

Chapter One

INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND

1.1 In 2008 Enviroparks (Hirwaun) Limited submitted planning applications to Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council (RCT) and Brecon Beacons National Park Authority (BBNPA) for planning permission for development described as follows:

Development of a sustainable waste resource recovery and energy production park comprising 27,562 m² of buildings and structures, including a 10,240 m² building for use class B1 / B2 use; process buildings; a gatehouse and weighbridge; a visitor centre and administration building; a 20 MW_e net capacity combined heat and power plant; with a 40 m ventilation stack; external anaerobic digestion, liquid and gas holding tanks; 30,352 m² of internal roads and hardstandings; vehicular parking; external security lighting; 17,497 m² of landscaping; vehicular ingress and egress from Fifth and Ninth Avenues, and associated utilities infrastructure.

1.2 Planning applications were made to two planning authorities because the boundary between the two crosses the application site. Because the proposals constituted a development requiring an environmental impact assessment (EIA), the applications were accompanied by an Environmental Statement (ES). Planning permission was granted by both authorities on 21 December 2010 (RCT reference 08/1735/10 and BBNPA reference 08/02488/FUL) following the completion of a planning obligations agreement under section 106 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990. As chapter four of this document explains, permission was granted subsequently for various amendments to the approved proposals.

1.3 Since then the planning permissions have been implemented through the construction of the first phase of the development. The operator, which is now called Enviroparks (Wales) Limited (EWL or 'the Applicant') wishes to proceed with the second phase of the development. However, since the original scheme design was prepared in 2008, advances in waste recovery technologies and a much-changed policy and commercial landscape for waste recovery and renewable energy generation have necessitated a review of the original master plan for the Enviroparks site. Revised planning applications have been prepared for the site, and this Environmental Statement Addendum ('the ES Addendum') is submitted alongside these applications to provide an updated assessment of the likely significant environmental effects of the proposals.

THE APPLICANT: ENVIROPARKS (WALES) LIMITED

1.4 EWL is an energy company that developed a concept of co-locating waste recycling, energy recovery and associated commercial operations on the same site or 'park'. The company's approach is to recycle diverse waste streams using integrated advanced technologies to maximise recycling and energy generation with the minimum residual waste and environmental impact.

1.5 Based in Abergavenny, EWL was established with the aim of developing a chain of Enviroparks in the UK. EWL is funded by private investors and investing institutions, notably Zeus Renewables which specialises in investments in renewable energy infrastructure. The directors of EWL formerly developed a battery recycling facility in Ebbw Vale which is the most modern of its kind in Europe and one of only two in the UK. Now employing 135 staff, the plant has become one of largest producers of lead roofing materials worldwide.

THE PROJECT TEAM

1.6 EWL is advised by a team of experienced consultants. Companies working on the project design and EIA for the revised scheme, together with the tasks and specialist issues for which each is responsible, are as follows.

Bouygues Energies and Services – an international engineering company specialising in the turnkey delivery of gasification plants. EWL’s gasification plant at Hirwaun would be the third project of the same design delivered by Bouygues in the UK.

Savills – town and country planning consultant and the EIA coordinator for the project.

Environmental Visage (Envisage) – an environmental consultancy service undertaking the technical assessment of environmental effects, including air quality and transport.

Dawnus – an international civil engineering and construction company based in Swansea.

FBW Engineering – process, mechanical and electrical engineers.

Ion Acoustics – noise and vibration consultants

Pell Frischmann – responsible for the assessment of ground conditions, drainage and flood risk

EPT Partnership – Cardiff-based project architects, responsible for developing the site layout and building designs

IFC Group – an international consultancy specialising in fire safety strategy

Clancy Consulting – a civil and structural consultancy specialising in the design of industrial buildings and infrastructure

Anthony Jellard Associates – Abergavenny-based landscape architects developing landscape designs and maintenance plans

1.7 EWL is also working in partnership with several specialist technology providers to deliver its aims. The combination of technologies brought together by EWL is designed to ensure high levels of efficiency with regard to fuel preparation and electricity production. These technologies are intended to represent Best Available Techniques for the functions they serve.

THE CURRENT APPLICATIONS

1.8 This ES Addendum accompanies planning applications to RCT and BBNPA for the following development:

Amended phase II development and operation of a sustainable waste resource recovery and energy production park, comprising the consolidation of the approved gasification yard and pyrolysis building into a 6,270.43 m² gasification hall; an emissions stack measuring 45 m in height and 3.5 m in diameter; a 2,102.86 m² fuel storage hall and a 378 m² turbine hall for electricity generation; and a 4,824 m² open service yard containing ancillary structures including air-cooled condensers for the gasification plant, ancillary fire water tanks and a fire pumphouse, effluent pumps, gas boosters, transformers and a standby diesel generator and fuel tank, with boundary landscape and planting.

