CADNANT

PLANNING

RHIGOS MOUNTAIN AND TOWER COLLIERY, RHIGOS
DESIGN, ACCESS AND PLANNING STATEMENT
ZIP WORLD LTD
OCTOBER 2019
2018.067

Conwy I 20 Connaught House, Riverside Business Park, Benarth Road, Conwy LL32 8UB

Chester I Bretton House, Bell Meadow Business Park, Pulford, Chester CH4 9EP

Status of report:	Issue for planning application	V1.0	November 2019
Author:	Sioned Edwards MRTPI		
Checker:	Sarinah Farooq MPlan Hons		
Reviewer:	Sarinah Farooq MPlan Hons		
Approved by:	Sioned Edwards MRTPI		
Document control:	CAD.02		

© The contents of this document must not be copied or reproduced in whole or in part without the written consent of Cadnant Planning Ltd. All plans are reproduced from the Ordinance Survey Map with the permission of the Controller HMSO, Crown Copyright Reserved, Licence No. 100020449

Cadnant Planning are accredited by and work to ISO 9001:2015 standard
(The British Assessment Bureau)

Contents

1. Introduction 1
2. The Zip World brand 3
3. The site and context 6
4. The proposed development 8
5. Policy context 16
6. Main considerations 30
7. Other design considerations 46
8. Accessibility 47
9. Conclusion 51

1. Introduction

1.1 This Design, Access and Planning Statement accompanies an application by Zip World Ltd, for full planning permission for the erection of three zip wire courses (4 zip lines), laying of hard standing, creation of internal access roads and pedestrian routes, temporary siting of cabins and use of land for car parking.

1.2 The application is submitted by Zip World, an adventure tourism provider, who opened their first zip line adventure, known as Zip World Velocity at Penrhyn Quarry, in Bethesda, North Wales in 2013. The North Wales adventure business wants to bring its unique brand of extraordinary experiences and adventure to South Wales, in the Cynon Valley. Zip World wish to develop a world class destination providing local jobs and significant economic benefits to the region, just like they have done in North Wales. Over the last five years, the Zip World brand has contributed £251 million to the North Wales economy (Assessing Zip World's Impact on the North Wales Economy Review 2018, by North Wales Tourism, 2018).

1.3 Zip World's innovation has seen it achieve many notable firsts, including Velocity 2 being the fastest zip line in the world and longest in Europe, Titan as the largest zip zone in Europe, and having the largest subterranean playground in Bounce Below and Caverns.

1.4 This Design, Access and Planning Statement was issued as part of a suite of documents for Pre-Application Consultation prior to the submission of a formal planning application. This Statement should be read alongside other planning application documents including proposed plans, Heritage Impact Assessment, Landscape Statement, Ecological Report and Transport Statement.

1.5 Pre-Application Consultation was undertaken in February 2019. Following a refinement of the proposed route of the zip wires, the route of Zip C has been amended. Zip C would begin from the same location, however, the landing area and the end of the zip line development is now proposed on land at Tower Colliery, immediately to the west of the head frame. A second Pre-Application Consultation was undertaken in October/November 2019 to consult upon the proposed change to the route of Zip C.

1.6 Following the enactment of the Planning (Wales) Act 2015 (the Act) the requirement for pre-application consultation on major development schemes was implemented. This includes the provision of development carried out on a site having an area of 1ha or more. The proposed development exceeds the 1ha site area threshold.

1.7 The requirement to carry out pre-application consultation falls under Section 17 of the Act and the Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) (Wales) Order 2012 (DMPWO) as amended by the 2016 Order. Guidance on carrying out the pre-application consultation requirements within the Act has been provided by the Welsh Government set out in Article 1 of the Town and Country Planning DMPWO (Amendment) 2016 'Guidance on Pre-application Consultation'.

1.8 As required by the Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) (Wales) Order (Amendment) 2016 the statement aims to address the following matters;

- Explain the design principles and concepts that have been applied to the development
- demonstrate the steps taken to appraise the context of the development and how the design of the development takes that context into account;
- explain the policy or approach adopted as to access, and how policies relating to access in the development plan have been taken into account; and
- explain how any specific issues which might affect access to the development have been addressed.

1.9 The adopted development plan consists of the Rhondda Cynon Taf Local Development Plan (LDP), which was adopted on in March 2011.

2. The Zip World brand

2.1 Zip World is an outdoor adventure tourism provider, who opened their first zip line adventure in Penrhyn Quarry, Bethesda, North Wales in 2013. The business has 13 adventures, spread over three sites in Snowdonia, including Penrhyn Quarry, Bethesda, Llechwedd Slate Caverns, Blaenau Ffestiniog and Zip World Fforest, Betws y Coed.

The story so far

2013

2.2 Zip World won international acclaim when it opened Zip World Velocity at Penrhyn Quarry, Bethesda in March 2013. Velocity offers riders the closest experience a human being can get to skydiving without actually leaping out of an aeroplane.

2014

2.3 In 2014, Zip World Titan was launched at Llechwedd Slate Caverns near the historic slate mining town of Blaenau Ffestiniog. This is the first four-person zip line in Europe where riders have 3 individual zip lines to complete.

2.4 Zip World also launched Bounce Below at its Llechwedd Slate Caverns site – giant trampolines, walkways and tunnels all made from netting, suspending in a slate cavern hidden underground.

2015

2.5 In 2015 Zip World Caverns was launched, described as a remarkable, uniquely exhilarating and atmospheric underground adventure comprising of zip lines, rope bridges via ferrata and tunnels.

2016

2.6 Zip World Fforest lies in a woodland setting in the Conwy Valley, close to the Snowdonia village of Betws y Coed. It hosts six forest adventures for the whole family, including the Fforest Coaster, the UK's only alpine coaster of its kind, bouncing Treetop Nets, Tree Hoppers and Zip Safari (zip line and adventure courses high in trees), Europe's highest giant swing, Skyride and Plummet 2, the world's first tandem drop from over 100ft high.

2019

2.7 In Summer 2019 Zip World opened their latest gravity fuelled adventure in the form of their Quarry Karts, which is the UK's only mountain cart experience. Spanning over 3km of dirt track, the course weaves through the Penrhyn Quarry mountain, to the Snowdonia mountain range backdrop, Anglesey and beyond. The track includes a

number of obstacles, including chicanes, berms, tunnels, twists and turns, and the zip riders up above.

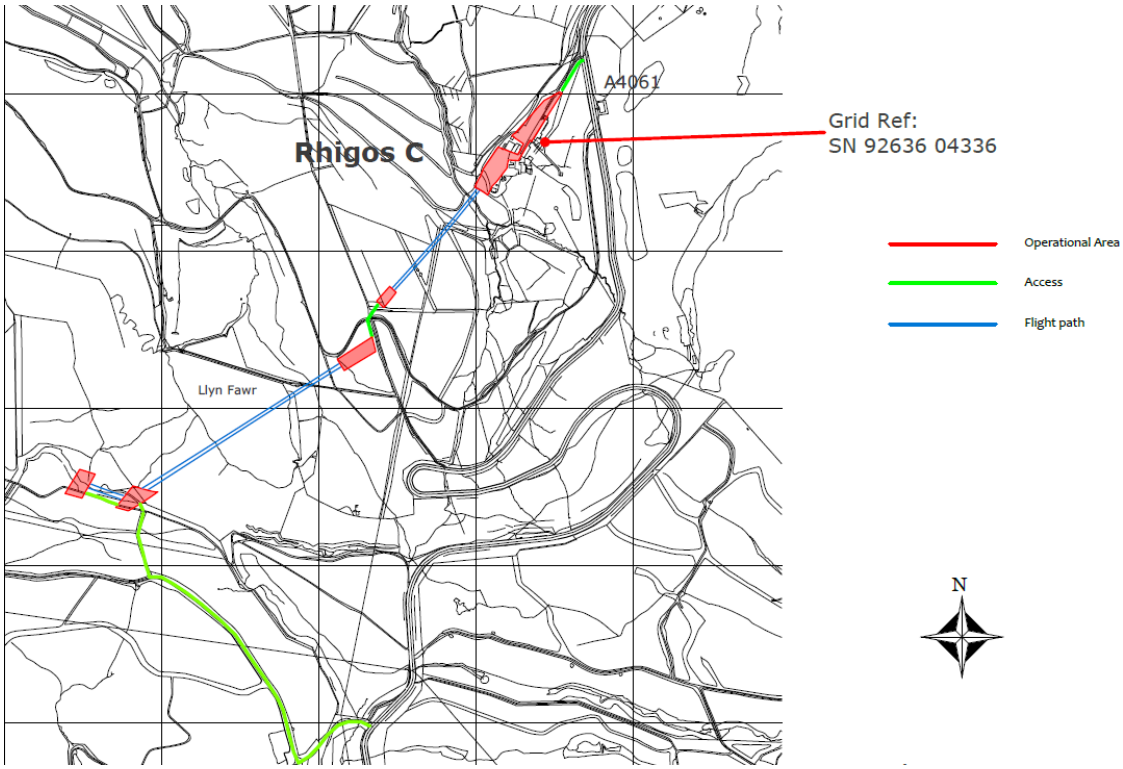
2.8 The proposed development marks a new milestone for Zip World as it will be the first time it brings its adventures to a permanent new base in South Wales. Zip World want to create adventures that bring new tourism opportunities to the local area of Rhigos and fuel the local economy.

3. The site and context

3.1 The application site in the north of the Cynon Valley, in the county borough of Rhondda Cynon Taf. The site lies to the south of the villages of Rhigos and Hirwaun, covering an area of land on Rhigos Mountain, located between 0.5km and 1km to the west of the A4061 highway, between Blaenrhondda and Hirwaun.

3.2 The extent of the application site is identified on the plan in Figure 2.1 below. This extends to include internal access roads to serve the proposed zip wire development (shown in green), operational areas where operational works are proposed to include the laying of hardstanding and erection of zip wire structures, car parking and reception area (shown in red) and flight paths for the proposed zip wires (shown in blue).

Figure 2.1 Plan identifying the extent of the application site and proposed uses



3.3 The application site also includes part of the site of the former Tower Colliery. Proposed zip line C will finish on land to the south-west of the existing buildings at Tower Colliery, immediately to the west of the listed head frame.

