



**The Deep Space Advanced Radar Capability (DARC)
Programme: Questions for Pembrokeshire & Wales**

**Academi Heddwch Cymru
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ABOUT THIS DOCUMENT

This document is intended to help inform debate and discussion over the DARC programme in Wales, and to assist local authorities and the Welsh Government. It describes some of the issues DARC poses and identifies a series of questions to be answered.

The document has been developed by staff at Academi Heddwch Cymru, led by Professor Colin McInnes. It draws heavily on a report prepared for Academi Heddwch Cymru by Dr Dylan Marshall (Aberystwyth University) and Dr Louise Ridden (Tampere University, Finland). Their full report will be available on the Academi Heddwch Cymru website at <https://www.wcia.org.uk/academiheddwch/>. Academi Heddwch Cymru is grateful to Dr Marshall and Dr Ridden for their support. Responsibility for this document resides with Academi Heddwch Cymru.

Academi Heddwch Cymru is Wales' national peace institute. It is an independent research organisation which aims to extend Wales's long-standing tradition of peace-making and peace-promotion by developing and coordinating an independent community of researchers in related fields. Its aims are to ensure that:

- Wales makes an internationally recognised contribution to peace research and practice
- A focus on peace is seen in relevant Welsh Government strategies and policies
- There is strong public engagement with peace research and practice in Wales.

Academi Heddwch was established in 2020 and is an alliance of the Universities in Wales, the Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol, the Learned Society of Wales, and the Welsh Centre for International Affairs (WCIA). It is also supported by representatives from the Peace Movement in Wales, Race Council Cymru, Urdd Gobaith Cymru, Rotary International, and the Office of the Future Generations Commissioner for Wales.

The Deep Space Advanced Radar Capability (DARC) Programme: Questions for Pembrokeshire & Wales

1. The Strategic Context

DARC is a US, UK and Australian (AUKUS) initiative to develop a network of ground-based radars. It is intended to significantly improve the surveillance of space given contemporary reliance – civil and military - on space-based systems. In addition to the risk of accidental collisions (and the potential for a catastrophic cascade of these – the ‘Kessler effect’), the UK’s National Space Strategy highlights deep concerns over the vulnerabilities of UK security and the UK economy to space capabilities by adversaries.

The UK’s participation in DARC is part of a wider post-Brexit strategy to present the UK as a globally significant actor. It helps to cement the ‘special relationship’ with the United States and the AUKUS strategic alliance, and maintain a leading role in the ‘five eyes’ intelligence sharing partnership.¹ Although the new Labour Government has moved away from the previous administration’s rhetoric of ‘Global Britain’, it still maintains the ambition to be a key international actor including significant engagement in the strategically important Indo-Pacific region. It has not indicated any change in the UK’s support for DARC.

The UK Government has announced its intention to host the UK’s DARC installation in Wales at the Cawdor Barracks in Pembrokeshire. Construction of lead elements is due to begin imminently and the site be operational by 2030. The development is subject to an environmental impact assessment and local authority planning permission. If planning permission is denied, then the MoD has indicated it will appeal, which would take the matter to the Welsh Government.

Although DARC is not a weapons system, it is a military installation; its design and operation is led by the US military globally and the MoD in the UK; it is presented as part of the AUKUS strategic alliance which focuses on security in the Indo-Pacific; and it is being developed

¹ With Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and the United States.

amid a backdrop of the wider militarisation of space and evolving space capabilities from several major powers. Questions have been raised about whether DARC contravenes international law and whether the Welsh Government and local authorities would be complicit in any infringement of international law. DARC also appears to sit uncomfortably with the Welsh Government's current international strategy, and in particular its stated aim to establish Wales as a globally responsible nation.

Question 1: *Is DARC compliant with international law and current norms concerning the non-militarisation of space?*

Question 2: *To what extent does DARC risk Wales' stated aim of being a globally responsible nation?*

Publicly available information about DARC's development remains limited. It is unclear what role the UK has, if any, in the development process, what the UK's exact contribution to DARC is beyond hosting the equipment, who and how it will be operated between allies, and the ownership and utilisation of the information generated by the network. This raises questions about the ability of national and local authorities to ensure actions on the base comply with local and Welsh regulations.

