

Planning Statement

Detached building incorporating bike hire, retail facility to include office, toilet, workshop and classroom

**Afan Argoed Country Park Afan Valley Road Cymmer
Port Talbot**

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1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 This document has been prepared to support the above development.
- 1.2 Consent is sought for the construction of a detached building incorporating bike hire, retail facility to include office, toilet, workshop and classroom
- 1.3 The application is made by Afan Bike Shed. The business, that has traded from the area for over 8 years, currently operates from the visitors centre just south of the application site.
- 1.4 The application is for a purpose built building to expand the existing growing business.

2.0 Planning History - Planning Context

2.1. Planning History

2.2 Q2020/0003 - Pre application Feb 2020 – No objection

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1 <http://www.afanvalleybikeshed.co.uk>

2.3 Planning Context

2.4 Local Policy - The development plan for the site is the Neath Port Talbot Local Development Plan 2011-2026. The Council adopted the plan on January 2016.²

2.5 Policy

Planning Policy Wales (Edition 10)

3.51 Previously developed (also referred to as brownfield) land (see definition overleaf) should, wherever possible, be used in preference to greenfield sites where it is suitable for development

3.56 Development in the countryside should be located within and adjoining those settlements where it can best be accommodated in terms of infrastructure, access, habitat and landscape conservation. Infilling or minor extensions to existing settlements may be acceptable, in particular where they meet a local need for affordable housing or it can be demonstrated that the proposal will increase local economic activity. However, new building in the open countryside away from existing settlements or areas allocated for development in development plans must continue to be strictly controlled. All new development should be of a scale and design that respects the character of the surrounding area.

SC1 Settlement limits

SP15 Biodiversity and Geodiversity

TO1 Tourism in the Countryside

TR2 Design and access to new developments

² <https://www.npt.gov.uk/7328>

EN6 Important Biodiversity and Geodiversity Sites

BE1 Design

3.0 Application Site

- 3.1 The application site is located within Afan Argoed Country Park on the eastern edge of the existing car park
- 3.2 The site is a triangular piece of land which was previously occupied by the Council and used for storage

4.0 Appraisal

- 4.1 The application site forms part of a Afan Argoed Park, however, for the purposes of the LDP it is outside settlement limits where development is not considered acceptable unless there is proven justification.
- 4.2 Policy TO1 does, however, support the proposal
- 4.3 *“Tourism proposals outside of settlement limits will only be permitted where all of the following criteria are satisfied:*
 - 1. *It is demonstrated that the proposal is viable and contributes towards the quality and economic sustainability of the tourism industry;*
 - 2. *It is demonstrated that either the proposal requires a countryside location or it could not be accommodated within an existing settlement;*

3. *The proposal would not have an adverse impact upon the landscape, ecology, and cultural heritage and would not adversely impact upon the social, economic, environmental or residential amenity of the area;*
4. *The proposal does not create unacceptable levels of vehicular traffic, cause a detriment to highway safety and access can be provided by a range of transport modes”.*

- 4.4 **Viability and Contribution** - In 2012 Tourism contributed £99.6 million to the Neath Port Talbot economy and supported 1,637 jobs locally.³
- 4.5 In October 2019 the Council published its LDP Annual Monitoring Report. It reported that *“tourism within Neath Port Talbot has become a significant contributor to the local economy and has provided a variety of opportunities, especially within the valleys areas. The latest release of tourism statistics showed that in 2016, tourism contributed £110.28 million to the Neath Port Talbot economy, an increase of £18.28 million since the base date of the Plan (2011).”*
- 4.6 The evidence therefore is that there is strong growth within that sector and that tourism plays a vital role within the local economy.
- 4.7 The Afan Valley plays a vital role within the local tourism market with its cycle tracks having national importance.
- 4.8 In 2015 the Council published a strategic tourism report ***Neath Port Talbot Destination Management Plan 2015- 2020**** which identified key

³ <https://www.npt.gov.uk/4418>

⁴ <http://www.npt-business.co.uk/media/4345/neath-port-talbot-destination-management-plan-2015-2020-final.pdf>

tourism sites and set out strategies for developing tourism within the area.

4.9 The report found that *“mountain biking growth in Afan Forest Park, attracts fairly affluent but 'niche' mountain biking visitors.”*

4.10 The report recognised that it had excellent strength such as

“Capacity to host large national sporting events (Afan Forest Park and Margam Country Park).

Excellent 'sense of place' from local and friendly tourism businesses.

World known as a mountain bike visitor destination.”

4.11 The report also recognised the substantial investment within the biking trails and importantly, the areas international reputation.