3.4 Land to be used at Tower Colliery also includes areas of hardstanding which were previously used as an area for car parking when the Tower Colliery site was operational. This area will be used for car parking as part of the proposed development,

as well as being the base for the zip wire adventure, providing reception area. No existing buildings or structures within the former Tower Colliery site form part of this planning application, however, the re-use of these buildings does offer potential for future development at the site.

3.5 Wherever possible, vehicular access is gained over existing access tracks, which are on private land. However, in some instances, new areas of hardstanding and access tracks are proposed to serve the development and these have been kept to a minimum.

4. The proposed development

Use

4.1 This application seeks full planning permission for the erection of three zip wire courses (4 zip lines), laying of hard standing, creation of internal access roads and pedestrian routes, temporary siting of cabins and use of land for car parking.

4.2 The zip wire adventure is split into three separate zip wire courses, referred to as Zip A, Zip B and Zip C. The zip wire development utilises the same technology and structures as are used at Zip World's existing Velocity attraction at Penrhyn Quarry, Bethesda, however riders will ride in a seated rather than a lying down position. It is proposed to use stealth trolleys, as are used in Penrhyn Quarry, as these are significantly quieter than standard aluminium trolleys.

4.3 A description of each element of the development is set out below:

Amount, scale, layout and access

Tower Colliery site

4.4 Vehicular access to the base of the zip line adventure, located at land at Tower Colliery, will be gained from the A4061 Rhigos Road via an existing access. Visitors will use the existing access road within the site to access to an area of hardstanding at the Tower Colliery site, which was previously used for car parking when the Colliery was operational. Car parking for approximately 80 cars will be provided informally on an area of hardstanding, which will be levelled out by use of compacted hardcore.

4.5 The car parking area will be in very close proximity to a group of cabins, which will be used as office, reception, kitting up and de-kitting and toilets. This will be the central area where visitors will report to upon arrival and book in, before being kitted up ready for their zip wire adventure.

4.6 Once booked in and kitted up, riders will wait to be transported up in groups by Zip World to the top of Zip A. The access route will be from Tower Colliery, along the Rhigos Road public highway, leaving at a junction which provides access to Pen y Cymoedd Wind Farm, onto a private road.

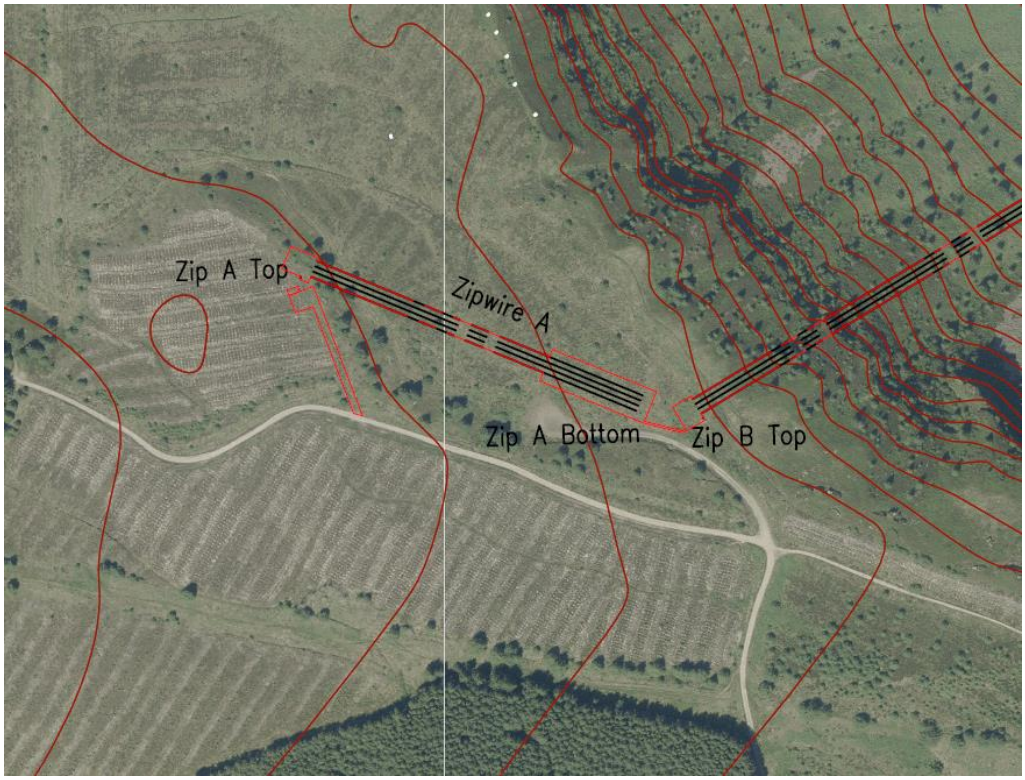
Zip wire course

4.7 The zip wire development is split into three separate zip wire courses, referred to as Zip A, Zip B and Zip C. Each zip line course will comprise of four zip lines, similar to the existing development at Titan, Llechwedd, Blaenau Ffestiniog. The zip line course will measure a width of 9m, comprising of four 16mm diameter galvanised steel zip wires.

Zip A

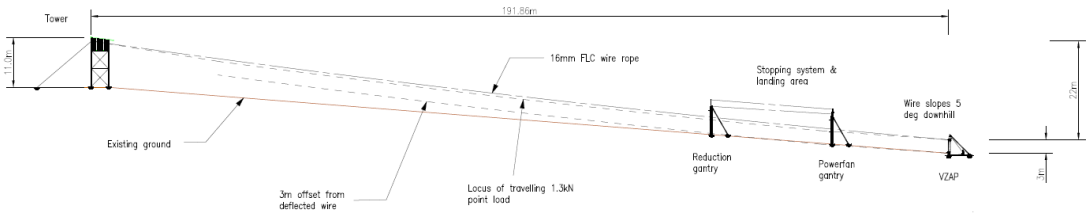
4.8 Zip A is the first zip wire course, which comprises the top section located at Rhigos Mountain (see Figure 4.1).

Figure 4.1 Extract of aerial image identifying proposed route for Zip A



4.9 Zip A measures approximately 191m in length and comprises of an overall drop of 22m from start to finish (see Figure 4.2).

Figure 4.2 Elevation of Zip A



4.10 The despatch platform for Zip A comprises of an open galvanised steel framework tower (H11m, W16.4m, D5.2m), accessed via a staircase, which will be a roof covered structure with open façade to the front with balustrade. The image in Figure 4.3 provides an example of a similar structure at Penrhyn Quarry (which doesn't sit on a raised framework).

Figure 4.3 Example of zip wire despatch platform

4.11 An area of hardstanding will be created to accommodate the despatch platform. A 4m wide compacted hardcore track and turning area will be created to provide operational vehicular access to Zip A, from the existing private access track.

4.12 The stopping system and landing area for Zip A comprise of three structures; reduction gantry and powerfan gantry (H 8.4m and W 15.8m) positioned 8m apart and a final VZAP structure (H7m, W 15.8). A photo of a similar stopping system is provided in Figure 4.4.

Figure 4.4 Photo of similar stopping system at Penrhyn Quarry

4.13 Riders will walk via a new pedestrian access from the bottom of Zip A to Zip B.

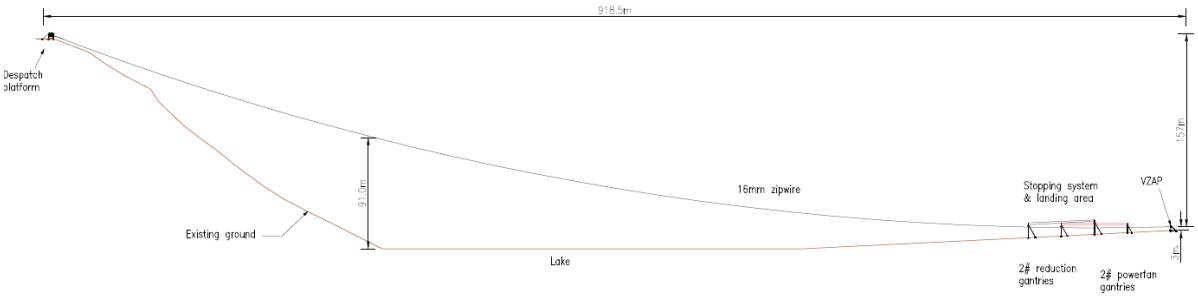
Zip B

4.14 Zip B comprises the longest section of the zip wire course, covering a distance of 932m from start to finish, despatching from above and sailing over Llyn Fawr (see Figure 4.5).

Figure 4.5 Extract of aerial image identifying route of Zip B

4.15 Zip B has the largest overall depth of 157m from despatch to landing. An elevation drawing of Zip B is provided in Figure 4.6.

Figure 4.6 Elevation of Zip B



4.16 The despatch platform for Zip B is similar to that for Zip A, however it is smaller in terms of its overall height (H5m, W16.4m, D5.2m), accessed via a staircase, which will be a roof covered structure with open façade to the front with balustrade. An area of hardstanding will be created to accommodate the despatch platform.

4.17 The stopping system and landing area for Zip B comprise of five structures; two reduction gantry and two powerfan gantry (H 12.3m and W 15.8m). The stopping system for Zip B extends to 123.5m. A compacted hardcore landing strip will be created at the bottom of Zip B, together with the removal of existing trees, the extent of removal is identified on the relevant site plan. A reinforced tree line is proposed at the bottom of Zip B in order to provide a buffer between the landing gantries for Zip B and a bridleway that runs from north to south in close proximity to this area. A 4m wide compacted hardcore track will also be created to provide access to Zip C.

