

Initial HRA Screening Report

Adroddiad Sgrinio

Cychwynnol ARhC



Replacement Local Development Plan 2018-2033
Cynllun Datblygu Lleol Newydd 2018 - 2033
January / Ionawr 2020

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1.0 Introduction

Background

1.1 Blaenau Gwent is undertaking a Habitat Regulations Appraisal (HRA) for the Revised Blaenau Gwent Local Development Plan (LDP). This report outlines the proposed approach to undertaking the HRA and identifies sites designated at the European level of relevance to the revised LDP and to this HRA process.

1.2 This report is the first stage of a HRA process to identify, assess and address any likely significant effects (LSE) on European sites from the revised LDP.

Purpose

1.3 This report seeks the views of the Statutory Nature Conservation Body (SNCB) for Wales namely Natural Resources Wales on the list of sites to be taken forward for a legally compliant HRA of the Revised Blaenau Gwent Local Development Plan. The HRA is required to assess whether there would be a likely significant effect (LSE) from the Revised LDP on any European sites as required by Regulations 63 of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017.

The Revised Blaenau Gwent Local Development Plan

1.4 Blaenau Gwent adopted its current Local Development Plan in November 2012. Since then it has undertaken regular monitoring and 4 years following adoption undertook a full review of its Plan. This review identified the need to revise the Plan following the full revision process.

Statutory Requirements

1.5 In the UK the European Directive (Directive 92/43/EEC on the Conservation of Natural Habitats and Wild Flora and Fauna) (European Commission, 1992) has been transposed into national legislation in the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (the Habitat Regulations). The aim of the Habitats Directive and the Habitat Regulations is to contribute to biodiversity through the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora.

1.6 In accordance with Article 6.3 of the Habitats Directive and Regulations 63 of the Habitat Regulations, before deciding to authorise an emerging plan or project a competent authority is required to assess whether this would

have a 'likely significant effect' (LSE) on any European sites included in the Natura 2000 network namely:

- Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) designated under European Council Directive 92/43/EEC(a) on the Conservation of Natural Habitats and of Wild Fauna and Flora (the Habitats Directive) (European Commission, 1992); and
- Special Protection Areas (SPA) designated under European Council Directive 79/409/EEC on the Conservation of Wild Birds (the Bird Directive) (European Commission, 2009)

1.7 The Welsh Assembly expects authorities in Wales to treat all Ramsar sites and proposed SPAs as though they were statutory European sites, and they should be treated as such in a HRA. The term 'European Sites' is therefore used in this report to collectively refer to SACs, SPAs, Ramsar sites and pSPAs.

HRA Process

1.8 In accordance with the Habitats Regulations, the HRA process follows a series of stages which will be undertaken for the revised LDP in order to meet with the requirements of the Regulations.

Table 1: Stages in the HRA Process

Stage 1	
Screening for likely significant effect	- Screening will be undertaken for each draft of the emerging Plan (Preferred Strategy and Deposit Plan) - This report identifies relevant international sites in and around the plan/ strategy area
	<i>If no effects likely – report no significant effect (taking advice from NRW as necessary)</i> <i>If effects are judged likely or uncertainty exists – the precautionary principle applies proceed to stage 2</i>
Stage 2	
Appropriate Assessment	- A further level of assessment is needed to consider whether the LDP Review could adversely affect the integrity of one or more European site(s), either alone or in combination with other plans or projects, in view of their established conservation objectives and conservation status - If the potential for adverse effects on site integrity are identified, the Appropriate Assessment should also consider mitigation measures to control the identified impacts in order to avoid adverse effects on site integrity
	<i>If effects or uncertainty remain following the consideration of alternatives and development of mitigations proceed to stage 3</i>
Stage 3	
Procedures where significant effect on integrity of international site remains	Consideration of Alternatives and Imperative Reasons of Overriding Public Interest

1.9 This report is the first stage of the HRA being carried out in respect of the Revised LDP and build upon the HRA carried out for the current Blaenau Gwent Plan (adopted 2012).

1.10 It is intended that the HRA process will run concurrently with the plan making process and form an iterative part of the revised LDP, involving consideration of all emerging policy and site options. As the SNCB for Wales, Natural Resources Wales will be consulted throughout the process.

2. Identification of Sites

Introduction

2.1 The initial step in the HRA process is to identify and agree a list of European sites to be considered when identifying the potential likely significant effects (LSE) to arise as a result of the revised LDP. This includes European sites within Blaenau Gwent and in the surrounding zone of influence.

