:	Renewable and Low Carbon Energy Developments of National Significance
Policy 29:	Regional Growth Areas – Carmarthen and the Haven Towns
Policy 32:	Haven Waterway and Energy

Annex 2 explains how our previous representations to the first Deposit Plan have been addressed.

Annex 2 – Current WG Response as Opposed to Previous Deposit Replacement LDP

Housing Growth Level

The plan seeks to deliver a requirement 5,840 homes and 1,970 new jobs (plus an additional initial 1,000 through the Freeport) over the 16 year plan period, with a housing provision for 6,425 dwellings. The authority commissioned Edge Analytics to consider a range of demographic forecasts (with an update paper 'Housing Requirement Background Paper' published 2023) based on the Welsh Government's 2018 based population/household projections as well as dwelling-led scenarios and an employment-led forecast, to address Welsh Government's previous concerns. This also took into account the 2021 Census results, the 2022 Local Housing Market Assessment and the results from the authority's annual housing surveys.

The plan requirement of 5,840 dwellings in Policy SP2 (365/annum) is closely aligned with the past five years (413/annum – 2014/2019) and 10 years (378/annum – 2009/2019) average build rates. In Pembrokeshire, natural growth is negative with deaths exceeding births. The latest 2018 based household projections indicate an average build rate of approximately 271 dwellings/annum, resulting in a total of approximately 4,336 dwellings over the plan period. The plan requirement is set 1,504 dwellings higher than the 2018 based projections.

The Haven Towns (Haverfordwest, Milford Haven, Pembroke and Pembroke Dock) are identified in Future Wales (Policy 29) as part of a Regional Growth Area which supports sustainable growth and regeneration in Carmarthen and the Pembrokeshire Haven Towns. These areas will be a focus for managed growth, reflecting their important sub-regional functions and strong links to the national growth areas of Swansea Bay and Llanelli. Local Development Plans should recognise the roles of these places as a focus for housing, employment, tourism, public transport and key services within their wider areas and support their continued function as focal points for sub-regional growth.

- Policy 10 (FW) identifies the Haven Waterway (including the Ports of Pembroke Dock and Milford Haven) and Fishguard Port as 'strategic gateways to facilitate international connectivity'.
- Policy 32 (FW) specifically relates to the Haven Waterway and states "the Welsh Government supports operations at Haven Waterway and recognises its location for potential new renewable and low carbon energy related development, innovation and investment".

The combination of these policies, as well as the need to deliver on affordable housing issues and address demographic imbalances, the Welsh Government would expect the housing requirement level to be above the 2018 projections. **The Welsh Government supports a housing requirement above the 2018 WG projections, the exact level is for the LPA to justify.**

Delivery of Key Sites

The plan needs to demonstrate the key sites can be delivered within the plan period. There are a number of sites which have been 'rolled forward' from LDP1. To add support to the inclusion of the strategic housing site at Slade Lane South (330 within the plan period and a further 680 beyond the plan period) the LPA would benefit from providing a Statement of Common Ground demonstrating how Pobl (housing association) and Welsh Government (who have a strong interest/ownership of parts of the site) plus others are on board and the timing of when units can be delivered on the ground. The Housing Trajectory (Appendix 2, Table B) shows an amended delivery rate over the previous deposit version which appears realistic and achievable. **The Welsh Government is content that previous representations have been addressed and the plan is compliant with the DPM and national planning policy**

Housing trajectory

The inclusion of a housing trajectory graph is a national policy requirement (PPW, paragraph 4.2.10). Guidance on how to prepare a trajectory is contained in the Draft Development Plans Manual (DPM, Edition 3, consultation, June 2019). The Welsh Government notes the Deposit plan does contain a trajectory in table and graph form (Appendix 2) which is supported.