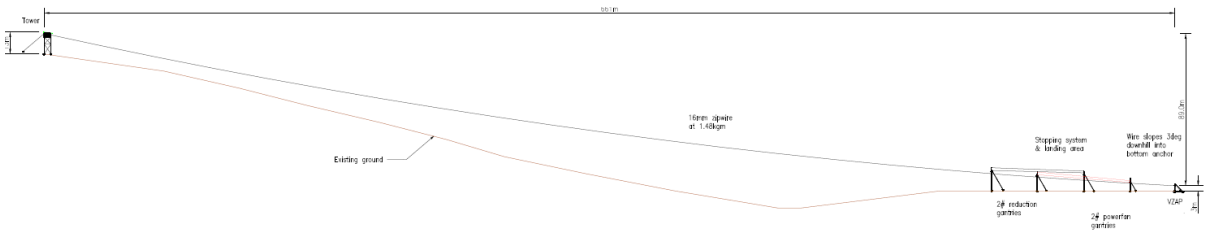
Zip C

4.18 Zip C is the final and lowest part of the zip wire course covering a distance of 661m. It starts from a close distance to the bottom of Zip B and extends over ground, landing within a reasonable walking distance from the Tower Colliery site (see Figure 4.7).

Figure 4.7 Extract of aerial image identifying route of Zip C

4.19 An elevation drawing of Zip C is provided in Figure 4.8.

Figure 4.8 Elevation of Zip C



4.20 The despatch platform for Zip C is higher than any of the other despatch platforms, due to the requirement for a higher starting point to accommodate the topography of the landscape and it measures H13m, W16.4m, D5.2m), accessed via a staircase, which will be a roof covered structure with open façade to the front with balustrade. An area of hardstanding will be created to accommodate the despatch platform.

4.21 The stopping system and landing area for Zip C comprise of five structures; two reduction gantry and two powerfan gantry (H 12.3m and W 15.8m). The stopping system for Zip C extends to 115m. A compacted hardcore landing strip will be created at the bottom of Zip C as identified on the relevant site plan.

4.22 Riders will finish their journey by walking back through the Tower Colliery site which will be fenced, back towards the car park and reception area.

Appearance

4.23 The proposal incorporates the following materials:

Despatch platform

Zip A and B

- Open non-reflective matt finished galvanised steel framework and staircase;
- Walls: timber clad and open façade with non-reflective matt finished metal balustrade;
- Roof: non-reflective matt metal component roofing sheets.

Zip C

- Treated timber shiplap board cladding to circular barrel vault roof;
- Galvanised steel balustrade;
- Timber plank or steel open mesh grating platform deck;
- Galvanised steel hollow section raking ties.

Stopping systems

- Unclad galvanised matt finished non-reflective steel framework fixed down to mass concrete pad bases.

Landscaping

4.24 In order to contain the use of only part of the former Tower Colliery site, the area will be fenced to restrict access beyond the application site. The extent of the proposed fence is identified on site plan A 04. A reinforced tree line is proposed at the bottom of Zip B in order to provide a buffer between the landing gantries for Zip B and a bridleway that runs from north to south in close proximity to this area. No other landscaping is proposed.

4.25 A 100m swathe cut of mature conifers is proposed near the end of zip B and along Zip C. The extent of tree removal is identified on the Tree Removal Plan submitted as part of the application. The 100m swathe cut through mature conifers plus adjacent blocks of felling the lower end of Zip B and top of Zip C will be seen as straight lines in the flowing landscape, but not generally be seen 'head-on' and therefore will not be too conspicuous.

5. Policy context

5.1 National and local planning policy guidance considered relevant to the principle of this development is set out in this section.

National planning policy and guidance

5.2 The proposal relates to a zip wire course development and relevant national planning policy is set out in:

- Planning Policy Wales (PPW) Edition 10, (2018);
- Technical Advice Note (TAN) 5: Nature Conservation and Planning' (2009);
- Technical Advice Note (TAN) 12 'Design' (2016);
- Technical Advice Note (TAN) 18 'Transport' (2007);
- Technical Advice Note (TAN) 23: Economic Development (2014)
- Technical Advice Note (TAN) 24: 'The Historic Environment' (2017).

5.3 In addition to the above, Cadw have produced a number of best practice guidance notes that are relevant to this application in relation to the historic environment and these are listed in the accompanying Heritage Impact Assessment.

5.4 Relevant national planning policies are listed in table 5.1.

Table 5.1 Summary of national planning policy and guidance

Policy	Summary of policy
PPW Chapter 1 Introduction	Paragraph 1.17 states that "*A plan-led approach is the most effective way to secure sustainable development through the planning system and it is essential that plans are adopted and kept under review. Legislation secures a presumption in favour of sustainable development in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise to ensure that social, economic, cultural and environmental issues are balanced and integrated*". 1.21 relates to development plans and advises that up-to-date development plans are the basis of the planning system and set the context for rational and consistent decision making. Plans at all levels of the development plan hierarchy must be prepared in accordance with national planning policies. Planning applications must be determined in accordance with the adopted plan, unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

PPW 4 Active and Social	The Active and Social theme covers the well-connected cohesive communities components of placemaking. These components are complementary to those of the Productive and Enterprising and Distinctive and Natural themes and collectively the three themes come together to contribute towards the national sustainable placemaking outcomes. A Prosperous Wales can be promoted through the development of modern and connected infrastructure to allow everybody to have a good quality of life by living in strong and safe communities, with access to decent jobs. A Resilient Wales is supported by protecting existing communities and natural environments while promoting well connected infrastructure and facilities closer to where people live. The key issues in this Active and Social theme include: • tackling inequalities between communities, delivering services and jobs closer to where people live and acknowledging the importance of inclusive communities and the wider environment for good health and well-being; • improve sustainable access to services, cultural opportunities and recreation facilities to support people to adopt healthy, culturally fulfilled lifestyles which will assist in improving health and wellbeing; • reducing reliance on travel by private car, and the adverse impacts of motorised transport on the environment and people's health, by prioritising and increasing active travel and public transport; Active and social theme aims to: • ensure new development is located and designed in a way which minimises the need to travel, reduces dependency on the private car and enables sustainable access to employment, local services and community facilities. This will be achieved through integrating development with sustainable transport infrastructure and designing schemes in a way which maximises provision and use of sustainable forms of travel, including prioritising these modes over the private car. Paragraph 4.1.9 advises that the planning system has a key role to play in reducing the need to travel and supporting sustainable transport, by facilitating developments which: • are sited in the right locations, where they can be easily accessed by sustainable modes of travel and without the need for a car;

	• are designed in a way which integrates them with existing land uses and neighbourhoods; and • make it possible for all short journeys within and beyond the development to be easily made by walking and cycling.
PPW Chapter 5 Productive and Enterprising Places	Chapter 5 of PPW relates to Productive and Enterprising Placemaking and Well-being. **Economic Development** Section 5.4 relates to Economic Development. PPW provides clarity on which uses should be acceptable as part of promoting economic development in Paragraph 5.4.1. This refers to traditional employment land uses as B1, B2 and B8 Uses and endorses that uses such as retail (A1, tourism D2 and public services A2, should be included when considering the economic strategy. Paragraph 5.4.1 states that; "*For planning purposes the Welsh Government defines economic development as the development of land and buildings for activities that generate sustainable long term prosperity, jobs and incomes. The planning system should ensure that the growth of output and employment in Wales as a whole is not constrained by a shortage of land for economic uses*." Paragraph 5.4.2 states that; *"Economic land uses include the traditional employment land uses (offices, research and development, industry and warehousing), as well as uses such as retail, tourism, and public services. The construction, energy, minerals, waste and telecommunications sectors are also essential to the economy and are sensitive to planning policy. This section focuses primarily on traditional employment land uses (B1, B2 and B8) while policies on other economic sectors are found elsewhere in PPW."* **Tourism** Section 5.5 relates to Tourism. PPW acknowledges that "*tourism involves a wide range of activities, facilities and types of development and is vital to economic prosperity and job creation in many parts of Wales. Tourism can be a catalyst for regeneration, improvement of the built environment and environmental protection*". Paragraph 5.5.2 notes that the planning system encourages tourism where it contributes to economic development, conservation, rural diversification, urban regeneration and social inclusion, while recognising the needs of

	visitors and those of local communities. The planning system can also assist in enhancing the sense of place of an area which has intrinsic value and interest for tourism. Appropriate tourism-related development in new destinations is encouraged. Paragraph 5.5.4 is of relevance to the application site. It acknowledges that there will be scope to develop well-designed tourist facilities in urban areas, particularly if they help bring about regeneration of former industrial areas. The sensitive refurbishment and re-use of historic buildings also presents particular opportunities for tourism facilities in all areas. Paragraph 5.5.7 states that planning authorities should adopt positive approaches to proposals which utilise previously developed or disused land and water bodies for tourism uses, particularly in relation to urban regeneration.
PPW Chapter 6 Distinctive and Natural Places	The Distinctive and Natural theme covers environmental and cultural components of placemaking. A Prosperous Wales can be realised by valuing the quality of our landscapes and historic environment as important for tourism, business, local employment, locally sourced building products, in attracting inward investment and to be accessed, used and enjoyed by local communities. A Healthier Wales can be achieved by enabling opportunities for connecting with the natural and historic environment, enabling access to tranquil areas, tackling airborne pollution and other environmental risks and the promotion of active travel and encouragement of healthier lifestyles with the benefit of improving physical and mental well-being. A More Equal Wales can be achieved through facilitating access to the natural and historic environment for physical and social benefits especially where inequalities exist. Regeneration should promote beneficial use of historical mining and industrial legacies in a sensitive way to allow communities and the natural environment to thrive and significant tourism generators such as the Wales Coastal Path are protected and accessible by all. Development plan strategies, policies and development proposals should be formulated to look to the long term protection and enhancement of the special characteristics and intrinsic qualities of places, be these of natural,

	historic or built environments, ensuring their longevity in the face of change. This means both protecting and enhancing landscapes, habitats, biodiversity, geodiversity and the historic environment in their own right as well as other components of the natural world, such as water resources or air quality. **Historic Environment** Section 6.1 relates to the Historic Environment. The historic environment comprises all the surviving physical elements of previous human activity and illustrates how past generations have shaped the world around us. It is central to Wales's culture and its character, whilst contributing to our sense of place and identity. It enhances our quality of life, adds to regional and local distinctiveness and is an important economic and social asset. The historic environment is made up of individual historic features which are collectively known as historic assets, including listed buildings, historic landscapes and scheduled monuments. Paragraph 6.1.6 advises that the Welsh Government's specific objectives for the historic environment seek to: • conserve archaeological remains, both for their own sake and for their role in education, leisure and the economy: • safeguard the character of historic buildings and manage change so that their special architectural and historic interest is preserved; and • protect areas on the register of historic landscapes in Wales. It is important that the planning system looks to protect, conserve and enhance the significance of historic assets. This will include consideration of the setting of an historic asset which might extend beyond its curtilage. Any change that impacts on an historic asset or its setting should be managed in a sensitive and sustainable way. **Archaeological Remains** Paragraph 6.1.23 advises that the planning system recognises the need to conserve archaeological remains. The conservation of archaeological remains and their settings is a material consideration in determining planning applications, whether those remains are a scheduled monument or not.

