

Huw Irranca-Davies AS/MS  
Ysgrifennydd y Cabinet dros Newid Hinsawdd a Materion  
Gwledig  
Cabinet Secretary for Climate Change & Rural Affairs



Llywodraeth Cymru  
Welsh Government

Eich cyf/Your ref P-06-1344  
Ein cyf/Our ref HIDCC/05651/24

Jack Sargeant MS  
Chair - Petitions committee  
Senedd Cymru

15th July 2024

Dear Jack,

Thank you for your letter of 18 June regarding the petition from Campaign Against East Vale Over Development (CAEVOD) and the petitioners' response to the Welsh Government report.

The petitioners raise a wide range of matters about development management in Wales. The Welsh Government's planning policies are set out in Planning Policy Wales and in Future Wales, the National Development Plan.

In response to the comments from the petitioners I am pleased to provide additional information about the Agricultural Land Classification (ALC) system, consultation arrangements with Welsh Government and the steps we have taken to keep the ALC system up to date.

The ALC system is used to grade the quality of agricultural land so that informed decisions can be made over its future use within the planning system.

The ALC system does not define Best and Most Versatile Agricultural Land (BMVAL) status. BMVAL is defined by planning policy as ALC grades 1, 2 & 3a.

BMVAL is the land which is most flexible, productive and efficient in response to inputs and which can best deliver future crops for food and non-food uses such as biomass, fibres and pharmaceuticals.

ALC Sub-grade 3b and Grade 4 are both capable of producing arable crops, though both grades have inherent limitations which restrict the versatility of these grades to a narrow range of crops and / or varying yields.

The ALC system describes the Grade 3 sub-grades as:

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Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

### **Grade 3 - good to moderate quality agricultural land**

*Land with moderate limitations which affect the choice of crops, timing and type of cultivation, harvesting or the level of yield. Where more demanding crops are grown yields are generally lower or more variable than on land in Grades 1 and 2.*

#### **Subgrade 3a - good quality agricultural land**

*Land capable of consistently producing moderate to high yields of a narrow range of arable crops, especially cereals, or moderate yields of a wide range of crops including cereals, grass, oilseed rape, potatoes, sugar beet and the less demanding horticultural crops.*

#### **Subgrade 3b - moderate quality agricultural land**

*Land capable of producing moderate yields of a narrow range of crops, principally cereals and grass or lower yields of a wider range of crops or high yields of grass which can be grazed or harvested over most of the year.*

### **Consultation Arrangements:**

Planning Policy Wales (PPW) does not apply a lower BMVAL hectare threshold for consideration by the relevant planning authority. Reference to a 20ha threshold relates to the statutory consultation arrangements when a planning authority must consult Welsh Ministers.

At >20ha, it becomes a matter of national interest for Welsh Government. The consultation arrangements are provided for in [TAN6 - Sustainable Rural Communities](#) Annex B.

The Welsh Government's Land Quality Advice Service (LQAS) is consulted on all solar and wind farm Developments of National Significance (DNS) applications. LQAS will validate submitted ALC surveys and undertake an on-site validation assessment where necessary. This is to ensure all parties have confidence in the ALC information coming before them.

### **Principle of the ALC System:**

The criteria for grading are based on the long-term physical and chemical limitations of land for agricultural use. It is important to note the current use of the land does not affect the grade or agricultural potential. Land use is an economic and management choice of the land manager. The ALC grade describes what the land is potentially capable of, not what it is currently used for.

### **Planning Policy Wales:**

BMVAL policy does not provide blanket protection for the BMV resource. It provides a high bar for the developer to demonstrate an overriding need for that particular development proposal to use BMV land. It seeks to conserve BMV land by directing development to lower quality agricultural land, i.e. brownfield land or ALC Grades 3b, 4 and 5.

## **ALC Mapping & System Development:**

The 'Provisional ALC Maps' (referenced as 1985 by CAEVOD) were produced prior to the introduction of the 1988 system. MAFF (now Defra) intended to update the maps, hence the name 'provisional'. This did not happen due to resourcing, data and data processing limitations at the time.

Welsh Government updated its national mapping in 2017, again in 2019 and is currently in the process of scoping its 3<sup>rd</sup> update. The Predictive ALC Map is based on the current ALC system.

Welsh Government and Defra are in the process of releasing a refreshed version of the 1988 Criteria and are also scoping the requirements for a full technical review to ensure the system continues to remain technically up to date well into the future. Any change in criteria will be reflected in a future update to the Predictive ALC Map. This body of work is supported by the extensive technical review series published as part of the Soil Evidence Programme, referenced in the response of 06 June 2023.

Once again, thank you for writing to me on this important topic. I hope this information is helpful to you or goes some way in answering your queries.

Yours sincerely,



**Huw Irranca-Davies AS/MS**

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