1.9 In accordance with the Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) (Wales) (Amendment) Order 2016, the current proposals were the subject of pre-application consultations. A draft of this ES Addendum was made available in support of the consultation exercise.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT

1.10 Environmental impact assessment (EIA) is a process that aims to improve the environmental design of a development proposal and to provide decision-makers with sufficient information about the environmental impacts of the project.

1.11 An environmental statement (ES) is a report that sets out the results of the EIA process. The ES is submitted with an application for planning permission and provides environmental information about the scheme, including a description of the development, its predicted environmental impacts and the measures proposed to ameliorate any adverse effects.

1.12 Under the Town and Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) (England and Wales) Regulations 1999, the original Enviroparks proposals for the Hirwaun site qualified as a development requiring EIA. An ES was thus submitted with the original planning applications.

1.13 During pre-application discussions with RCT and BBNPA concerning the current proposals it was confirmed that an EIA update was required. The current planning applications are thus accompanied by an ES Addendum, the scope of which is described in detail in chapter six of this document. Because the Town and Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) (Wales) Regulations 2016 recently consolidated the 1999 EIA Regulations and subsequent amending regulations, this ES Addendum complies with relevant provisions of the 2016 EIA Regulations.

1.14 The ES Addendum should be read alongside the original 2008 ES for the Enviroparks development and further environmental information submitted in 2009, both of which are resubmitted alongside the current planning applications. The ES Addendum comprises a main report (this document), appendices presented in a separate lever-arch file, and a separate non-technical summary (NTS). To assist cross-referencing, this addendum follows the same structure as the original ES as follows:

2. Site description
3. Proposed development and land uses
4. Site selection, alternatives and scheme evolution
5. Planning policy context
6. Scoping and consultation
7. Community effects
8. Transport and access
9. Air quality
10. Noise and vibration
11. Ground conditions, drainage and flood risk
12. Landscape and visual effects
13. Ecology
14. Archaeology and cultural heritage
15. Conclusion

1.15 The ES Addendum focuses on changes to the baseline environmental conditions prevalent in the locality, changes to the Enviroparks development as originally consented and changes to policy and regulations that are relevant to the assessment of the proposals. Updates to the original ES are provided only where necessary, and where no material changes of circumstance have been identified, the updated assessment relies on the original ES to avoid duplication. The archaeology and cultural heritage chapter is an example of this. In contrast, where significant changes to baseline conditions, regulations and policy or to assessment methodologies or the environmental effects of the scheme itself are evident, replacement ES chapters are provided in this addendum.

1.16 Chapter 2 provides an updated description of the existing site and current land uses and considers how this is likely to change in future irrespective of the proposed scheme being developed. Chapter 3 explains each element of EWL’s revised proposals and, with the planning application plans and drawings, defines the physical and operational parameters that have been assessed during the EIA.

1.17 Chapter 4 summaries the site selection and evaluation process and explains how the layout has evolved through a series of iterations - effectively alternative options.

1.18 Chapter 5 provides a summary of relevant planning and other policy as directly relevant to the EIA of the current proposals. The ‘scope’ of the EIA is then identified in chapter 6. This explains how the ES Addendum provides the environmental information identified by the local planning authorities and statutory consultees during the preliminary stages of the EIA process.

1.19 The main element of the EIA process is then reported in chapters 7 to 14. Chapter 15 of the ES Addendum provides a summary of the mitigation incorporated into the proposed development. This will assist in ensuring that these measures are translated into legal instruments and, where relevant, a construction and environmental management plan for the project. Chapter 15 also sets out the residual impacts of the proposal after the proposed mitigating measures have been taken into account. Where appropriate, technical reports have been included as appendices to the ES Addendum.

1.20 A non-technical summary provides, in plain language, a summary of the ES addendum and contains the essential illustrative material required to support the description of the proposal and its environmental effects.

THE APPROACH TO ASSESSMENT

1.21 The framework used to express the predicted significance of the environmental effects identified is explained in each ES addendum chapter. In summary, unless best practice guidance for technical assessment dictates otherwise, each predicted impact and residual effect will be ascribed one of the following levels of significance:

negligible;
low;
medium, or;
high.

1.22 Those elements of the development that have been introduced to mitigate potential adverse effects are identified within each chapter. The mitigation included in the scheme can be categorised into two types - 'inherent' and 'additional' mitigation. Inherent mitigation is amelioration that is a fundamental part of the scheme and can generally be represented in the application plans. Additional mitigation is generally less capable of being shown in the planning application drawings, because it might involve controls on the construction or operation of the development, for example. The need for additional mitigation might be enforced through planning conditions or obligations associated with a grant of planning permission for the proposals.

1.23 The consented and partly-implemented Enviroparks development is subject to a comprehensive range of environmental mitigation and safeguards. These are either inherent in the design or enforced through planning conditions and planning obligations agreed under section 106 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990, or through the an Environmental Permit from Natural Resources Wales (NRW), which regulates the site operations. Not least because various of these mitigation strategies are already partly implemented, the current proposals seek to work within them.