Question 3: *What will be the legal relationship between the UK and its allies at the base? What assurances are available that local and national regulations will be complied with? Who will own and use the information?*

2. Potential Health Impacts

Health concerns have been raised by local stakeholders, including the local pressure group 'PARC against DARC' which claims that the radar array is "one of the most high-radiation projects ever put on British soil."² There is a significant - if contested - body of evidence of potential health risks of such developments. Paul Davies MS and former MP Stephen Crabb have explicitly acknowledged the need for more information and assessment of health implications. While in favour of DARC, local councillor Mark Carter has also stated that confirmation is needed that there are no health implications for local residents.³

The need for transparency and assurance on the potential health impact of DARC is heightened by previous examples of negative health outcomes for local communities from military sites.⁴ These concerns were only partly addressed by the public engagement events held by the MoD in Solva and St David's on 13 and 14 September 2024, with vague references made to WHO guidelines.

The physical and mental well-being of those who live close to the proposed site should be a priority for all stakeholders, but at present it is unclear that concerns have been satisfactorily addressed, leading to uncertainty in the local community. Addressing these issues is also a matter of empowering local communities and building trust.

Question 4: *Will an independent assessment be made of the potential health risks involved during both the construction and operation phases, including the presence of buried unexploded ordnance, radioactive materials and asbestos contamination?*

² 'Pembrokeshire Against DARC Radar', Health, <https://parcagainstdarc.com/health>.

³ Tom Sinclair, 'Deep Space Radar Base to Be Built in Pembrokeshire, Creating 100 Jobs', *Herald.Wales* (blog), 2 December 2023, <https://www.herald.wales/national-news/deep-space-radar-base-to-be-built-in-pembrokeshire-creating-100-jobs/>.

⁴ For example, Tom Perkins, 'Toxic PFAS from US Military Bases Polluting Drinking Water, Report Finds', *The Guardian*, 13 October 2023, sec. Environment, <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2023/oct/13/pfas-pollution-us-military-bases-forever-chemicals>.

3. Environmental Impact

The UK element of DARC will consist of 27 dishes (each 20m high and 15m wide) as well as considerable supporting infrastructure.⁵ The proposed site at Cawdor Barracks lies adjacent to and within easy sight of the Pembrokeshire Coast National Park, and near a site of special scientific interest. There are therefore wide-ranging concerns about the environmental impact in this area of high sensitivity.

These concerns consist of:

- (i) The visual impact, being located near a road and visible from a globally significant area of natural beauty which attracts visitors from around the world
- (ii) On wildlife, including a number of protected species and the migration patterns of birds
- (iii) On the community, which has a deep relationship with the natural environment in which they live
- (iv) On water management and the possibility of water pollution
- (v) And on the Welsh Government's commitment to net zero, given concerns over DARC's potential carbon footprint.

An environmental impact assessment (EIA) will be required for the site, but the timeframe is unclear (which is especially worrying since there are indications that some of the work will begin very shortly). It is also unclear whether the EIA process will engage with local stakeholders and be sufficiently flexible to address the range of environmental concerns which have been raised. Not least, there are concerns that the focus will be on quantifiable elements rather than on the lived experience of residents.

Question 5: *When will the environmental impact assessment be undertaken, by whom, what will be the process, who will be consulted, and how will this be sequenced with the MoD's timeframe for construction?*

⁵ Original data from the Ministry of Defence or elsewhere could not be located to verify the exact plans for the facility. Aled Scourfield, 'Space Radar Plan by Pembrokeshire Coast Path "Unacceptable"', *BBC News*, 12 June 2024, sec. Wales, <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c6ppnyzjr4lo>. See also 'EIA Scoping report. Project DARC - Cawdor Barracks' (Leeds: Montagu Evans; SWECO, 10 March 2023).

4. Economic Potential

To our knowledge, a full assessment of the economic impact from DARC's construction phase, or its long-term presence in the local area has yet to be undertaken.

There appear to be three broad sets of economic issues for local communities and for Wales.

First, the visual impact of the site and publicity concerning it may have a detrimental effect on tourism to Pembrokeshire in general and the local area in particular. Research in 2019 suggested tourism was worth £590M to the Pembrokeshire economy, while more recently tourism to Wales appears to have increased because of the cost of living crisis and the carbon cost of air travel.

Second, the MoD estimate that DARC will add 100 jobs directly and more indirectly as well as short term opportunities related to construction, which will partially offset the 300 job losses from the departure of 14th Signals Regiment which is currently based at the Cawdor Barracks. However, there does not seem to have been an appraisal of the potential economic benefits from alternative uses of the site.

Third, defence industrial collaboration initiatives such as DARC support the UK Government's national economy growth agenda, and is broadly echoed by the Welsh Government's National Space Strategy (2022) which hopes to capture 50% of the UK's total space market by 2030.⁶ The Labour Government is also likely to see DARC as a project connected to over 1,000 wider jobs in the UK (including around 100 in Cardiff) as part of the wider AUKUS defence industrial activities. However, in the wake of numerous high-cost and strategically questionable defence acquisitions in the last two decades,⁷ critics make the case for

⁶ Llywodraeth Cymru: Welsh Government, 'New Plan to Launch Wales' Thriving Space Sector into Orbit', 21 February 2022, <https://www.gov.wales/new-plan-launch-wales-thriving-space-sector-orbit>.