	Listed Buildings Paragraph 6.1.10 advises that there should be a general presumption in favour of the preservation or enhancement of a listed building and its setting, which might extend beyond its curtilage. For any development proposal affecting a listed building or its setting, the primary material consideration is the statutory requirement to have special regard to the desirability of preserving the building, its setting or any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses. **Landscape** The character and special qualities of all our places and landscapes, both urban and rural, can provide a strong sense of place, inspiration and belonging, and contribute to the distinctive cultural identity of Wales. All the landscapes of Wales are valued for their intrinsic contribution to a sense of place, and local authorities should protect and enhance their special characteristics, whilst paying due regard to the social, economic, environmental and cultural benefits they provide, and to their role in creating valued places.
TAN 5 Nature Conservation and Planning	Technical Advice Note 5 'Nature Conservation and Planning' provides advice about how the land use planning system should contribute to protecting and enhancing biodiversity and geological conservation. Paragraph 1.6.1 states that; "*Biodiversity conservation and enhancement is an integral part of planning for sustainable development. The planning system has an important part to play in nature conservation. The use and development of land can pose threats to the conservation of natural features and wildlife. Past changes have contributed to the loss of integrity of habitat networks through land-take, fragmentation, severance, disturbance, hydrological changes and other adverse impacts. But development can also present significant opportunities to enhance wildlife habitats and the enjoyment and understanding of the natural heritage*."
TAN 12 Design	The guidance in TAN 12 has been considered in formulating the proposal and in reporting on the Design and Access issues. The Welsh Government is strongly committed to achieving the delivery of good design in the built and natural environment which is fit for purpose and delivers environmental sustainability, economic development and social inclusion, at every scale throughout Wales. Paragraph 5.5.1 of TAN 12 identifies that an

	understanding of landscape and townscape quality, including its historic character, is fundamental to the design process. The relationship between all elements of the natural and built environment. To create sustainable development, design must go beyond aesthetics and include the social, environmental and economic aspects of the development, including its construction, operation and management, and its relationship to its surroundings. Good design is also inclusive design. The principles of inclusive design are that it places people at the heart of the design process, acknowledges diversity and difference, offers choice where a single design solution cannot accommodate all users, provides for flexibility in use, and, provides buildings and environments that are convenient and enjoyable to use for everyone. Section 5.8 relates to rural areas and paragraph 5.8.1 identifies that; '*The special qualities of the rural landscape and coastline of Wales should be recognised. The qualities should be enhanced through conservation of the character of the countryside and by achieving quality in new development.*'
TAN 18 Transport	TAN 18 has also been taken into consideration. The main aim of TAN 18 is ensuring that new development is located where there is, or will be, good access by public transport, walking and cycling thereby minimising the need for travel and fostering social inclusion. Paragraph 2.4 of TAN identifies that the inter-relationship between land use planning and transport is complex and varied. The development of land is dependant, in part, upon transport infrastructure and services to function efficiently. By influencing the location, scale, density and mix of land uses and new development, land use planning can help reduce the need to travel and length of journeys, whilst making it easier for people to walk, cycle or use public transport. TAN 18 also considers people with disabilities. TAN 18 identifies that it is important to consider their needs in terms of parking, in particular ensuring that adequate numbers of suitably designed parking spaces are provided in appropriate locations.
TAN 23 Economic Development	TAN 23 also provides guidance on matters relating to economic development and recognises the diverse range of employment uses that are present in the economy in Wales.

	Paragraph 1.2.1 advises that "*the economic benefits associated with development may be geographically spread out far beyond the area where the development is located. As a consequence it is essential that the planning system recognises, and gives due weight to, the economic benefits associated with new development*". Section 2.1 relates to the weight to be given to economic benefit. Paragraph 2.1.1 advises that it should not be assumed that economic objectives are necessarily in conflict with social and environmental objectives. Often these different dimensions point in the same direction. Planning should positively and imaginatively seek such 'win-win' outcomes, where development contributes to all dimensions of sustainability. Paragraph 2.1.2 advises that Where economic development would cause environmental or social harm which cannot be fully mitigated, careful consideration of the economic benefits will be necessary. There will of course be occasions when social and environmental considerations will outweigh economic benefit. The decision in each case will depend on the specific circumstances and the planning authority's priorities.
TAN 24: The Historic Environment	TAN24 provides guidance on how the planning system considers the historic environment during development plan preparation and decision making on planning and Listed Building applications. This TAN provides specific guidance on how the following aspects of the historic environment should be considered: World Heritage Sites; Scheduled monuments; Archaeological remains; Listed buildings; Conservation areas; Historic parks and gardens; Historic landscapes; and, Historic assets of special local interest. In respect of archaeological remains, TAN 24 states "*When considering development proposals that affect scheduled monuments or other nationally important archaeological remains, there should be a presumption in favour of their physical preservation in situ, i.e. a presumption against proposals which would involve significant alteration or cause damage, or would have a significant adverse impact causing harm within the setting of the remains. In cases involving less significant archaeological remains, local planning authorities will need to weigh the relative importance of the archaeological remains and their settings against other factors, including the need for the proposed development*". Planning Policy Wales, TAN 24 and the other relevant guidance all refer to the importance of the setting of historic assets and ensuring that this is taken

	into account when considering proposals that might impact on this. The setting includes the surroundings in which the historic asset is understood, and often extends into the surrounding landscape.

Local planning policy and guidance

5.5 The adopted development plan consists of the Rhondda Cynon Taf Local Development Plan (LDP), which was adopted in March 2011. Table 5.2 provides a summary of local planning policy which is of relevance to the proposed development.

5.6 A number of relevant Supplementary Planning Guidance Notes related to the LDP have been produced, including The Historic Built Environment (2011) which provides more detailed guidance for considering applications that affect the historic environment.

Table 5.2 Summary of local planning policy and guidance

Policy	Summary of policy
Key issues in Rhondda Cynon Taf	
Summary of trends	The central and northern valleys of the County Borough are experiencing: • High levels of deprivation; • Dereliction compounded by a declining population; • Low levels of house building; and • Below average levels of economic activity.
Aims of the LDP strategy	In the central and northern valleys, the LDP strategy will seek to: • Halt the process of decline by stimulating growth in the housing and employment markets; • Removing dereliction, and • Supporting services in important urban centres.
Vision and objectives	
Vision	The LDP sets out a Vision which, in summary, is as follows: *"Rhondda Cynon Taf will be a County Borough of Opportunity. That means working together to enable individuals and communities to achieve their full potential, in terms of both their work and social life."*
LDP objectives	The objectives of the Rhondda Cynon Taf LDP include: **Sustainable Communities** 2. Promote integrated communities within the Principal Towns, Key Settlements and other sustainable settlements by ensuring the development of a high quality

	built environment that provides opportunities for living, working and socialising for all. **Achieving Potential** 3. Develop a sustainable economy in Rhondda Cynon Taf that provides a diverse range of job opportunities in locations that reinforce the roles of Principal Towns and Key Settlements in the north and south of the County Borough. **Better Quality of Life** 4. Promote and protect the rich culture and heritage of the County Borough by protecting and enhancing the historic landscape of the Rhondda, the historic parks and gardens in the south and the built heritage of the County Borough as a whole. **Develop and Protect the County Borough for Future Generations** 10. Promote the efficient and appropriate use of land, soil and minerals throughout the County Borough by maximising the use of land, promoting the re-use and restoration of derelict land and buildings, reuse of materials and the safeguarding of resources of local, regional and national importance where they occur in Rhondda Cynon Taf.
Core strategy and policies	
Core Strategy	Aberdare is identified as a principal town, being an important hub for social and economic activity by acting as gateways for new investment, innovation and sustainable development. Key Settlements such as Hirwaun, provide important services and act as centres for commercial and community activity. It acts as a focal point for growth in Rhondda Cynon Taf over the plan period. Hirwaun currently plays a different role to other Key Settlements, being in in an excellent strategic location and are capable of assimilating significant additional residential and commercial development. Hirwaun has a major role to play in the successful delivery of the LDP Strategy.
Policy CS 1 – Development in the North	In the Northern Strategy Area the emphasis will be on building strong, sustainable communities. This will be achieved by: 1. Promoting residential and commercial development in locations which will support and reinforce the roles of Principal Towns and Key Settlements; 2. Providing high quality, affordable accommodation that promotes diversity in the residential market; 3. Ensuring the removal and remediation of dereliction by promoting the re-use of under used and previously developed land and buildings; 4. Promoting large scale regeneration schemes in the Principal Town of Aberdare and in the Key Settlements of Mountain Ash, Ferndale and Treorchy; 5. Promoting accessibility by securing investment in new roads, public transport improvements, walking and cycling;

