

Project Profile

Taff Ely Wind Farm, Rhondda Cynon Taf: Habitat and Construction Management Plans

Background

Taff Ely Wind Farm is a 20 turbine scheme that is owned by Beaufort Wind Ltd and operated by RWE Innogy UK Ltd (RWE), and located near Tonyrefail, Rhondda, South Wales. The wind farm was built in 1993 and typically generates enough electricity to meet the needs of over 4,250 homes every year.

Planning permission was granted for the repowering of the site in January 2015. The repowering involves the replacement of the existing 20 turbines with 7 new, larger machines and requires the construction of a new access track and associated infrastructure.

BSG Ecology's Role in the Project

BSG Ecology was commissioned to help discharge a planning condition attached to the consent for the repowering scheme.

The condition required a Construction Management Plan (CMP) to establish protocols to mitigate potential construction phase impacts on existing ecological interests and the production of a Habitat Management Plan (HMP) covering the site post construction and an area of land identified for management. A particular focus of both plans was avoiding and reducing impacts on peatland habitats. As part of the planning submission RWE gave a commitment to restore an area of peatland which would not be impacted by the works and the HMP and CMP provide details of the restoration strategy. Approach

BSG Ecology undertook desk top reviews of existing information on the scheme and completed site visits in order to gain a thorough understanding of the hydrology of the site and the area proposed for restoration.

Close working with RWE, the landowner and client team hydrologists and engineers was required to ensure that the plans clearly set out achievable ways of minimising impacts to peat during construction. The feasibility of restoring the area of degraded peat was also explored, with the input led by in-house staff with particular expertise in peatland habitats and their management. Consultation with peatland specialists from Natural Resources Wales (NRW) and the Rhondda Cynon Taf

County Borough Council ecologist was also undertaken in order to agree the detail of the CMP and HMP.

Findings in brief

The desk top review, site visits and consultation were brought together to inform the production of the respective plans.

Various methods were adopted for the peatland restoration including filling in selected drainage ditches and creating peat dams to encourage the rewetting of the area. Historically excavated peat and the peat which will be excavated to construct the access track will be utilised to fill in the ditches.

The CMP also provided practical solutions to avoid potential impacts upon a range of protected species including nesting birds, otters, reptiles and bats. A range of 'contractor friendly' species briefing notes were produced to accompany the CMP. These will be used in combination with tool box talks to help educate contractors on the sensitive areas of the site during construction.

Marsh fritillary (butterfly) is the flagship species for the HMP. The Rhos Tonyrefail Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) notified for the presence of marsh fritillary is located in very close proximity to Taff Ely. A key element of the HMP was to slightly change the grazing regime within selected areas of the site to enable the food plant of the butterfly: devils bit scabious to flourish to encourage the expansion of the range of the butterfly. The plan also included details of a post construction monitoring strategy to establish the success of the peatland restoration scheme and the targeted marsh fritillary enhancement work. There are specific monitoring objectives of the establishment of devils bit scabious and marsh fritillary butterfly. Provisions are also made for any necessary remedial action to address any issues identified through monitoring.

Outcome

The final Habitat Management Plan and Construction Management Plan have both been agreed by NRW and Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council.