“Specific investment has been made in mountain biking trails and facilities in Afan Forest Park and this is now one of the best established areas for mountain biking within the UK. In particular investment through the Cognation mtb Trails South Wales project has further strengthened the mountain biking product across the region, creating one of the most exciting mountain biking destinations in the world.”

4.12 There is clear evidence that mountain biking has led to measurable additional economic activity in the area

“As a result of mountain biking growth in Afan Forest Park, the area attracts fairly affluent but 'niche' mountain biking visitors.”

- 4.13 However, there appears to be a lack of facilities within the area to capture and therefore capitalize on additional tourist activity.

“In order to maximise visitor spending, further work is required in matching both the private sector and third sector to specific retail and accommodation development opportunities to create more places for visitors to buy souvenirs, have a meal/ snack, buy supplies etc.”

- 4.14 Natural Recourses Wales (NRW) recently published a report ***Natural Resources Wales Forestry and NNR Visitor Data Report September - December 2019 Issue 1***. This studied tourist data from 37 sites within Wales
- 4.15 Of the site studies Afan Argoed ranked 4th in terms of footfall with 196977 visitors. This accounted for 6.29% of the total footfall within all the sites.
- 4.16 Whilst there had been a drop in cyclist number from 2018 the study still recorded 64522 cyclists for 2019
- 4.17 The various studies undertaken clearly demonstrate that recreational cycling, particularly within the Afan Valley, make a significant contribution to the location economy.
- 4.18 Its international recognition attracts “*affluent, niche*” visitors from all over the world.
- 4.19 The applicant business growth has reflected this buoyant, *niche* market
- 4.20 The applicant started the business in 2012. At that time the business operated from a van which was parked in Afan Argoed car park 2 days a

week. The business had one part-time employee and a turnover of £30k

- 4.21 By 2013 the business has expended and it began a tenancy in the adjacent Visitor Centre
- 4.22 The business has now out grown the accommodation provided within the visitor centre and therefore new accommodation within the vicinity of the current business is required.
- 4.23 The business currently employs 2 full time staff and 4-part time staff. It has an annual turnover off £450k and provides a range of commercially sensitive product testing for major international bikes, training, repairs and sales to the cycling community with some bike retailing at over £10k.
- 4.24 The areas premium brand recognition as an internationally cycling centre is reflected in the applicants' business. The applicant sells premium brand bikes such as *Santa Cruz*⁵ and *Unno*⁶. These bikes sell at prices of up to £10k. In relation to Unno, who manufacture handmade bikes in Barcelona, the applicant is one of only four retails in the UK and one of approximately twelve globally.
- 4.25 It is clear from the various studies that cycling is a major contributor to the local economy. The studies show there remains growth potential.
- 4.26 The applicant has developed a profitable business with a national reputation based on its close connection with the adjacent cycle trails. As such it is considered that the proposed development is viable and contributes towards the quality and economic sustainability of the tourism industry

⁵ <https://www.santacruz bicycles.com/en-GB>

⁶ <https://www.unno.com>

- 4.27 **Location** - Whilst outside settlement limits the application site is located within an existing tourist facility and immediately adjacent to local bike trails.
- 4.28 The application site has been previously used for storage and therefore can be classed as a brownfield site.
- 4.29 There are currently no available sites within the adjacent settlements that provide the space, parking and accessibility to the bike trails and as such it is considered that the proposal requires a countryside location and it could not be accommodated within an existing settlement.
- 4.30 **Landscape and Amenity** - The proposed building will be a single storey structure. It has a modern semi-rural design and will be landscaped to fit into the existing landscape.
- 4.31 In support of the application a tree survey has been commissioned. This has identified that five trees have to be removed due to their condition (T5, T6, T8, T9, T10). Two trees (T11 & T2) will need to be removed to facilitate the development. These can be replaced within the site via a suitably worded condition.
- 4.32 No bat roosts were identified within the surveyed trees.
- 4.33 **Access and Car Parking** – The existing business currently operates from the visitor centre which is 20m south of the application site. Access and car parking is provided within the existing carpark.
- 4.34 The business will only move 20m north and it will remain within the existing Afan Argoed facility. As such the parking requirements will be unchanged and the car parking provision will continue within the existing public car park.

5.0 Summary

- 5.1 The proposed development seeks to provide a bespoke building for a tourist and leisure business located 20m north of the existing business.
- 5.2 The existing business has a long established, profitable track record in the area and has established itself as a national recognised premium brand business.
- 5.3 The development will be undertaken within an existing tourist facility and on a previously developed site.
- 5.4 The development will not have a detrimental effect on the landscape or ecology
- 5.5 The development will not have a detrimental effect on highway and pedestrian safety.