	6. Encouraging a strong, diverse economy which supports traditional employment and promotes new forms of employment in the leisure and tourism sectors; 7. Protecting the cultural identity of the Strategy Area by protecting historic built heritage and the natural environment, 8. Promoting and enhancing transport infrastructure services to support growth and investment, and 9. Reducing daily out commuting by private car and promoting sustainable forms of travel. Paragraph 4.26 of the LDP advises that the Northern Strategy Area has suffered significant decline since the widespread closure of the collieries in the South Wales Coalfield in the mid 1980's. The Strategy Area has suffered from high indices of deprivation, unemployment, dereliction, loss of services and inevitably depopulation. A poor internal road network, low house building rates and a lack of meaningful inward investment have exacerbated the situation. 4.27 The Strategy Area does however, have a strong sense of community pride, many towns and villages with fine architectural history and a spectacular landscape that rivals that of the adjoining Brecon Beacons National Park. 4.28 The LDP will provide a policy framework that seeks to secure regeneration and create sustainable communities in the Northern Strategy Area.
Policy CS 10 – Minerals	The Council will seek to protect resources and to contribute to the local, regional and national demand for a continuous supply of minerals, without compromising environmental and social issues, by: … 2. *Defining safeguarding areas for mineral resources, including coal, high quality hard rock, limestone and sand and gravel, taking into account the range, quality and extent of resources and environmental, planning and transportation considerations*;…
Northern Strategy Area: Building Sustainable Communities	
Policy NSA 16 – Re-development of Vacant / Redundant Industrial Sites	Proposals for the conversion or re-development of redundant and/or vacant industrial sites will be supported where: 1. All sites (a) The development is compatible with other uses in the locality and there are no significant adverse impacts on the amenities enjoyed by local residents; and (b) The re-development of the derelict, unsightly, underused and vacant land will have a positive effect in regeneration terms.
Policy NSA 25 – Special Landscape Areas	Special Landscape Areas are identified at the following locations: 1. Mynydd y Cymmer; 2. Mynydd Troed y Rhiw Slopes; 3. Llwyncelyn Slopes;

	4. Cwm Clydach; 5. Cynon Valley Northern Slopes; 6. Cwm Orci; 7. Rhondda Fawr Northern Cwm & Slopes; 8. Hirwaun Common, Cwm Dare & Cwm Aman; and, 9. Brecon Beacons Edge at Llwydcoed. Development within the defined Special Landscape Areas will be expected to conform to the highest standards of design, siting, layout and materials appropriate to the character of the area.
Area Wide policies	
Policy AW 5 – New Development	Development proposals will be supported where:- 1. Amenity a) The scale, form and design of the development would have no unacceptable effect on the character and appearance of the site and the surrounding area; b) Where appropriate, existing site features of built and natural environment value would be retained; c) There would be no significant impact upon the amenities of neighbouring occupiers; d) The development would be compatible with other uses in the locality; e) The development would include the use of multi-functional buildings where appropriate; f) The development designs out the opportunity for crime and anti social behaviour. 2. Accessibility a) The development would be accessible to the local and wider community by a range of sustainable modes of transport; b) The site layout and mix of uses maximises opportunities to reduce dependence on cars; c) The development would have safe access to the highway network and would not cause traffic congestion or exacerbate existing traffic congestion; d) Car parking would be provided in accordance with the Council's Supplementary Planning Guidance on Access, Parking and Circulation.
Policy AW 6 – Design and Placemaking	Development Proposals will be supported where: 1. They are of a high standard of design, which reinforces attractive qualities and local distinctiveness and improves areas of poor design and layout; 2. They are appropriate to the local context in terms of siting, appearance, scale, height, massing, elevational treatment, materials and detailing; 3. In the case of extensions to buildings, they reflect, complement or enhance the form, siting, materials, details and character of the original building, its curtilage and the wider area;

	4. In the case of proposals for new and replacement shop fronts and signage, they make a positive contribution to the streetscene; 5. In the public realm and key locations such as town centres, major routes, junctions and public spaces, the character and quality of the built form is to a high standard of design; 6. They include public art; 7. Landscaping and planting are integral to the scheme and enhance the site and the wider context; 8. They include an integrated mixture of uses appropriate to the scale of the development; 9. They include the efficient use of land, especially higher-density residential development on sites in proximity to local amenities and public transport; 10. Open space is provided in accordance with the Fields in Trust Standards; 11. A high level of connectivity and accessibility to existing centres, by a wide range of modes of sustainable transport; 12. Schemes incorporate a flexibility in design to allow changes in use of buildings and spaces as requirements and circumstances change; 13. The development reflects and enhances the cultural heritage of Rhondda Cynon Taf; 14. The design protects and enhances the landscape and biodiversity; 15. The development promotes energy efficiency and the use of renewable energy; and 16. The design promotes good water management, including rainwater storage, sustainable urban drainage, porous paving etc.
Policy AW 7 - Protection and Enhancement of the Built Environment	Development proposals which impact upon sites of architectural and / or historical merit and sites of archaeological importance will only be permitted where it can be demonstrated that the proposal would preserve or enhance the character and appearance of the site. Development proposals which affect areas of public open space, allotments, public rights of way, bridleways and cycle tracks will only be permitted where it can be demonstrated that: 1. There is a surplus of such facilities in the locality, or; 2. The loss can be replaced with an equivalent or greater provision in the immediate locality; or 3. The development enhances the existing facility.
Policy AW 8 – Protection and Enhancement of the Natural Environment	Rhondda Cynon Taf's distinctive natural heritage will be preserved and enhanced by protecting it from inappropriate development. Development proposals will only be permitted where: 1. They would not cause harm to the features of a Site of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINC) or Regionally Important Geological Site (RIGS) or other locally designated sites, unless it can be demonstrated that:

	a) The proposal is directly necessary for the positive management of the site; or b) The proposal would not unacceptably impact on the features of the site for which it has been designated; or c) The development could not reasonably be located elsewhere and the benefits of the proposed development clearly outweigh the nature conservation value of the site. 2. There would be no unacceptable impact upon features of importance to landscape or nature conservation, including ecological networks, the quality of natural resources such as air, water and soil, and the natural drainage of surface water. All development proposals, including those in built up areas, that may affect protected and priority species will be required to demonstrate what measures are proposed for the protection and management of the species and the mitigation and compensation of potential impacts. Development proposals must be accompanied by appropriate ecological surveys and appraisals, as requested by the Council. Development proposals that contribute to the management or development of Ecological Networks will be supported.
Policy AW 14 – Safeguarding of Minerals	The following mineral resources shall be safeguarded from any development which would unnecessarily sterilise them or hinder their extraction. 4. The resources of Coal, as shown on the proposals map, will be safeguarded from development. This safeguarding area will exclude internationally and nationally designated nature conservation sites and established settlements of 10 units or more.

6. Main considerations

Principle of development

6.1 The proposal relates to a zip wire development, which is considered to be an outdoor adventure tourism development. There is no specific policy within the adopted LDP which relates to tourism development outside defined settlement boundaries. However, paragraph 6.15 of the LDP notes the need for new facilities was identified in the tourism sector to promote the offer and strategic location of Hirwaun. The role of the proposed development to the tourism sector of the local area is discussed in greater detail under the 'Economic and tourism benefits' heading below.

6.2 The proposal makes use of previously developed land by way of locating the base and hub for the proposed zip wire development on part of the former Tower Colliery site. PPW advises that the re-use of previously developed land is preferable to the use of green sites.

Economic and tourism benefits

6.3 The development would involve significant investment in the local economy which will, in the short term, benefit the construction supply chain and in the long-term create valuable permanent jobs once operational. It is expected that, once operational, the development would also complement the current tourism offer in the area and help ensure that visitor spend is retained locally.

Zip World's impact on the economy

6.4 An independent assessment of Zip World's impact on the North Wales economy was undertaken in 2016 by North Wales Tourism. The assessment reviewed the attraction's economic impact by examining the value of visitor spend and employment opportunities made available. An update to the 2016 report was undertaken and published as 'Assessing Zip World's Impact on the North Wales Economy Review 2018' (the NWT 2018 Review).

6.5 The research had a number of purposes. The main purpose was to form an understanding of the attraction's contribution to the North Wales economy. The secondary purpose was to understand the importance of the economic benefits it brings.

Visitor spend

6.6 The NWT 2018 Review identified that the average Zip World visitor spend is £251 – 500. This is higher than the UK average of £161. Zip World had attracted over 482,758 visitors since 2013.

6.7 The NWT 2018 Review shows that visitors to Zip World's average spend in North Wales is increasing. 12.77% of visitors who went to Zip World less than a year ago spent more than £1,001. This is a 4.46% increase from the year previous.

6.8 Also encouraging is the increase in the minimum spend. Visitors spending £0-£100 has decreased by 7.8% from 3 years ago and 3.27% from the previous year.

6.9 One of the factors influencing the growth in spend include more accommodation on offer. This provides an indication for where spin-off spending is being made by Zip World visitors.

6.10 Combining this with the average spend, North Wales Tourism were able to calculate that Zip World has brought in excess of £121,172,258 to the North Wales economy. Since the last survey was carried out by North Wales Tourism, Zip World has welcomed over 1 million visitors since inception. Using this figure and the previous financial formula North Wales Tourism estimate that Zip World has contributed over £251,000,000 to the local economy of North Wales. The figure above does not include non-participants on Zip World products which North Wales Tourism estimate is a further 30%.

Influence

6.11 The NWT 2018 Review has measured Zip World's direct effect on the North Wales economy. This is calculated by examining the primary motivation for visiting North Wales. The primary motivation acts as the instigator and main pull reason to North Wales. Therefore, North Wales Tourism assume that these visits wouldn't have taken place without Zip World's influence.

6.12 The NWT 2018 Review suggests that Zip World is a strong pull factor. Zip World was the main factor to visit with 63% of responders visiting as part of a longer stay with over 25.10% stating that they hadn't been to North Wales before.

Local jobs

6.13 It is estimated that the proposed development will provide employment opportunities for eight full time staff and 50 part time staff when fully operational. Wherever possible, the applicants would seek to employ people from the local area and the wider South Wales Valley region.

6.14 A strong economy relies on an abundance of jobs for local people. Zip World strongly believe that employing local people forms an integral part to the success of the business. As of September 2018, Zip World employed a total of 450 people (increase of 218 since 2016). The NWT 2018 Review identifies that Zip World hires locally with 93% of employees being local to the area. This strongly demonstrates the local employment opportunities offered by Zip World as a result of the development.

6.15 The NWT 2018 Review identifies that the locality of the employee shows that Zip World employs very few people from outside of the area - only 6.67%. Because of this, there are fewer leakages, with the money ultimately being made and spent in the local economy.

6.16 Zip World is a leader in the adventure tourism industry and the wealth of knowledge and experience from its established team at North Wales will be transferred to the South Wales Valleys, by way of training for locally employed people.

Landscape and visual effects

6.17 The application is accompanied by a Landscape and Visual Statement, prepared by Bronwen Thomas Landscape Architect.

6.18 A study area of 1km either side of the linear site has been taken for the landscape assessment, which includes a part of Neath Port Talbot (NPT) County Borough Council and the visual assessment is based on a 5km study area, which includes the southern border of Brecon Beacons National Park (BBNP) and parts of NPT in the west.