With regards to the content of the trajectory, Welsh Government notes the 'Large Windfall Completions' have been zeroed for two years, in line with the DPM. Whilst the remaining completions in 2033 ideally should be zero (Row N, 2033) there is a deviation of 28 units over the provision in policy SP2. However, this is less than 0.5% of the overall provision and is not considered of concern. **The Welsh Government is content that previous representations have been addressed and the plan is compliant with the DPM and national planning policy.**

Affordable Housing

The DPM identifies the LHMA as a core piece of evidence that sets out the level and type of housing need in an area. The LHMA was published July 2021 and identifies a need for 2,832 affordable homes (177 units per annum) over the plan period. The plan is seeking to deliver 2,000 affordable homes over the plan period (policy SP3, at 125/yr).

It is unclear if the 80% social rent and 20% intermediate housing tested in the viability assessment (presumably reflecting the previous Area Summary Paper) is the correct tenure split and should be clarified. This could impact on findings in the viability assessment including the plan-wide and site-specific affordable housing targets in Policies GN16 & 20. Further clarity on this aspect would be beneficial.

The Welsh Government is content that previous representations have been addressed and the plan is compliant with the DPM and national planning policy, albeit with clarity on the tenure split and avoiding issues regarding viability assessments.

Spatial Distribution and Settlement Hierarchy

The spatial strategy aims to deliver 60% of homes in the urban areas (identified in Tier 1 of the settlement hierarchy), and 40% to the rural settlements. This is split down by settlement tier (Appendix 2, Table F). The Draft Development Plans Manual (Edition 3) states authorities include Table 16, 'Summary of spatial distribution of housing' to demonstrate how all the components of supply (allocations, commitments and windfalls) make up the total plan provision and how they will be spatially distributed.

The LDP has a remaining reference to 'hamlets' (paragraph 5.83) which should be deleted as these are no longer referenced in the settlement hierarchy.

The Welsh Government is content that previous representations have been addressed and the plan is compliant with the DPM and national planning policy.

Gypsy and Traveller Site(s)

The previous representation by the Welsh Government to the first deposit LDP raised significant concerns regarding the lack of provision of sites to meet the identified level of need. This position is now reversed. Policy SP4 of the plan (plus paragraphs 4.20 – 4.23) identify a level of need over the plan period of 39 pitches. It is noted that planning permission has been granted for 14 pitches, reducing the residual need to 25 pitches within the plan period.

Policy GN24 identifies allocations totalling 55 pitches, 30 pitches above the level of need. The Welsh Government supports this policy as it meets the needs identified in the plan/evidence base (2019 GTAA signed off in 2024). Whilst the date of the evidence base and relationship to the date of the examination could raise questions, the Welsh Government considers there is sufficient flexibility, i.e. overprovision of pitches, to provide confidence in that the level of need will be met. **The Welsh**

Government is content that previous representations have been addressed and the plan is compliant with the DPM and national planning policy. The allocations are shown on the proposals map and will need to demonstrate they are constraint free.

Employment Provision

Policy SP5 allocates 164.91ha of employment land (elements of which have been completed) comprised of 122.16ha on strategic employment sites (Policy SP14) and 42.75ha on local employment sites (Policy GN9). The two-county economic study identifies that most of the strategic employment sites are key existing sites related to port operations. These existing sites are not new allocations and have been identified in a safeguarding policy (Policy SP15) totalling 868.57ha. This complies with Table 22 of the Draft Development Plans Manual (Edition 3).

Employment Provision Policy SP5 identifies the delivery of 1,970 jobs over the plan period, plus an additional 1,000 jobs from the Celtic Freeport, with growth projected in health, accommodation and food services and retail. **The Welsh Government is content that previous representations have been addressed and the plan is compliant with the DPM and national planning policy.**

Haven Waterway Enterprise Zone

The Haven Waterway Enterprise Zone in Pembrokeshire has been designated by the Welsh Government based on existing and potential new energy sites. The importance of the Enterprise Zone and Celtic Freeport are recognised by the authority through Policy SP13 Port and Energy Related Development. Given its importance the boundaries of the Enterprise Zone (plus potentially the Celtic Freeport) must be shown on the Proposals Map. **The Welsh Government is content that previous representations appear to have been addressed, although further clarification that all spatial areas to which policy SP13 apply are identified, thereby ensuring the plan is compliant with the DPM and national planning policy would be beneficial.**

