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Llywodraeth Cymru  
Welsh Government

# **Integrated Sustainability Appraisal of the Strategic Planning Guidance for the Gwent Levels National Natural Resource Area (Future Wales Policy 9)**

## Draft Environmental Report

### Non-Technical Summary

Welsh Government: Consultation Draft 17<sup>th</sup> February – 31<sup>st</sup> March 2026

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## **1. Purpose of the Non-Technical Summary**

- 1.1. This document provides a summary of the [Integrated Sustainability Appraisal \(ISA\): Draft Environmental Report of the Strategic Planning Guidance for the Gwent Levels](#) in non-technical language.

## **2. What is the Gwent Levels Strategic Planning Guidance?**

- 2.1. The Gwent Levels is a large, low-lying area in southeast Wales, situated between the Rivers Rhymney and Wye. It consists of reclaimed land with a network of drainage channels, some managed by Natural Resources Wales (NRW) and others by local landowners.
- 2.2. The Gwent Levels is recognised for its important wildlife, landscapes, and historic value, and has several local, national, European and international protections. This area is crucial for helping Wales adapt to and reduce the impacts of climate change and for supporting biodiversity. The Levels also provide key supporting habitats for protected sites in the area like the Severn Estuary and the Wye and Usk rivers.
- 2.3. Despite these protections, the Gwent Levels is at risk from development, particularly because of its location near major cities, its flat topography and good infrastructure. Fragmentation and degradation from such pressures and land management practices, could harm the area's ability to support wildlife and habitats and cope with climate change.
- 2.4. In 2021, the Welsh Government committed to working with partners to create national [planning guidance](#) for the Gwent Levels to help deliver the requirements of Policy 9 in Future Wales: the national plan 2040<sup>1</sup>. This guidance will help protect and strengthen the area's ecological networks in line with national policy. Once completed, the guidance will be used alongside other planning policies to shape development and conservation decisions in the Gwent Levels.

## **3. What is the Integrated Sustainability Appraisal?**

- 3.1. The ISA is a process of appraising the contents of the guidance against a framework of sustainability objectives and decision aiding questions. This

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<sup>1</sup> [Future Wales: The National Plan 2040 | GOV.WALES](#)

is to help ensure negative impacts are avoided and positive impacts are maximised, over the short, medium and long term. The ISA process ensures the guidance is as sustainable as possible.

- 3.2 The ISA integrates the following assessments, and fully meets the legislative requirements, of: Sustainability Appraisal; SEA Regulations; Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act (2015); Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011; Equalities Impact Assessment; Children's Rights Impact Assessment; Sustainable Management of Natural Resources, the Strategic Land Management Duty (Agriculture (Wales) Act 2023) and the Natural Resources Policy (Environment (Wales) Act 2016). The ISA also accounts for the non-legislative requirements of assessments relating to Rural Proofing; Health Impacts; Climate Change; and Economic Development.
- 3.3 The ISA has been shaped by the Well-being of Future Generations Act ways of working. This integrated approach, incorporating a number of different assessments, has enabled a holistic and rounded consideration of the implications of the guidance to be taken. Engagement and collaboration has shaped the work to date and will continue to do so including with regards to the final version of the guidance. This ISA enables the decisions made and potential impacts to be set out in a consistent and transparent manner.

#### **4. ISA and Gwent Levels Planning Guidance Processes So Far**

- 4.1 The production of the guidance has been based on and shaped by evidence and engagement and collaboration with stakeholders. Stakeholder engagement has been carried out throughout the development of the guidance and has played an important role in shaping the assessment and guidance. A Task and Finish Group was established for developing the guidance which provided expert advice and contributed to interpreting the evidence and planning context, helping to ensure that the guidance aligned with Future Wales Policy 9. Additional engagement with statutory and non-statutory stakeholders ensured that relevant organisations were kept informed and able to comment on early findings.
- 4.2 The [ISA Scoping Stage](#) gathered further evidence including bringing together the relevant plans, policies and programmes and analysing a

range of evidence to highlight key issues and opportunities. This evidence developed an understanding of the environmental, social, cultural and economic baseline, and considered how these conditions were likely to change without the implementation of the guidance. This baseline was then analysed to identify the key sustainability issues and opportunities that the emerging guidance needed to address. Following a focused consultation on the draft Scoping report, it was refined. The evidence, engagement and consultation have all informed the ISA Framework, which set out the 16 objectives and decision aiding questions that have been used to assess the guidance against.