2.2 Plans and projects can have spatial implications that extend beyond the intended plan boundaries. In particular, it is recognised that distance in itself is not a definitive guide to the likelihood or severity of an impact, inaccessibility/remoteness is typically more relevant as factors such as the prevailing wind direction, river drainage paths, and ground water flow direction will all have a bearing on the relative distance at which an impact can occur. This means that a plan for development some distance away from a European Site could still have effects on the site and therefore, needs to be considered as part of the screening process.

2.3 The use of a 15km search area is the same approach as was agreed by NRW for the current LDP.

Site Identification Process

2.4 All European sites within Blaenau Gwent and within 15km of Blaenau Gwent's boundaries have been identified using current GIS datasets (October 2018).

European Sites identified

2.5 There are no sites within Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council area (excluding the Brecon Beacons National Park). There are however, 9 within a 15km buffer. Table 2 identifies details of the sites and appendix 1 provides a map of the sites.

Table 2: Sites within 15km of Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council (excluding Brecon Beacons National Park)

Site Name	Status	Site Code	Distance from BGCBC	Area (ha)	Qualifying features
Cwm Clydach Woodlands	SAC	UK0030127	Adjacent	28.81	<i>Asperulo-Fagetum</i> beech forests; Atlantic acidophilous beech forests with <i>Ilex</i> and sometimes also <i>Taxus</i> in the shrublayer (<i>Quercion roburi-petraeae</i> or <i>Ilici-Fagenion</i>)
Usk Bat Site	SAC	UK0014784	Adjacent	1686.4	European dry heaths Degraded raised bogs still capable of natural regeneration Blanket bogs* Calcareous rocky slopes with chasmophytic vegetation Caves not open to the public Tilio-Acerion forests of slopes, screes and ravines* Lesser horseshoe bat (<i>Rhinolophus hipposideros</i>)
River Usk	SAC	UK0013007	3.9 km	1007.7	Watercourses of plain to montane levels with the <i>Ranunculion fluitantis</i> and <i>Callitricho-Batrachion</i> vegetation; Sea lamprey (<i>Petromyzon marinus</i>); Brook lamprey (<i>Lampetra planeri</i>); River lamprey (<i>Lampetra fluviatilis</i>); Twaite shad (<i>Alosa fallax</i>); Atlantic salmon (<i>Salmo salar</i>); Bullhead (<i>Cottus gobio</i>); Otter (<i>Lutra lutra</i>) Allis shad (<i>Alosa alosa</i>)
Aberbargoed Grassland	SAC	UK0030071	4.4 km	39.78	<i>Molinia</i> meadows on calcareous, peaty or clayey-silt-laden soils (<i>Molinion caeruleae</i>); Marsh fritillary butterfly <i>Euphydryas</i> (<i>Eurodryas</i> , <i>Hypodryas</i>) aurinia
Sugar Loaf Woodlands	SAC	UK0030072	7.9 km	173.84	Old sessile oak woods with <i>Ilex</i> and <i>Blechnum</i> in the British Isles
Brecon Beacons	SAC	UK0030096	10.1 km	269.67	Calcareous rocky slopes with chasmophytic vegetation; Siliceous rocky slopes with chasmophytic vegetation; European dry heaths; Hydrophilous tall herb fringe communities of plains and of the

					montane to alpine levels
Llangorse Lake/Llyn Syfaddan	SAC	UK0012985	10.1 km	215.64	Natural eutrophic lakes with <i>Magnopotamion</i> or <i>Hydrocharition</i> -type vegetation
Coed Y Cerrig	SAC	UK0012766	11.6 km	9.1	Alluvial forests with <i>Alnus glutinosa</i> and <i>Fraxinus excelsior</i> (<i>Alnion incanae</i> , <i>Salicion albae</i>)
Cwm Cadlan	SAC	UK0013585	12.9 km	83.93	Molina meadows on calcareous, peaty or clayey-silt-laden soils (<i>Molinion caeruleae</i>) Alkaline fens

* *Priority Species*

2.6 These are the same European sites that were considered in the HRA of the current Blaenau Gwent LDP.

3.0 Conclusion

Overview

3.1. This report has outlined the requirement to undertake a Habitat Regulation Appraisal in respect of the Revised Blaenau Gwent LDP. The report has also identified relevant European sites (including Ramsar sites and proposed Special Protection Areas) for consideration within the HRA process.

3.2 Nine European sites (all SACs) have been identified to take forward to the next stage of the HRA process. All of these sites are outside of the Blaenau Gwent Local Planning Authority boundary but within a 15km boundary. These are the same sites that were considered previously in the HRA carried out for the current Blaenau Gwent LDP (adopted Nov 2012).