6.19 The proposed development falls within the following landscape character areas:

Zip line	Landscape character area	Visible section
Zip A	Scarp and cwms (Forested upland - indirectly)	Top section
Zip B	Scarp and cwms Forested foothills	Top section, and Central section
Zip C	Forested foothills Former opencast	Central section, and Lower section

6.20 The summary and conclusions from the Landscape Statement are set out below. For full details, please refer to the Landscape Statement.

Landscape impacts summary

Forested uplands

- No parts of the proposed development will be within this landscape character areas.
- The access tracks within the forestry will get more usage but the impact is considered to be negligible.

Scarp and cwms

- All of Zip A and three-quarters of Zip B are in this landscape character area.
- This landscape has a generally high or very high sensitivity to change, being highly valued for its geological features and cultural and scenic qualities.
- The impacts on SSSI are unknown but may be minor or more.
- It is judged that the impacts on the scenic and cultural perceptions, especially when viewed from Rhigos viewpoint, will be major.
- The PRoW along the top of Craig y Llyn is likely to get more use, leading to a moderate indirect impact on this path.

Forested foothills

- The lower quarter of Zip B and most of Zip C, plus the track that links between them, are in this landscape character areas.
- Being in the SLA and part of the view from the Craig y Llyn viewpoint, the zip lines will have a moderate or minor impact.

Former opencast:

- The end of Zip C and the reception area are in this landscape character area;
- There will be a negligible impact on the culturally-valuable Tower Colliery;
- There may be a minor impact on the SINC; and
- Increased use of the forestry access track by zip line vehicles and for parking and spectating will occur. This will be a minor indirect impact.

Visual effects and impacts summary

- The general visibility map (Figure 6 of Landscape Statement) shows that notable views of the proposed development do not differ from views of the site itself, and are only available from places to the immediate east and from the north.

- From the south and west the proposed development will be hidden from views by the topography plus forestry.
- The impact on perception from the Rhigos viewpoint layby, is assessed to be major, either adverse or beneficial, depending on the individual. The visual impact, however, will be minor.
- There will be no other notable visual impacts of the proposed development from roads.
- There will be very little visual impact of the proposed development from settlements.
- There will be very little visual impact of the proposed development on regular recreational routes, except on the very top of Craig y Llyn.
- From Viewpoint 1, Rhigos Mountain viewpoint layby, the visual impact is judged to be minor during construction and operation. The perceptual impacts are judged to be major.
- From Viewpoint 2, on the edge of Bryn, the visual impact is judged to be minor during operation.
- From Viewpoint 3, on the edge of Hirwaun, the visual impact is judged to be negligible.
- From Viewpoint 4, near Penderyn, the visual impact is judged to be negligible.

Overall conclusion of Landscape Statement

- The landscape impacts overall within 1km of the site are judged to be minor.
- The visual impacts overall are judged to be minor at most, with negligible or no visual impacts from most parts of the 5km study area.
- At the Rhigos viewpoint layby, and nearby, will there be a major impact on the perception of the view. This may be considered adverse or beneficial, depending on each individual's point of view.

Ecology

6.21 The application is accompanied by a Habitat Survey undertaken by Sturgess Ecology. The proposed route of the line crosses Craig y Llyn Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), the Cwm Gwrelych and Nant Llyn Fach Streams SSSI lies to the north-west of the site) and three Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINC) within 500m of the site.

6.22 A summary of potential effects are set out below:

Habitats

6.23 The protected habitats within the Craig y Llyn SSSI receive very strict protection through the Wildlife and Countryside Act. There are no protected habitats within the area that would be directly affected by the project, but the tracks and launch points will affect land within SINC designated areas, which include acid grassland, heath and marshy grassland. Possible mitigation options relevant to this project are discussed in the recommendations section of the Habitat Survey report.

Plants

6.24 A number of notable plants were recorded during the survey; the majority of these are located in the SSSI and would not be directly affected by the proposed project. Within the potentially affected habitats the only species with special legal protection is Bluebell, which was growing in small quantity at the forest margin at TN1. The protection of Bluebells applies primarily to their sale so is not applicable to the current proposals. The only non-native invasive plant found within the study area that is listed on Schedule 9 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act was Hollyberry Cotoneaster beside the forestry tracks at TN26. In addition, Montbretia occurs nearby, and there is desk study record of Indian Balsam.

Invertebrates

6.25 Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary butterflies are included as an RCT LBAP species, and so receive indirect protection through the planning process. This species is known to occur within the study area, and there may be suitable habitat (with Violets, for the caterpillars to feed on) in some of the proposed access tracks. The potential risk appears to be to be negligible.

6.26 There are no indications of any other protected invertebrate species within the proposed works areas. The main areas of invertebrate interest are within the SSSI and so would remain unaffected.

Amphibians

6.27 Frogs and Toads are included within the RCT LBAP, and these are likely to occur within the vicinity of the proposed access works. However, no breeding ponds would be affected, and animals would probably only be present in low numbers as they forage in

the heath, woodland and marshy grassland habitats. No significant impacts on local populations are anticipated, and no mitigation would be required.

Reptiles

6.28 Much of the potential works area affects heath, acid grassland and marshy grassland habitat that is potentially suitable for reptiles, so the works should be carried out in a way that minimises the risk of harming them.

6.29 Works being carried out within existing tracks or areas of bare ground are unlikely to affect reptiles, but care should be taken if working in areas of vegetation (particularly areas of heath, grassland and patchy scrub. Recommendations are proposed.

Birds

6.30 Where areas of heath, scrub, woodland / plantation, are likely to be disturbed by construction of the access tracks, this should ideally be scheduled outside the bird nesting season (which is typically March to mid-August inclusive). If this is not feasible, works within the nesting season should only take place after a check for nests and confirmation that breeding birds would not be disturbed.

6.31 Peregrine is listed in Schedule 1 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act, which affords them special protection during the nesting season. Peregrines have nested on the crags overlooking Llyn Fawr in the past, as there appear to be several potentially suitable nest sites. The only precise grid reference for a Peregrine nest at Llyn Fawr included in the SEWBReC data is within 100m of the proposed zip line, so the potential for disturbing Peregrines while nesting should be an important consideration. Other locally notable birds potentially breeding in the study area include Ring Ouzel, Raven and Nightjar; these are listed in the RCT LBAP and will also be considered in the planning process. The potential for disturbance by the presence of visitors during the operational phase of the project must be considered, not just the construction work phase.

6.32 There is a potential impact on birds from collisions with the line during foggy weather or in the dark (e.g. Nightjar). However, the risk is probably very low, and similar to that of the existing overhead power-lines through the SSSI.

Mammals

6.33 The measures already described to safeguard reptiles and nesting birds would also limit the potential for harming small mammals when constructing the new access tracks.

6.34 Water Voles have recently been confirmed in the wider area, using upland Purple Moor-grass habitats, so it is feasible that they may be present using the grassland or ditches west of the SSSI. Water Voles are protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act and listed in the RCT LBAP. It would therefore be appropriate to undertake a specific check for Water Voles before the access track is constructed in this area.

6.35 Badgers are known to occur in the study area and are protected under the Protection of Badgers Act. No setts are present near to any of the start or finish locations of the ziplines, but if works are required that might affect a Badger sett this would probably require a licence from NRW.

6.36 Otters are known to visit the lakes within the SSSI. However, the proposed project would not affect any habitat likely to be used by Otters, so would not result in any significant impact on them.

6.37 The proposed access works for the initial phase of the project would not affect any buildings likely to support roosting bats, so no impact on bats is anticipated. The forestry area below the proposed ziplines mostly supports young trees which have no suitable cavities for roosting bats. However, there are several dead trees with flaking bark and woodpecker holes in the planation and beside the Nant Gwrangon Stream at TN28 and 29, and it would be important to clarify whether any of these are in use by bats if it is necessary to fell them. The woodpecker holes in the poles supporting the overhead line at TN23 and TN25 would also need a survey prior to any work to remove them (although a physical inspection is unlikely to be possible while the conductors are live).

Recommendations

6.38 Recommendations are set out in the Habitat Survey to include recommendations for the project design, which have/will be undertaken, and recommendations for initial works phase and habitat enhancements.

Ecological enhancement

6.39 The Habitat Survey Report provides recommendations for project design, initial works and habitat enhancement including:

- Retain the site's relatively undisturbed character as far as possible;
- Provide interpretation boards;
- Develop a habitat management plan;
- Carry out a final pre-construction ecology check of the proposed works areas;
- If possible, program the construction works to avoid the bird nesting season and reptile hibernation season;
- Carry out a two-stage clearance for new tracks and works areas;
- Natural successional processes should be the main means for re-vegetation;
- Take precautions to avoid introduction of non-native invasive plant species;
- Contribute to the removal of conifer trees from the SSSI; and
- Provide additional Peregrine nest sites in the SSSI.

6.40 Some of the above would be proposed as off-site enhancement to be undertaken on land within NRW's ownership and discussions are on-going between the applicant, NRW and the Council's ecologist in relation to the proposed off-site improvements to the SSSI and mitigation in relation to Peregrine falcons.

Effects on heritage assets

6.41 The application is accompanied by a Heritage Impact Assessment. The base for the zipwire development and ancillary development will be at the former Tower Colliery near Hirwaun, with the zip wires on the hills behind. Tower Colliery is an important site historically and socially, and contains two listed buildings along with a number of curtilage buildings.

6.42 The relevant guidance states that Heritage Impact Assessments should be proportionate to the proposal and significance of the heritage asset. In addition to the two listed buildings at the Tower Colliery site, the top zip wire is proposed to be on the ridge above Llyn Fawr and is in close proximity to a Scheduled Ancient Monument in the form of Ffos Toncenglau Cross Ridge Dyke which has pre-historic origins. To the south of Llyn Fawr is land known as the Rhondda Uplands which is designated as an historic landscape. To the west of the Tower Colliery site, the Historic Environment

Record shows several sites in close proximity to each other, including earthworks and cairns.