## **5. How the ISA has been undertaken**

- 5.1 The geographical scope of the ISA has been driven by the scope of the guidance i.e. at a sub-regional scale within the Gwent Levels. The timescale for the ISA reflects that of Future Wales and Policy 9 as this is what the guidance is looking to support. The intention of the ISA is to enable the principles of sustainable development to be embedded into the guidance.

### ***ISA Framework***

- 5.2 A key output of the ISA Scoping Stage was the ISA Framework. The ISA Framework is the main assessment tool used during the ISA and comprises a series of 16 ISA Objectives covering social, economic, cultural and environmental issues identified during the ISA Scoping Stage and a set of decision aiding questions. The ISA Objectives are set out in Table 1-1 below.
- 5.3 This framework has been used to assess the three Strategic Principles and 14 Actions. It identifies to what extent they could have a positive or negative impact across the range of assessments that have been incorporated. Note that the Strategic Principles and Actions assessed reflects the wording and also the numbering at the time the assessment was undertaken and therefore they will differ from those set out in the draft Guidance being consulted. This is because the assessment resulted in a number of recommendations to improve the wording and application of the Strategic Principles and Actions (see Table 2-5 in [the Main Environmental Report](#)). In the draft Guidance being consulted upon Action 11 as assessed has become Action 6. Subsequently Actions 6-10 will have all

moved up one number and become Actions 7-11 in the actual draft Guidance.

Table 1-1 ISA Framework against which the Guidance is assessed

ISA Objective	
1	To promote sustainable economic growth and strengthen the resilience of the rural economy across the Gwent Levels
2	To encourage and promote sustainable tourism opportunities
3	To encourage opportunities to increase educational attainment across all age groups by using the Gwent Levels landscape as a natural learning resource
4	To promote opportunities to encourage the protection and improvement of air quality
5	To halt and reverse biodiversity loss and contribute to the protection and effective management of 30% of our land, freshwater and sea for nature by 2030
6	To contribute to the reduction and management of flood risk
7	To contribute to the management and maintenance of the Gwent Levels drainage system
8	To contribute to an improvement in physical, mental and social health and well-being
9	To encourage opportunities within which social cohesion and equality can be improved
10	To promote opportunities for the reduction of fly-tipping and littering
11	To contribute towards the future well-being of the Welsh Language
12	To create opportunities for the protection and enhancement of the Gwent Levels' unique and distinctive landscape and seascapes
13	To create opportunities to protect, conserve and enhance the historic environment of the Gwent Levels at a landscape scale, including its heritage assets, their settings, and the area's cultural significance
14	To protect and enhance opportunities for greenhouse gas emissions to be reduced, stored and sequestered across the Gwent Levels
15	To protect and improve water quality and water resources
16	To protect geology and soil and promote the sustainable use and management of land

## 6. Appraisal Results – Draft Gwent Levels Strategic Planning Guidance

6.1 The guidance is structured in the following way:

- Purpose, Scope and Status of the Guidance – sets out why the guidance is needed, its purpose and status.
- Developing the Guidance – sets out the evidence sources and baseline information and the assessment process.
- Development Plan and Policy Context – sets out the planning context for the guidance.
- The Gwent Levels – a unique Welsh Landscape – sets out an overview and context for the Gwent Levels.
- Current Challenges Affecting the Gwent Levels – sets out the issues and threats affecting the Levels.
- The Gwent Levels NNRA – a spatial designation – sets out the background to the REN mapping.
- Principles for the Gwent Levels NNRA, Core and Recovery (opportunity) Zones – Sets out the three Strategic Principles and 14 Actions and their interrelationship.

6.2 It has been an iterative process, and the outcome of the assessment has fed into the final consultation version of the guidance.

### ***Appraisal Results***

6.3 The following Table 1-2 sets out a summary of the assessment findings for each Strategic Principle and Action. During the assessment, consideration was given to whether reasonable alternatives existed for each. It was considered that there were no reasonable alternatives because for the most part the Principles and Actions are already framed within PPW and Future Wales. To introduce Principles and Actions that are different to what is set out in those documents would not be compliant with national policy.