⁷ Jack Detsch, 'The Royal Navy Has More Ambitions Than Assets', *Foreign Policy* (blog), 24 July 2024, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2022/10/03/hms-queen-elizabeth-britain-royal-navy-ambitions-assets/>. ; Deborah Haynes, 'Military Procurement Failures Hindered UK's Ability to Secure Tanks, Damning Review Finds', *Sky News*, 15 June 2023, <https://news.sky.com/story/military-procurement-failures-hindered-uks-ability-to-secure-tanks-damning-review-finds-12903148>.

redeploying parts the defence budget directly into other areas of need for the UK.⁸ Moreover, linking economic growth to defence industrial collaboration serves to militarise communities, with wider implications for society.

***Question 6:** Will a full, independent economic assessment be undertaken which includes consideration of the past performance of such projects in terms of economic growth and employment? And will an assessment be made of the extent to which this will contribute to the militarisation of the Welsh economy?*

***Question 7:** Will an economic assessment be made of potential alternative uses for the site, given the precedent of the Brawdy Business Park which has experienced high demand, helping to strengthen the local economy?*

⁸ Jennifer Scott, “‘Bairns Not Bombs’: SNP Calls for End to Two-Child Benefit Cap and Pledges NHS Funding Boost”, *Sky News*, 19 June 2024, <https://news.sky.com/story/bairns-not-bombs-snp-calls-for-end-to-two-child-benefit-cap-and-pledges-nhs-funding-boost-13155332>.

5. Implications for the Governance of Wales

The MoD have stated that the development of the site at Cawdor Barracks will require local authority planning permission. If this is denied, then the MoD have indicated that it will appeal to the Welsh Government. This would lead to an investigation by the Welsh Government's Planning Inspectorate and would likely involve a public hearing or a public inquiry. There is no formal role for the Senedd in this, though a debate may of course be triggered. The Welsh Government's decision would only be the subject of a Judicial Review in the High Court on grounds of procedure. However, the High Court would include an assessment of whether the provisions of the European Convention on Human Rights had been considered satisfactorily.⁹

At the public meetings in September, the MoD stated that the final decision will be with the Government in Wales not the UK Government. However, Permitted Development Rights appear to allow the UK Government to carry out developments for national security purposes without acquiring local planning consent.

Question 8: *Under what circumstances would the Welsh Government consider a debate in the Senedd to discuss DARC?*

Question 9: *Will the decision to grant planning approval reside solely in Wales or might another process – such as Permitted Development Rights – be used by the UK Government if planning approval is denied?*

A number of public engagement events have been held which have enabled the MoD to explain the project to local communities and address the concerns which they raised. However, the information provided at these events tended to be superficial¹⁰ – perhaps inevitably given their nature – and further information remains difficult to obtain. As trust and respect are central pillars of peaceful communities, the poor level of local consultation

⁹ See Welsh Parliament Senedd Research, *The Planning Series 6: Appeals* available at <https://research.senedd.wales/media/lopnd1dy/appeals-web-english.pdf>.

¹⁰ The Information Boards are available at https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/66e7eb7ce47cfc6de429d74f/DARC_Proposal_at_Cawdor_Barracks.pdf.

risks a democratic deficit which can be damaging for the everyday experiences of peace in communities surrounding the site. If community concerns, particularly around environmental issues and the agency of Welsh national identity are not addressed, it could cause a further erosion of trust between Welsh communities and the UK Government.

Question 10: *Does the MoD intend to present a more detailed case for public scrutiny, and does it intend to be available subsequently for questioning on remaining issues of concern to local communities and the Welsh government?*

Question 11: *How does the MoD plan to engage further with local communities to build trust?*

The Well-being of Future Generations Act (WBFGA) is a key and distinctive piece of legislation for Wales. Engaging with the Act and addressing the associated 7 Well-being Goals is important not only to the future quality of life in Wales, but in respecting Wales as a devolved nation. The DARC proposal appears to impact directly on the majority of the Well-being Goals, but when questioned in September in the public engagement events, MoD staff were unaware of the Act and had no plans to engage with the Commissioner or to address the Well-being Goals. Even if DARC falls outside the remit of the WBFGA and the role of the Future Generations Commissioner, it does fall within the spirit of future generations thinking.

Question 12: *How will the MoD engage with the Future Generations Commissioner and how does it propose to comply with the Well-being Goals?*