

Planning application C12/1451/15/LL - Glyn Rhonwy pump storage scheme

Objection from Cymdeithas Eryri - Snowdonia Society

The Snowdonia Society is a member-based charity committed to protecting, enhancing and celebrating Snowdonia National Park. I am writing on behalf of our 1600 members to express concerns about the above planning application. The Snowdonia Society does not object to the principle of a pump storage scheme at the Glyn Rhonwy site, recognising the need for energy storage solutions and the potential for employment. However, the organisation objects to the current proposal given that insufficient information is provided by the applicant in the documents available for public consultation about the construction details of specific features of the scheme, and in particular the aesthetic impact, as well as the complete absence of any information relating to the potential transmission options of the power generated.

As a charity committed to Snowdonia National Park, we are particularly concerned about the aesthetic impact of the top dam on views from Moel Eilio, Cefn Du and Yr Wyddfa. Approximate dimensions for the dam at Q1 are provided in the planning statement, which also refers to sympathetic landscaping of dams and slate mounds in accordance with guidance, however this is not sufficient detail given the potential impact of the construction, which at 510m long is substantial. There is no detail given as to which guidance exactly is referred to and who will produce this guidance. The Design and Access statement explains that, 'The dams have been designed to reflect, and tie into, the existing gradients and contours of the quarry and hill side landscape as far as possible', yet again this lacks specific detail and is so vague as to provide no obligation on the developer to ensure the construction is sympathetic to its landscape setting. The Snowdonia Society believes that the applicant should provide further binding information about the landscaping and construction materials for the Q1 dam, and other significant construction features, and these should be conditioned in any planning consent granted.

Of further concern is the 24-hour lighting proposed for the site, taking into account its location just 1km from the Snowdonia National Park boundary, a highly protected landscape recognised for its special qualities, one of which is limited light pollution. Any lighting required should be minimal, efficient and carefully designed to ensure the dark skies of this wild rural area are not impacted. Again, it is felt that this should be conditioned in any planning consent granted in order to ensure compliance by any future developer. No information is given about the construction of the dams or the proposed lighting in planning application document A01.

The impact of the scheme on the fragile ecology and ecosystem of Llyn Padarn SSSI also fails to be addressed sufficiently in the application. It is acknowledged that water will be both extracted from and released into Llyn Padarn, a habitat of international importance, and yet no detail is given as to how any potential detrimental impacts will be avoided. The pumping station will be situated in Llyn Padarn Country Park, on the shore of the lake, and yet again the application gives no information with regard to the size, appearance, access and operations of the pumping station, only a grid reference specifying a location. All these aspects are of crucial importance in an area renowned for its wildlife and recreational appeal. In the view of the Snowdonia Society, it is impossible to support the application without further specific detail as to how potentially catastrophic impacts of the pumping station and the extraction and release of water from/into the SSSI will be avoided.

Importantly, the Snowdonia Society strongly believes that it is impossible to give support for the scheme without any information about the necessary grid connections. This is reinforced by Gwynedd's own policies as laid down in the Unitary Development Plan.

Policy C27 of the UDP states that for any renewable or sustainable energy scheme ancillary equipment and connection lines must not cause significant harm to the visual quality of the landscape. Without any information as to the options available for transmission, we contend that it is impossible to be reassured that this is the case.

Also, Policy C6 of the Gwynedd UDP recognises that any development associated with the Glyn Rhonwy site must not adversely affect the outstanding visual and natural environment of its setting. Without information about the grid connection, it is impossible for the planning committee to agree that this will be the case with the current proposal for a pump storage scheme.

In this respect the Snowdonia Society fully supports the views of local individuals, communities and organisations who have expressed concern over the potential negative impacts of transmission options for the power generated. Despite verbal assurances to local communities from both Quarry Battery Company and Councillor Eurig Wyn, the application merely states that the grid connections for the scheme do not form part of the current application.

We are very concerned that in the absence of information the scheme will be granted permission to proceed and that consent for the associated grid connection will not be open to public consultation or will be granted on the basis of consent for the scheme already being in place.

The setting of Llyn Padarn is one of the most celebrated images of Snowdonia and to damage it with overhead power lines or other inappropriate infrastructure would be disastrous for the National Park and the vital tourism industry in the area.

For the reasons outlined above, the planning authority is urged to seek further information from the applicant to ensure that sufficient protection of the landscape and natural environment is guaranteed and, if consent for the scheme is granted in future, to ensure that appropriate binding conditions are in place to ensure that future developers are not free to interpret the loose assertions in the current planning application as they choose. Furthermore, we contend that, in accordance with the Gwynedd UDP, the planning committee cannot justify granting consent to the scheme without information about grid connections and ancillary development. It is urged to seek and make public this information at the earliest possible stage.