Table 1-2 – Summary of Assessment

<b>Summary of Assessment Results and Cumulative Effects Assessment</b>	
<b>Economy - Sustainable Economic Growth</b>	
ISA Objective 1: To promote sustainable economic growth and strengthen the resilience of the rural economy across the Gwent Levels	
<b>Affected SEA Regulations Schedule 2(6) issues: Population, human health, climatic factors and material assets</b>	
<p>The guidance is expected to have a positive impact on sustainable economic growth. The guidance looks to ensure ecosystem resilience and strengthening biodiversity networks at a landscape scale. It does not directly encourage development but will ensure any development that does take place across the NNRA area is sustainable, appropriate and looks to avoid negative impacts and maximise positive impacts.</p> <p>The assessment recognises that in the short term there may be a mix of positive and negative impacts but these will become positive in the medium to longer term.</p> <p>Actions A9 and A10 have a neutral impact as they relate to water availability and hydrology and agricultural management of the reens and ditches and are not considered to have any direct impact on economic growth and the rural economy.</p> <p>For Actions 7–11, it should be noted that the Core Zone is already subject to extensive protection through multiple statutory designations, including SSSIs. As set out in PPW, there is therefore a general presumption against development within this Zone. Consequently, the scale and amount of development likely to come forward in the Core Zone will be extremely limited. The assessment outcomes should therefore be read in the context of this very limited development potential.</p>	
<b>Economy – Sustainable Tourism Opportunities</b>	
ISA Objective 2: To encourage and promote sustainable tourism opportunities	
<b>Affected SEA Regulations Schedule 2(6) issues: Population, human health, climatic factors, material assets, cultural heritage including architectural and archaeological heritage and landscape</b>	
<p>The guidance is expected to have a positive impact on sustainable tourism in the Gwent Levels. By safeguarding and strengthening biodiversity and ecosystem resilience, the landscape, cultural and heritage value of the area is protected and enhanced. This enhances its attraction as a tourist destination and the interest in proposals for low-impact recreation could therefore increase. This may create supportive conditions for new and existing businesses linked to the tourism industry such as recreation and the visitor economy. It is however recognised that economic growth is not the principal driver of the guidance.</p>	

The assessment recognises that in the short term there may be a mix of positive and negative impacts but these will become positive in the medium to longer term.

Actions A9 and A10 have a neutral impact as they relate to water availability and hydrology and agricultural management of the reens and ditches and are not considered to have any direct impact on the provision of sustainable tourism opportunities.

For Actions 7–11, it should be noted that the Core Zone is already subject to extensive protection through multiple statutory designations, including SSSIs. As set out in PPW, there is therefore a general presumption against development within this Zone. Consequently, the scale and amount of development likely to come forward in the Core Zone will be extremely limited. The assessment outcomes should therefore be read in the context of this very limited development potential.

#### **Education**

ISA Objective 3: To encourage opportunities to increase educational attainment across all age groups by using the Gwent Levels landscape as a natural learning resource

#### ***Affected SEA Regulations Schedule 2(6) issues: Population and human health***

The guidance is predicted to have an overall neutral impact on education. It was however recognised that increasing green infrastructure and ecosystem resilience could have an indirect positive impact through protecting and enhancing the area and providing an educational resource. This reflects the parts where the guidance's influence is indirect or uncertain, rather than indicating adverse effects.

#### **Air Quality**

ISA Objective 4: To promote opportunities to encourage the protection and improvement of air quality

#### ***Affected SEA Regulations Schedule 2(6) issues: Population, human health, air and climatic factors***

The guidance is considered to have mainly neutral impacts with some positive in the long term or few actions with uncertainty on its overall impact on the protection and improvement of air quality.

This is due to air quality challenges in the area being largely influenced by external factors, including existing industrial activity adjacent to the Levels and wider traffic issues. The positive effects were predicted with Strategic Principle 2 and Actions A5, A7 and A8 that centre around the Core Zone. These ensure the landscape, features and supporting habitats are given due consideration in development proposals and recognises the area's designations, thus

supporting improvements in air quality. Actions A1, A6, A11 and A14 were harder to predict as there is uncertainty on how these may be delivered and the overall impact, if any, on air quality.

For Actions 7–11, it should be noted that the Core Zone is already subject to extensive protection through multiple statutory designations, including SSSIs. As set out in PPW, there is therefore a general presumption against development within this Zone. Consequently, the overall scale and amount of contribution towards the delivery of this Objective as a result of any proposed development will therefore be extremely limited. The assessment outcomes should therefore be read in the context of this very limited potential.