Best and Most Versatile Agricultural Land

National planning policy is clear that agricultural land of grades 1, 2 and 3a, the best and most versatile land should be conserved as a finite resource. Policy GN1, point 4 notes the need for an ALC survey. However, this is not as per the flow chart in the WG Departmental published guidance – only if the predictive ALC map notes BMV on site (Grade 1, 2 or Subgrade 3a) is a survey required. **This should be amended** (in line with guidance on the Predictive ALC map) in GN1, section 5.4 and in numerous other documents (e.g. Candidate Site Assessment Criteria and ALC Topic Paper 1 & 2). Section 5.6 - Soils (including Peat) and ‘considerable weight’ to BMV policy are noted. However, footnote 25 is now outdated and should now refer to the Peatlands of Wales (2022) evidence score map via DataMap Wales.

Policy **GN 6 - Section 5.55 needs reviewing** in line with the updates to PPW Chapter 6 to consider impacts to peat soils and peatland habitats in site selection and infrastructure siting for wind energy projects. The main points are:

- Use of the Peatlands of Wales evidence score map as a first step;
- Consideration of the ‘stepwise approach (6.4.15 1a and 1b, irreplaceable habitats including the natural resources which underpin them);
- Consideration of peatland paragraph 6.4.34.

The WG welcome the reference to WG Synthesis of Soil Evidence (2022). The WG has previously published data on agricultural land quality (2020) for all LPAs in Wales, however this has not been referenced as background data for the plan and the application of policy. Whilst the LPA has used the Predictive ALC Map, the WG has previously (2019, 2021 and 2022) provided LPA directly with agricultural land quality information for sites being considered, as well as advice and guidance on use of the Predictive ALC Map and the need to commission detailed ALC field surveys where BMV is an issue for consideration. **It is unclear how this is used in the evidence base and SA.**

It is unclear on the extent and distribution of peat soils in the LPA and how the SA has considered this in the assessment. The SA references the Unified Peatland Map (UPM) which was superseded by the Peatlands of Wales Evidence Score maps in 2022. It is not clear what the BMV or peatland resource is for the LPA and relationship to the LDP.

The LPA has produced a **ALC Topic Paper (Part 1 and 2)** which should clearly demonstrate and summarise how BMV policy has been applied and addressed throughout the development of the LDP – this is not the case. **The paper should be reviewed** to include a summary of how BMV policy is evidenced and justified in the plan, from sustainability appraisal, the spatial strategy and site selection assessments for allocations and candidate sites (what weight has been given to BMV land; how BMV policy has been applied to the spatial strategy and site selection). None of the allocated sites involving BMV (approx. 200 Ha?) has evidence provided of ALC field survey work undertaken to confirm grading. **This is not in line with published WG departmental guidance and requires reviewing. The Council must be able to robustly justify any loss of BMV land linked to the search sequence in Planning Policy Wales (PPW) and findings in the SA.**

Renewable Energy & Minerals

The Council needs to clarify the choices made in relation to renewable energy and the DCPO letter of 1/03/2022 by the then Minister for Climate Change in respect of Solar PV developments and BMV as well as updates to Chapter 6 of PPW in respect of the 'stepwise approach' to peat soils and peatland habitats as well and para 6.4.34 regarding peatland.

Apart from this clarification, the Welsh Government is content that previous representations have been addressed and the plan is compliant with the DPM and national planning policy.

Welsh Language Impacts

Policy SP19 identifies areas of Welsh language sensitivity where 18% or more of the population is Welsh speaking. The authority should explain how the scale of housing growth proposed in the plan does not adversely impact on the Welsh Language.

Historic Environment

Section 5.148 refers to the Historic Environment (Wales) Act 2016 and this has now been replaced by the Historic Environment (Wales) Act 2023. Also, sections 5.148 and 5.153 refers to Scheduled Ancient Monuments, they should refer to scheduled monuments, especially as the 2023 Act does not mention Ancient Monuments at all.