Questions for Natural Resources Wales

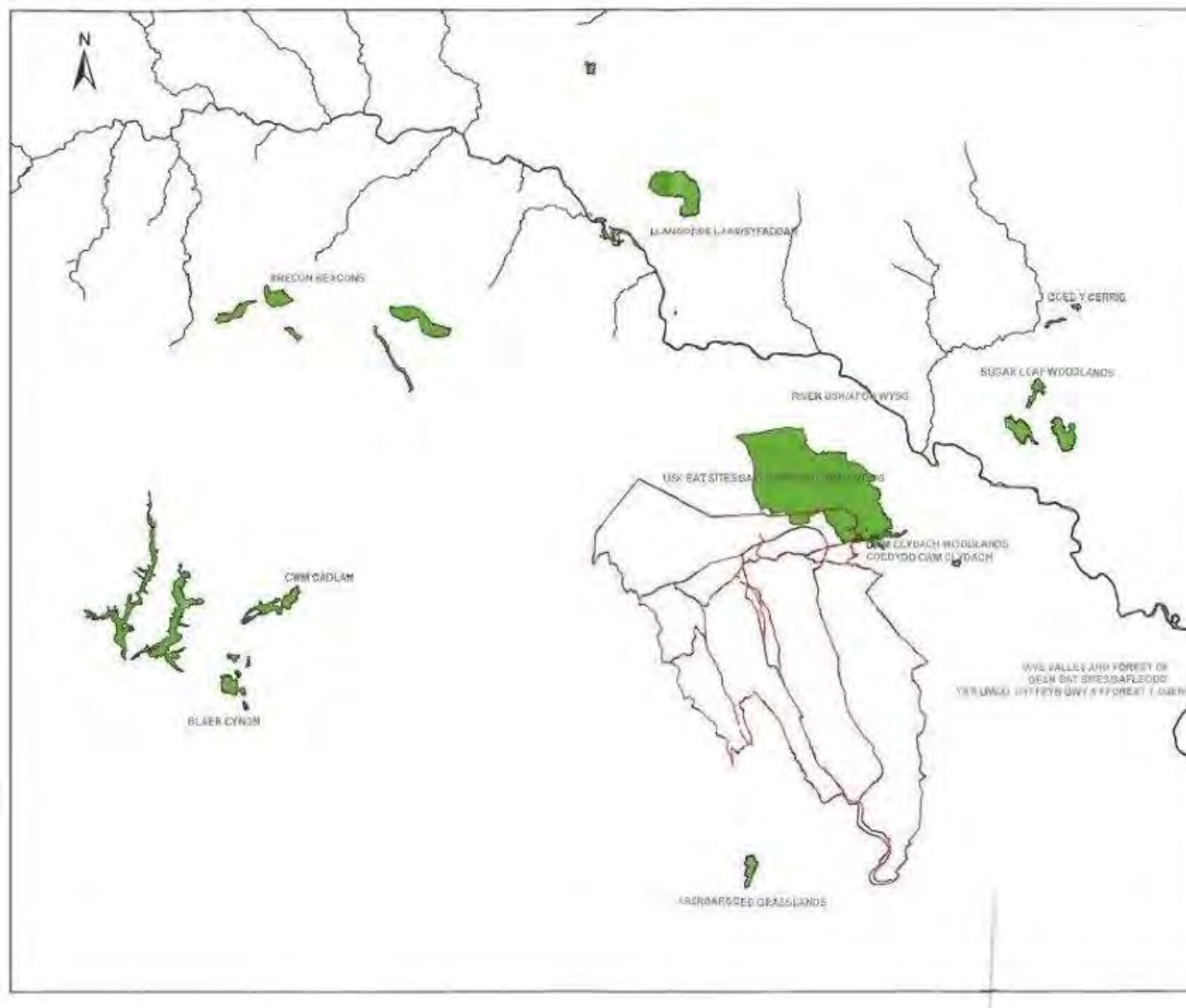
3.3 NRW as the Statutory Nature Conservation Body (SNCB) for Wales, are requested to confirm whether:

- NRW is content for a 15km radius to be adopted around the Blaenau Gwent LPA authority boundary as the zone of influence for any LSE

- The sites identified are correct

Next Steps

3.4 Reflecting the requirements of the Habitat Regulations, iterative HRA Screening Reports will accompany the Preferred Strategy and Deposit Plan. These will determine whether any further stages of the HRA process that is an Appropriate Assessment will need to be undertaken.





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