6.43 The proposal does not involve using the listed buildings themselves, however some elements will be in close proximity to them and have the potential to affect their setting. Given the nature of the zipwires, there is minimal impact on the ground with this being limited to where there are fixed despatch structures and stopping structures, so there is unlikely to be any physical impact on historic assets such as the nearby scheduled ancient monument. The main impact therefore is considered to be the impact on the setting of the listed and curtilage buildings.

Effects on listed buildings

6.44 The colliery site contains two listed buildings and a number of curtilage buildings, and is synonymous with the history of mining in the South Wales Valleys.

6.45 Zip A is located on the ridge at the top of Craig y Llyn and has the highest despatch platform at 11m high which will be visible on the horizon. There are already electricity pylons visible on the ridge line, which then come down the hillslope to the colliery site. As this is the furthest zip wire from the colliery site, and the smallest, the despatch platform, landing gantry and zip A will not have an unacceptable detrimental visual impact on the setting of the colliery site.

6.46 Zip B is the biggest of the zip wires and goes from the top of the ridge at Craig y Llyn across Llyn Fawr to a smaller ridge which is closer to the colliery site. From here, the top of Zip C will be accessed. Given the location of the despatch platform for zip B, the despatch platform doesn't require a tower the same height as Zip A but does require more gantries at the landing site. These will be visible from the colliery site, but will have no more of an impact than the existing power cables and pylons.

6.47 The landing strip for Zip C is to be located to the west of the listed headframe and will be in close proximity to it.

6.48 The setting of both the listed Engine House and Fan House and the Headframe and Pithead do have the potential to be affected by the gantries of the landing strip. At present the site around the listed building contains debris and the site as a whole is in a derelict condition. This detracts from the setting of the listed buildings considerably. The proposal would include the clearance of the debris which would be a positive move in terms of the setting of the listed buildings, as well as the overall site.

6.49 The larger gantries are located further away from the listed buildings, and these reduce in size as they get closer to them. The gantries will be located to the west of the concrete strip hard standings and the gantries will be set away from the listed buildings. The impact on their setting will therefore be minimal when viewed from the southwest.

6.50 When looking out from the listed buildings, the gantries will be visible, but given their construction, location and the fact that it is an industrial site will not be inappropriate. In addition to this, they will be an improvement on the derelict site and associated debris that is currently present.

6.51 Given the industrial nature of the site, the form of the gantries, and the relative scale of the landing strip to the listed buildings and the separation between, it is not considered that there will be an unacceptable impact on the setting of the listed buildings from the immediate west of the site.

6.52 Using this part of the site means that visitors will be able to see the headframe and engine house from a closer distance and this provides the opportunity for increased awareness of the importance of the site from a heritage and social historic point of view. It also provides increased opportunity for education and learning. From this perspective, locating the landing strip in this location is considered to be a positive opportunity.

6.53 Given the clearance of the debris, the nature of the gantries, the industrial nature of the site, previous structures and the increased awareness of the heritage and buildings of the colliery that will arise from the landing strip being close to the iconic headframe it is not considered that the proposal will have an unacceptable impact on the setting of the listed buildings in this location.

6.54 For all the proposed zip wires, the wires themselves won't be highly visible, as is the case with the electricity wires that come from the ridge to the colliery. The gantries will be largely of galvanised steel and timber and by virtue of their size and location in relation to the scale of the landscape will not be highly visible in the landscape, and in addition to this the form of the dispatch and landing gantries is not at odds with the industrial nature of the Colliery site.

Effect on Scheduled Ancient Monuments

6.55 Cadw were consulted as part of the PAC process and noted concern that the HIA had not considered the impact of the development on the setting of the scheduled

monument known as Ffos Toncenglau Cross Ridge Dyke (GM118) and strongly recommended that an assessment should be undertaken. Since the PAC, the HIA has been updated to include an assessment on this scheduled monument and a summary is provided below.

6.56 There is one designated historic asset which lies in the immediate vicinity of the application site, namely the Ffos Toncenglau Cross Ridge Dyke Scheduled Monument. There are also a number of un-designated historic assets in the vicinity of the application site, and in addition to this the application site lies just to the north of the Rhondda Historic Landscape Area, with the access track to Zip Wire A falling partly within this designation. Included within the land around the application site, are important find sites which also indicate the early use of the site and the surrounding area.

6.57 Of these assets, only the Scheduled Monument is directly affected by the proposal in that the existing access track crosses it. This track was previously used to access the wind farm construction site and continues to be used to provide access to the wind farm. Cross dykes are substantial linear earthworks with one of more ditches running beside one or more banks. As here, they are generally found in upland areas, running across ridges and spurs. Because very few have survived, all well preserved examples such as this are considered to be of national importance.

6.58 The application site therefore lies in a sensitive location from a historic landscape perspective, however it is the setting of the known heritage assets that has the greater potential to be affected rather than the assets themselves.

6.59 It is considered that the form, appearance and location of the proposed development in relation to the Scheduled Monument and known undesignated assets will not cause unacceptable harm for the following reasons:

- The development will not be prominent in the landscape or compete with any of the historic assets;
- It will be visually permeable;
- The materials used will be matt and of a colour designed to blend into the landscape;
- There will be a minimal change to the skyline, especially from distant viewpoints; and
- There will not be a change to the general character of the landscape.

6.60 In addition to this, the development will be relatively reversible in terms of the landscape setting and could provide the potential for education. Although it does not form part of this scheme, the removal of the redundant pylons that previously served the colliery site would improve the aesthetic of the area and also improve the setting of the historic assets.

6.61 The proposed development will therefore create a change in the setting of the Ffos Toncenglau Cross Ridge Dyke Scheduled Monument and the other undesignated historic assets comparable with a slight adverse effect on these. Taking into account the heritage importance, this equates to harm in respect of the Scheduled Monument and no harm in respect of the undesignated assets. However, for the reasons set out above, it is not considered that an unacceptable harm to the setting of any of the assets would result from the proposal.

Conclusion

6.62 The colliery site has great communal value and it is important to find a way to re-use the site and retain the heritage of coal mining in this area. The scheme provides the potential in the long term to assist in the restoration and regeneration of the site, and in the short term to provide a new use for part of the site, and the opportunity to educate, inform and introduce the history of the site to a new section of the population.

6.63 The proposal uses the existing hard standing at the site so no new parking is required. Any slight detrimental visual impact from any element of the scheme will be negligible and mitigated by finding a re-use for part of the site and the historic interpretation that will be provided on this important site which a key part of the history of mining in the South Wales Valleys.

6.64 A key element of the setting of the Colliery is the openness of the surrounding landscape and views to the hills above to the south and west. Whilst there will be some limited impact on its setting, the proposal does not compromise this, and the Colliery will continue to be experienced in the open rural landscape which forms a key element of its wider setting.

6.65 In respect of the wider application site, there is a balance to be achieved between a sustainable economy and sustaining and protecting the historic landscape and the historic assets that lie within this from inappropriate development. As shown above, it is not considered that this proposal would cause harm to the Scheduled Monument or known designated or undesignated historic assets, or their settings.

Archaeology

6.66 The land between the top zip wire and the Tower Colliery site which is in the immediate vicinity of the application site contains a number of archaeological sites, some of which are likely to already have been affected by previous mining works.

6.67 During the initial PAC process and following receipt of comments from CADW, Gwent-Glamorgan Archaeological Trust were consulted in relation to the proposal on an informal basis.

6.68 In light of comments received from Gwent-Glamorgan Archaological Trust, a Historic Environment Assessment has been undertaken by Trysor to examine the effects of the proposed development on the historic environment.

6.69 The Historic Environment Assessment concludes that despite being heavily modified by 20th century forestry, communications and industry, the landscape on and around the Craig y Llyn escarpment retains a high potential for new archaeological discoveries.

6.70 The landscape of the assessment has proven to be relatively rich in artefactual remains from prehistoric periods, with numerous flint artefacts recovered from the peats and soils during ground-breaking forestry operations in the past. Evidence of early prehistoric settlement sites is also known within the area as the result of discoveries made during forestry operations.

6.71 In terms of archaeological mitigation, a watching brief should be considered to be a minimum response to any ground-breaking operations undertaken in association with the proposed development.

6.72 Particular attention should be paid to the removal of trees to facilitate the construction of Zip Lines C, the course of which passes through the area of a recorded Roman or Early Medieval cairnfield (ID number 2) which is currently hidden in a young plantation. Nothing is known of the condition of this cairnfield, which has been lost from view for many decades.

6.73 The loss of the pastoral farming landscape and settlements of post-medieval date as a result of the changes imposed in the 20th century has greatly altered the landscape.

6.74 Where evidence of post-medieval field boundaries has been identified, mitigation such as a watching brief should be considered a minimum response to enable a better

understanding of the post-medieval farmed landscape to be gained. The applicant is willing for a watching brief to be undertaken.

6.75 Some existing forestry trackways and bridleways will be upgraded to accommodate access routes associated with the ziplines above the Craig y Llyn escarpment. Care must be taken to ensure that any features adjacent to these routes are not impacted upon, such as the possible bomb crater ID Number 29.

6.76 The proximity of listed colliery buildings in the Tower Colliery complex to the proposed car park and portakabins and the terminal gantries of Zip C requires that they are separated by fencing to ensure the general public cannot approach any listed buildings and structures.

6.77 This Historic Environment Desk-based Assessment concludes that the proposed development would not have a significant negative impact on any other known historic assets in the assessment area, including the Carn Foesen and Carn Fach burial cairns.

6.78 The proposed development would not have a direct, physical impact on the single scheduled historic asset significant negative impact on any designated historic assets within the assessment area, namely the scheduled Toncenglau Dyke (GM118). Increased traffic on an existing forestry/windfarm track will have a Very Low Negative impact on setting but this will not alter the significance of the Dyke. The local topography and vegetation would block views of the Zip Lines from the scheduled area of the dyke.

6.79 There would be no direct, physical impacts on the listed buildings at Tower Colliery. It is considered there would be a Low Negative impact on their setting from the gantries at the lower end of Zip Lines C and safety fencing within the complex. This will not alter the significance of the Listed Buildings. In addition there will be a Low to Moderate Positive impact as people will be able to safely enter the colliery complex increasing their understanding and enjoyment of the former industrial processes.