#### **Biodiversity, Flora and Fauna**

ISA Objective 5: To halt and reverse biodiversity loss and contribute to the protection and effective management of 30% of our land, freshwater and sea for nature by 2030

#### ***Affected SEA Regulations Schedule 2(6) issues: Biodiversity, human health, fauna, flora, soil, water, air, climatic factors and material assets***

The guidance is seen as having a significant positive impact on the target of effective management of 30% of our land, freshwater and sea for nature by 2030.

All of the Strategic Principles and Actions have a positive effect as they focus on the protection of the environment and supporting ecosystem resilience with some impacts increasing to significant in the long term.

For Actions 7–11, it should be noted that the Core Zone is already subject to extensive protection through multiple statutory designations, including SSSIs. As set out in PPW, there is therefore a general presumption against development within this Zone. Consequently, the overall scale and amount of contribution towards the delivery of this Objective as a result of any proposed development will therefore be extremely limited. The assessment outcomes should therefore be read in the context of this very limited potential.

#### **Climate and Flood Risk – Flood Risk**

ISA Objective 6: To contribute to the reduction and management of flood risk

#### ***SEA Regulations Schedule 2(6) issues: Biodiversity, human health, fauna, flora, soil, water, climatic factors, material assets and landscape***

The guidance is considered to have an overall positive impact on the management and reduction of flood risk. The guidance overall is expected to positively influence flood risk and management, as it supports ecosystem services and contributes to landscape resilience. It also reflects the historic role of the Gwent Levels in managing water and hydrological processes. Existing management approaches, including the hold-the-line strategy and long-established agricultural water-level regulation, continue to play an important role. It is recognised that climate change is likely to increase overall

flood risk through pressures from extreme weather events and the guidance would help to minimise impacts. This includes through the provision of strategic green infrastructure which is recognised as a potential source of providing a supportive function for managing flood risk by enhancing natural processes within the landscape.

Most Strategic Principles and Actions are expected to deliver positive impacts in the long term. This is because they create opportunities to enhance flood-risk management outcomes through their contributions to net benefit for biodiversity from development within the NNRA. These contributions may help improve landscape connectivity, which is an important component in the wider functioning of the drainage and flood-management system. Action A9 looks to have a significant positive impact in the medium to long term as it ensures water availability and hydrology are considered in development proposals, directly impacting on ensuring effective flood risk management.

For Actions 7–11, it should be noted that the Core Zone is already subject to extensive protection through multiple statutory designations, including SSSIs. As set out in PPW, there is therefore a general presumption against development within this Zone. Consequently, the overall scale and amount of contribution towards the delivery of this Objective as a result of any proposed development will therefore be extremely limited. The assessment outcomes should therefore be read in the context of this very limited potential.

Action A4 has been assessed as neutral, as its focus is on species-specific management and does not directly impact on flooding. The impacts of Actions A6 and A14 remain uncertain. It is possible that the delivery of off-site net benefit for biodiversity could provide some positive effects on flood risk, but the outcomes will depend on localised solutions that are still to be defined. Therefore, it is not possible to determine the extent to which Actions A6 and A14 will contribute to reducing or managing flood risk.

#### **Climate and Flood Risk – Drainage**

ISA Objective 7: To contribute to the management and maintenance of the Gwent Levels drainage system

***SEA Regulations Schedule 2(6) issues: Biodiversity, fauna, flora, soil, water, climatic factors, material assets, cultural heritage including architectural and archaeological heritage and landscape***

The guidance is considered to have a significant positive impact on the Gwent Levels drainage system. The guidance directly impacts the management and maintenance of the Gwent Levels drainage system by supporting the movement and storage of water and protecting the wider hydrological system. The Strategic Principles promote improvements and management of the reens, grips, and wider drainage features by ensuring development does not adversely affect these systems. Its effectiveness, however, is dependent on the actions and land management practices that feed into it, as the drainage

network of the Gwent Levels is intrinsic to both the biodiversity and the character of the landscape. By reinforcing ecological networks and supporting improved landscape function these linkages support the established hydrological processes that characterise the Gwent Levels and contribute positively to the ongoing management and maintenance of the drainage system. Over the long term, the Strategic Principle 3 and a number of Actions are expected to increase their impact to have a significant positive impact. By reinforcing ecological connectivity and supporting natural drainage processes, maintaining the overall integrity of the drainage system, this impact is magnified over time.

Almost all Actions are expected to contribute positively to supporting the drainage system on the Gwent Levels. For Actions 7–11, it should be noted that the Core Zone is already subject to extensive protection through multiple statutory designations, including SSSIs. As set out in PPW, there is therefore a general presumption against development within this Zone. Consequently, the overall scale and amount of contribution towards the delivery of this Objective as a result of any proposed development will therefore be extremely limited. The assessment outcomes should therefore be read in the context of this very limited potential.

Action A4 has been assessed as having a neutral impact. This is due to its focus being on species-specific management and does not directly impact on flooding.

### **Health and Well-being**

ISA Objective 8: To contribute to an improvement in physical, mental and social health and well-being

#### ***SEA Regulations Schedule 2(6) issues: Population, human health, climatic factors, cultural heritage including architectural and archaeological heritage and landscape***

The guidance is expected to have a positive impact on health and well-being. The guidance will have a broadly positive influence on physical, mental, and social health and well-being. This reflects the Gwent levels possible role as providing a distinctive, tranquil, and recreational resource for many communities, providing immersive natural environments that provide opportunities for rest, recreation, and connection with nature.

The Core Zone is a place where people experience the strongest sense of landscape identity, historic character, and ecological richness due to its designations and landscapes. However it is also recognised that the Recovery Zone has significant potential to deliver enhanced wellbeing benefits by providing a landscape capable of absorbing and supporting increased recreational activity without degrading its environmental quality. Promoting green infrastructure through the Strategic Principles will support access to nature, this can strengthen linkages throughout the NNRA and enhance its

ability to support health and well-being outcomes. It is recognised that the Strategic Principles have different functions and roles to play with the wider NNRA and Recovery Zone which play a vital role supporting the Core Zone which is likely to be the main visitor destination.

For Actions 7–11, it should be noted that the Core Zone is already subject to extensive protection through multiple statutory designations, including SSSIs. As set out in PPW, there is therefore a general presumption against development within this Zone. Consequently, the overall scale and amount of contribution towards the delivery of this Objective as a result of any proposed development will therefore be extremely limited. The assessment outcomes should therefore be read in the context of this very limited potential.

Actions A3, A7, A10, and A11 are all expected to have an overall neutral impact, as they were assessed to have no direct impact towards delivery of this objective. The impact of Action A5 is considered to be uncertain because it cannot be ascertained what exactly the effect will be on health and well-being when details of any proposals are unknown.

### **Populations**

ISA Objective 9: To encourage opportunities within which social cohesion and equality can be improved

### ***SEA Regulations Schedule 2(6) issues: Population, human health, cultural heritage including architectural and archaeological heritage and landscape***

The guidance is considered to have a neutral impact on social cohesion and equality. This is due to the primary focus of the Principles and Actions being on strengthening habitat networks and ecosystem services across the Gwent Levels, therefore their direct contribution to social cohesion is limited. It is recognised that the strengthened landscape character and improved environmental quality and the delivery of strategic green infrastructure can indirectly support community interaction by providing high-quality natural spaces.

Strategic Principle 2 and Actions A1, A6, A8, A9 and A14 are all predicted to have positive impacts for social cohesion and equality. This is due to the rural setting of the Core Zone, where opportunities to promote social cohesion and equality are inherently more constrained than in areas closer to settlements. Nevertheless, by safeguarding the integrity of the Core Zone and maintaining access to a distinctive, well-managed natural environment, the Principle creates conditions that can facilitate social and well-being benefits.

For Actions 7–11, it should be noted that the Core Zone is already subject to extensive protection through multiple statutory designations, including SSSIs. As set out in PPW, there is therefore a general presumption against development within this Zone. Consequently, the overall scale and amount of

contribution towards the delivery of this Objective as a result of any proposed development will therefore be extremely limited. The assessment outcomes should therefore be read in the context of this very limited potential.

There is some uncertainty about the impact from Action A5, as it cannot be ascertained what exactly the effect will be on social cohesion and equality when details of any proposals are unknown.

#### **Crime**

ISA Objective 10: To promote opportunities for the reduction of fly-tipping and littering

#### ***SEA Regulations Schedule 2(6) issues: Biodiversity, human health, fauna, flora, soil and water***

The guidance is predicted to have a neutral impact on the reduction of fly-tipping and littering. This is due to the focus of the Strategic Principles and Actions being on environmental safeguarding, protection of ecosystem services and landscape enhancement. Responsibility for addressing fly tipping lies primarily with local authorities, which have their own policies and enforcement mechanisms to manage waste-related behaviours.