Coal Risk Mining Assessment

6.80 The Coal Authority were consulted as part of the PAC as the application site lies within the defined Development High Risk Area. Within the operational and access areas, their records indicate that the site has been subject to both recorded and historic unrecorded underground coal mining at shallow depth. It was therefore requested that a Coal Mining Risk Assessment (CMRA) Report was prepared to accompany the planning application.

6.81 As a result a CMRA report has been prepared by Rhondda Geotechnical Services and is submitted as part of this application and was consulted upon as part of PAC 2. The CMRA report presents abundant evidence from comprehensive research that there is no risk to ground stability posed by coal mining legacy issues at any of the sites where the structural components of the ride are to be sited. In particular, the risk of shallow unrecorded workings under the proposed structures has been thoroughly examined and discounted.

6.82 Therefore, according to the CMRA, there is no need for the site to be classified as development High Risk, and no reason for the Coal Authority to object to planning permission being granted for the proposed development.

7. Other design considerations

Materials

7.1 Materials proposed to be used in the development area identified in section 4 of this statement. For all the proposed zip wires, the wires themselves won't be highly visible, as is the case with the electricity wires that come from the ridge to the colliery. The gantries will be largely of galvanised steel and timber and by virtue of their size and location in relation to the scale of the landscape will not be highly visible in the landscape, and in addition to this the form of the dispatch and landing gantries is not at odds with the industrial nature of the Colliery site.

7.2 The timber cladding and curved roofline of Zip C's dispatch tower means that it will generally blend in with the backdrop and surrounds of the scarp face and woodlands.

Environmental sustainability

7.3 In terms of environmental sustainability, consideration has been given to the effect of the proposed development on the environment. The proposal makes use of previously developed land at the former Tower Colliery and this is advocated by PPW.

Community safety

7.4 The proposed development has been designed with the safety and well-being of future users being a key consideration as well as the need to protect and enhance the safety of the surrounding community. In order to contain the use of only part of the former Tower Colliery site, the area will be fenced to restrict access beyond the application site. The extent of the proposed fence is identified on site plan A 04. It is not considered that the proposed development will have a detrimental effect on community safety.

8. Accessibility

Planning policy

8.1 The relevant national policies and guidance relating to accessibility are set out within:

- Planning Policy Wales, Edition 10, (2018); and
- Technical Advice Note 18 'Transport' (2007).

8.2 The relevant planning policies within the adopted LDP are as follows:

- Policy AW 2 – Sustainable Locations.

Sustainability

8.3 PPW supports the transport hierarchy, which prioritises sustainable means of transport, including walking, cycling and public transport, over travelling by private car. TAN18 encourages development to take place in areas which would reduce car dependency and increase social inclusion.

8.4 Strategic road and rail links mean that the Northern Strategy Area of the LDP benefits from good communication links with Cardiff, the Brecon Beacons, Neath Port Talbot and communities in the Heads of the Valleys region such as Merthyr Tydfil and Caerphilly. The area in respect of the A465 means that excellent communication links also exist with Swansea and the West Midlands.

8.5 Strategic road and rail links within the southern part of Rhondda Cynon Taf provide good communication links with Cardiff, the Vale of Glamorgan and Bridgend. The southern part of the county in relation to the M4 means that there are also excellent communication links with West Wales, South West England and London.

8.6 Whilst the application site lies in open countryside outside any development boundaries, there are several bus stops and public transport links in the nearby villages of Hirwaun and Rhigos and along Rhigos Road. There provide sustainable links to nearby settlements.

8.7 As a company, Zip World has invested in a new fleet of electric vehicles with more on order, with the longer plan to have the entire fleet 'go green'.

8.8 It is considered that the application site complies with planning policy aims in terms of locating development in location accessible by all means of transport to ensure sustainable development.

Public access

8.9 The majority of land within and around the application site (with the exception of Tower Colliery) is open access land comprising of forestry, open moorland and rocky slopes. Within the forestry there are some Public Rights of Way (PRoW) and many of the forestry tracks are available for walking and riding. Sustrans cycle Route 47 also passes through the forestry.

8.10 The landing area for Zip B and the top of Zip C are in close proximity to a bridle path. The proposed layout has been designed in order to avoid the bridle path and a new line of trees are proposed to be planted along the bottom of the land area for Zip B in order to reduce noise and visual impact from the bridleway.

8.11 The only public road near the application site is the A4061 Rhigos Mountain Road, with a viewpoint layby.

Movement to, from and within the development

8.12 Public access for visitors to the Tower Colliery site will be gained via and existing access from the A4061 Rhigos Road. This provides access to the car parking area and reception area which serve as the base for the zip wire development. This is the only access and car parking area to server the development.

8.13 The car parking area will be in very close proximity to a group of cabins, which will be used as office, reception, kitting up and de-kitting and toilets. This will be the central area where visitors will report to upon arrival, book in, before being kitted up ready for their zip wire adventure.

8.14 Once booked in and kitted up, riders will wait to be transported up in groups by Zip World to the top of Zip A. The access route will be from Tower Colliery, along the Rhigos Road public highway, leaving at a junction which provides access to Pen y Cymoedd Wind Farm, onto a private road.

8.15 Both vehicular accesses which will be used as part of the development are existing accesses, and the visibility splay in each direction for both accesses are shown on the associated plans.

8.16 Access for riders between each zip wire course will be on foot as described in greater detail in section 4 of this statement.

8.17 During the initial PAC process, consultation with RCT Highways as the Local Highways Authority took place and comments were received. In response to these, a Highways Technical Note has been produced to respond to the comments. The Highways Technical Note considers the development proposals and their potential effect on the surrounding area from a traffic and transportation perspective, with specific reference to the proposed access and trip generation.

8.18 In response to comments provided by RCT Highways Authority, the Highways Technical Note provides detailed drawings to demonstrate visibility that can be achieved at both access points together with tracking drawings in relation to access for minibuses.

8.19 As the current visibility falls short of the requirement for that of a 60mph road, it is proposed to mitigate this by reducing the speed limit along parts of Rhigos Road from 60mph to 40mph. Accident statistics have been assessed over the last five years which suggest that both access are safe in their current format onto a 60mph highway. The visibility splays at the junction would comply with those required for a 40mph road and would therefore be considered acceptable with the proposed highways mitigation. The proposed mitigation of reducing the speed limit would be secured by way of a financial contribution for undertaking a Traffic Regulation Order (TRO). The application is accompanied by a draft s.106 agreement to secure this.

8.20 Follow-up discussions with RCT Highways Authority has confirmed that the content of the Highways Technical Note is acceptable.

Parking

8.21 Vehicular access to the base of the zip line adventure, located at land at Tower Colliery, will be gained from the A4061 Rhigos Road via an existing access. Visitors will use the existing access road within the site to provide access to an area of hardstanding at the Tower Colliery site, which was previously used for car parking when the Colliery was

operational. Car parking for approximately 80 cars will be provided informally on an area of hardstanding, which will be levelled out by use of compacted hardcore.

8.22 The car parking area will be in very close proximity to a group of cabins, which will be used as office, reception, kitting up and de-kitting and toilets. This will be the central area where visitors will report to upon arrival, book in, before being kitted up ready for their zip wire adventure.

Forecasted development trips

8.23 During the PAC process, additional information was sought in relation to trip generation analysis and this is provided in greater detail in the Highways Technical Note. It demonstrates that the proposed development could generate, on a busy day (likely to be a summer bank holiday), approximately 17 two-way visitor trips an hour.

8.24 There would be a maximum of 60 two-way trips associated with the proposed development employees split across the day during peak season. Depending on shift patterns, a significant proportion of these would arrive before 08:00 and depart after 21:00. Additionally, it is considered that some members of staff would lift-share or cycle to the development. It is considered there would be an imperceptible impact associated with any employee traffic.

8.25 The above trip generation forecast equates to one additional vehicle on the surrounding highway network every 3 – 4 minutes. This is considered to be an imperceptible impact.

8.26 Follow-up discussions with RCT Highways Authority has confirmed that the content of the Highways Technical Note is acceptable.

9. Conclusion

9.1 The proposal relates to the erection of three zip wire courses (4 zip lines), laying of hard standing, creation of internal access roads and pedestrian routes, temporary siting of cabins and use of land for car parking on land at Rhigos Mountain and Tower Colliery, Rhigos.

9.2 The application is submitted by Zip World, an adventure tourism provider, who opened their first zip line adventure in Bethesda, North Wales in 2013. The North Wales adventure business wants to bring its unique brand of extraordinary experiences and adventure to South Wales, in the Cynon Valley.

9.3 This statement presents an assessment of the main considerations relevant to the proposed development, to include the principle of development, economic and tourism benefits, landscape and visual effects, effects on ecology, coal mining assessment, transport and heritage assets.

9.4 The Landscape Statement concludes that the landscape impacts of the proposal are minor and the visual impacts negligible or not visible, but acknowledges a major impact on the perception of the view from the Rhigos Road layby.

9.5 The application site and its surrounding landscape are ecologically rich as identified in the Habitat Survey and recommendations are proposed to minimise potential effects.

9.6 When considering heritage, the site has great communal value and it is important to find a way to re-use the site and retain the heritage of coal mining in this area. The scheme provides the potential in the long term to assist in the restoration and regeneration of the site, and in the short term to provide a new use for part of the site, and the opportunity to educate, inform and introduce the history of the site to a new section of the population.

9.7 A key element of the setting of the Colliery is the openness of the surrounding landscape and views to the hills above to the south and west. Whilst there will be some limited impact on its setting, the proposal does not compromise this, and the Colliery will continue to be experienced in the open rural landscape which forms a key element of its wider setting.

9.8 The proposal offers significant economic and tourism benefits to the local area, offering up to eight full time and 50 part time jobs. The economic benefits that have been

realised in North Wales since the opening of Zip World's range of outdoor adventure tourism presents and unique opportunity for the business to deliver similar economic benefits to the former coal mining area of South Wales. We consider this to be a significant material planning consideration within the overall planning balance.

CADNANT

PLANNING

Conwy I 20 Connaught House, Riverside Business Park, Benarth Road, Conwy LL32 8UB
I 01492 581800

Chester I Bretton House, Bell Meadow Business Park, Pulford, Chester CH4 9EP
I 01244 621007

www.cadnantplanning.co.uk