#### **Welsh Language**

ISA Objective 11: To contribute towards the future well-being of the Welsh Language

#### ***SEA Regulations Schedule 2(6) issues: Population and cultural heritage including architectural and archaeological heritage***

The guidance is predicted to have a neutral impact on the Welsh Language. This is due to its focus which will not directly strengthen or promote the Welsh language. Other requirements will ensure new signage or associated documentation will be available bilingually. (Also see ISA Objective 13 and cultural heritage)

#### **Landscape Character – Landscape and Seascapes**

ISA Objective 12: To create opportunities for the protection and enhancement of the Gwent Levels' unique and distinctive landscape and seascapes

#### ***SEA Regulations Schedule 2(6) issues: Soil, material assets, cultural heritage including architectural and archaeological heritage and landscape***

The guidance is expected to have a significant positive impact on the Gwent Levels' unique and distinctive landscape and seascapes. The guidance looks to safeguard biodiversity, strengthen ecosystem resilience, and support environmental integrity, helping maintain the area's distinct character. Most Actions also offer secondary benefits, such as protecting key landscape and seascapes features. The Actions that have a significant positive impact are A1 A3 as these Actions specifically focus on supporting the landscape, with many other Actions growing from a positive to a significant positive over time.

For Actions 7–11, it should be noted that the Core Zone is already subject to extensive protection through multiple statutory designations, including SSSIs. As set out in PPW, there is therefore a general presumption against development within this Zone. Consequently, the overall scale and amount of contribution towards the delivery of this Objective as a result of any proposed development will therefore be extremely limited. The assessment outcomes should therefore be read in the context of this very limited potential.

Action A4 is the only Action that is expected to have a neutral impact as it pertains to the protection of species, it will have no direct impact on the landscape and seascape.

#### **Landscape Character – Heritage Assets**

ISA Objective 13: To create opportunities to protect, conserve and enhance the historic environment of the Gwent Levels at a landscape scale, including its heritage assets, their settings, and the area's cultural significance

#### ***SEA Regulations Schedule 2(6) issues: Population, human health, material assets, cultural heritage including architectural and archaeological heritage and landscape***

The guidance is predicted to have an overall significant positive effect on the historic environment of the Gwent Levels, including its heritage assets and their settings. The guidance looks to safeguard biodiversity networks and strengthen long-term ecosystem resilience at the landscape scale, thus directly contributing to maintaining the characteristic qualities of the area.

Over time, a synergistic effect is anticipated, whereby a stronger and better-managed landscape creates greater opportunities to protect and enhance the historic environment of the Gwent Levels.

For Actions 7–11, it should be noted that the Core Zone is already subject to extensive protection through multiple statutory designations, including SSSIs. As set out in PPW, there is therefore a general presumption against development within this Zone. Consequently, the overall scale and amount of contribution towards the delivery of this Objective as a result of any proposed development will therefore be extremely limited. The assessment outcomes should therefore be read in the context of this very limited potential.

Action A3 is focused specifically on the functional linkages between protected sites, this would have no direct impact on heritage assets. Action A4 is focused specifically on the protected habitats and species, this would have no direct impact on the historic environment.

#### **Greenhouse Gas Emissions**

ISA Objective 14: To protect and enhance opportunities for greenhouse gas emissions to be reduced, stored and sequestered across the Gwent Levels

***SEA Regulations Schedule 2(6) issues: Human health, fauna, flora, soil, air, climatic factors and material assets***

The guidance is considered to have a positive impact on greenhouse gas emissions. The guidance supports the protection of habitats which help maintain the natural conditions that support long term carbon storage and strengthens the ecological processes that regulate the local climate. Over time this is likely to produce a significant positive impact from Strategic Principle 2 and Actions 8 and 9 as habitat condition improves and it will help support the long-term resilience. The impact of Actions A6 and A14 remains uncertain when details of any proposals are unknown.

For Actions 7–11, it should be noted that the Core Zone is already subject to extensive protection through multiple statutory designations, including SSSIs. As set out in PPW, there is therefore a general presumption against development within this Zone. Consequently, the overall scale and amount of contribution towards the delivery of this Objective as a result of any proposed development will therefore be extremely limited. The assessment outcomes should therefore be read in the context of this very limited potential.

A number of actions were assessed as having a neutral outcome, namely Actions A3, A4, A5 and A10.

**Water**

ISA Objective 15: To protect and improve water quality and water resources

***SEA Regulations Schedule 2(6) issues: Biodiversity, population, human health, fauna, flora, soil, water, climatic factors and landscape***

The guidance is expected to have an overall significant positive impact on water quality and resources. This reflects the fact that water features are a defining component of the Gwent Levels landscape and are closely linked to habitat connectivity. Water is the circulating system of the ecosystem of the Gwent Levels. The guidance places strong emphasis on safeguarding the river system and associated drainage features, supporting the wider aim of enhancing ecological networks. Over time, these protections are expected to reinforce the condition of sensitive water environments and help maintain the hydrological processes needed for healthy ecological functioning. This will result in a significant positive effect into the medium and long term.

For Actions 7–11, it should be noted that the Core Zone is already subject to extensive protection through multiple statutory designations, including SSSIs. As set out in PPW, there is therefore a general presumption against development within this Zone. Consequently, the overall scale and amount of contribution towards the delivery of this Objective as a result of any proposed development will therefore be extremely limited. The assessment outcomes should therefore be read in the context of this very limited potential.

The effects of Actions A6 and A14 remain uncertain because details of any proposals are unknown.

### **Soil and Land Management**

ISA Objective 16: To protect geology and soil and promote the sustainable use and management of land

#### ***SEA Regulations Schedule 2(6) issues: Biodiversity, fauna, flora, soil, water, climatic factors, material assets and landscape***

The guidance is expected to have an overall positive impact on soil and land management. It will do this by promoting sustainable land management practices and safeguarding and strengthening biodiversity networks and ecosystem resilience.

For Actions 7–11, it should be noted that the Core Zone is already subject to extensive protection through multiple statutory designations, including SSSIs. As set out in PPW, there is therefore a general presumption against development within this Zone. Consequently, the overall scale and amount of contribution towards the delivery of this Objective as a result of any proposed development will therefore be extremely limited. The assessment outcomes should therefore be read in the context of this very limited potential.

Since A4 pertains to the protection of species, it may be marginally positively impactful regarding vegetation and increasing soil health as a secondary effect. However, overall it is considered to have a neutral impact.

Actions A6 and A14 have uncertain impacts because details of any proposals are unknown.

## **7. How the ISA has Influenced the Gwent Levels Strategic Planning Guidance**

7.1 A number of recommendations were made as part of the assessment which have fed into the guidance and informed the final consultation version. This has ensured the guidance, during its production, has been tested and shaped to maximise positive effects and avoid or minimise negative effects.

## **8. Avoiding, reducing or mitigating negative effects and maximising positive effects**

8.1 Overall, the guidance is seen to have positive and significantly positive impacts in relation to the Objectives. For those economic focused Objectives which have been identified as having a mix of positive and negative impacts initially, it is considered that these will become positive in time. This is due to the guidance helping to shape sustainable green growth where development is otherwise acceptable. Where there are uncertain effects, this is largely due to the detail of schemes being unknown at this stage in terms of what benefits they may end up contributing towards.

## **9. Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA)**

9.1 Work to address the HRA requirements is currently underway and will continue to be undertaken with the involvement of Natural Resources Wales (NRW), ensuring the assessment is robust and compliant with the Habitats Regulations. The outcomes of the HRA process will also influence the final drafting of the guidance and may lead to changes from the draft version where necessary. This will ensure the guidance meets the requirements of the regulations and demonstrates no adverse effects on the integrity of European and internationally designated sites.

## **10. Monitoring Significant effects**

- 10.1 The ISA has identified the likely effects of the guidance on ISA Objectives over the short, medium and long term. An indication of the certainty of these effects was also provided. However, there is a risk that the sustainability impacts are different to those anticipated, especially with regards any unforeseen circumstances. It is therefore an essential component of delivering sustainable development to monitor the significant effects of the guidance in relation to the predicted impacts. This will enable the guidance to be updated, as necessary, should unexpected negative effects arise or expected positive effects not arise.
- 10.2 A Monitoring Framework, comprising those effects being sought to be monitored, is presented in the ISA Report that sets out a range of indicators to be monitored relevant to the likely effects of the guidance. Following the publication of the final guidance, a Post Publication Statement will be prepared, including a Statement of Environmental Particulars. This Statement will provide detail of how the ISA process has influenced the development of the guidance, the predicted significant effects, as well as the Monitoring Framework.