



Landscape Character and Visual Impact Assessment of Proposed Residential Development at Leiros Park, Neath

Text, Plans, Photographs & Appendices

Hale Construction Ltd

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TDA/2558/LC&VIA/RhC/07.20



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Section 1

INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Tirlun Design Associates (TDA) have been instructed by Hale Construction Ltd. to undertake a landscape character and visual impact assessment of land north of Leiros Park Drive, Neath ('The Site') and assess the general visual and landscape character impacts a proposed residential development will have upon the surrounding landscape.
- 1.2 Desktop research and site surveys were carried out in July 2020 and their findings are contained herein.
- 1.3 The following document should be read in conjunction with the other technical documentation that supports the proposals.
- 1.4 The primary question asked within this document is:

'Can the site at Leiros Park accommodate a new residential development without unacceptable impacts upon the visual amenity of its surroundings and the landscape character of its immediate setting?'
- 1.5 The document has been set out as follows:
 - **Section 2 - Qualifications & Experience** introduces the member of staff dealing with this assessment on behalf of TDA and highlights their qualifications and experience relevant to this study.
 - **Section 3 – Leiros Park: Planning Context & Landscape Character** introduces the site, its planning context and landscape character.
 - **Section 4 - Visual Appraisal & Landscape Character Assessment** is a visual appraisal and landscape character assessment of the proposed development.
 - **Section 5 – Proposals & Landscape Mitigation** provides a description of landscape mitigation measures
 - **Section 6 - Summary & Conclusion** provides a summary of the study and presents a conclusion to the question raised within paragraph 1.4.

Section 2

QUALIFICATIONS & EXPERIENCE

- 2.1 This assessment has been carried out on behalf of TDA by Rhodri Garth Crandon. His qualifications include an honours degree in Landscape Architecture gained from Cheltenham & Gloucester College of Higher Education (CGHE) and a Post Graduate Diploma in Landscape Architecture also from CGHE.
- 2.2 Rhodri is the director of TDA, a landscape consultancy practice based in South Wales, and has over 15 years professional practice experience within the field of landscape architecture. Over this period, he has undertaken many projects relevant to this study which have dealt with issues relating to landscape design, landscape planning and landscape & visual assessment.
- 2.3 In addition, Rhodri has worked as an expert witness in relation to landscape character and visual issues on many relevant projects both in the private and public sector, including Monmouthshire County Council during their Unitary Development Plan Inquiry in 2004.
- 2.4 More specifically and in relation to residential development sites, Rhodri has worked on numerous projects at planning application and appeal level, dealing with the landscape character and visual impacts of such developments on the landscape in general and in some cases National Parks, Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, Green Belts and Special Landscape Areas.

Section 3

LEIROS PARK: PLANNING CONTEXT & LANDSCAPE CHARACTER

The Site

- 3.1 The site is located on the northern fringe of Neath immediately to the north of Leiros Park Drive, Alexander Road and Swallow Close.
- 3.2 It is defined to the south, east and west by linear woodland groups. The northern boundary is predominantly defined by field boundary hedgerows.
- 3.3 TDA drawing no. TDA/2558/01 – Location of Photo Viewpoints (refer to Plans section of this document) clearly illustrates the site and its context.

Planning & Landscape Context

- 3.4 The site is not covered by any local or national special landscape designations. However, the land that surrounds the site to the north and east is designated as Green Wedge in the Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council Local Development Plan (2016).
- 3.5 The site is allocated for housing in the adopted Neath Port Talbot Local Development Plan (2016).
- 3.6 A number of public footpaths cross and surround the site (refer to TDA/2558/01 – Location of Photo Viewpoints).
- 3.7 Based upon the study of up to date mapping provided by Sustrans, there are no national or local cycle routes adjacent to or near the site.
- 3.8 The site does not contain any listed buildings or scheduled ancient monuments. The trees on site are covered by a blanket tree preservation order.

Planning Policies

- 3.9 The proposed residential development needs to take account of Policy BE1 (Design) of the Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council Local Development Plan (2016). Policy BE1 states that:

All development proposals will be expected to demonstrate high quality design which fully takes into account the natural, historic and built environmental context and contributes to the creation of attractive, sustainable places.

Proposals will only be permitted where all of the following criteria, where relevant, are satisfied:

1. It complements and enhances the character and appearance of the site, building or area in terms of siting, appearance, scale, height, massing and elevation treatment;

2. It respects the context of the site and its place within the local landscape, including its impact on the important arterial gateways into the County Borough, its effects on townscape and the local historic and cultural heritage and it takes account of the site topography and prominent skylines or ridges;

- 3. It utilises materials appropriate to its surroundings and incorporates hard and soft landscaping and screening where appropriate;**
- 4. It would not have a significant adverse impact on highway safety, the amenity of occupiers of adjacent land or the community;**
- 5. Important local features (including buildings, amenity areas, green spaces and green infrastructure, biodiversity and ecological connectivity) are retained and enhanced as far as possible;**
- 6. It achieves and creates attractive, safe places and public spaces, taking account of 'Secured by Design' principles (including where appropriate natural surveillance, visibility, well-lit environments and areas of public movement);**
- 7. It plays a full role in achieving and enhancing an integrated transport and communications network promoting the interests of pedestrians, cyclists and public transport and ensures linkages with the existing surrounding community;**
- 8. It uses resources, including land and energy, as efficiently as possible through:**
 - (a) Making the best and most efficient use of the land available through being of appropriate density taking into account the character and appearance of the area, normally a minimum of 35 dwellings per hectare in the Coastal Corridor Strategy Area or a minimum of 30 dwellings per hectare in the Valleys Strategy Area;**
 - (b) The layout and form of the development does not preclude the reasonable use of other adjacent land;**
 - (c) Developing brownfield land in preference to greenfield land where possible;**
 - (d) Minimising building exposure while maximising solar gain.**
- 9. Its drainage systems are designed to limit surface water run-off and flood risk and prevent pollution;**
- 10. The layout and design of the development achieves inclusive design by ensuring barrier free environments, allowing access by all and making full provision for people with disabilities.**

3.10 The Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council Local Development Plan Strategic Housing Site Assessment Report (2013) discusses the visual impact of a proposed housing development at Leiros Park. The report states that:

... "the potential visual impact of the smaller site now proposed for allocation is considered to be more limited, especially when combined with careful attention to layout, design and landscaping. The development will be viewed against a backdrop of fields beyond the site and its relationship to the existing housing adjoining the site"

3.11 The report goes on to state:

“The urban area of Neath is located in a 'bowl' type depression within the landscape and over time development has occurred on the hillsides surrounding central Neath. Whilst the development of the Leiros Park site would in part be visible from certain areas of Neath, it should be viewed in the context of the existing adjacent developments. Furthermore, it should be emphasised that the fact that a site is visible within the wider context, it should not prevent a site from being developed as long as appropriate layout and subtle design measures are incorporated into the scheme in order to minimise any potential adverse impacts”.

3.12 Consequently, provided the proposed development complements and enhances the character and appearance of the site, respects the context of the site and its place within the local landscape and appropriate layout and subtle design measures are incorporated into the scheme in order to minimise any potential adverse impacts then it is consistent with the Planning Policy and report findings detailed above..

Landscape Character

3.13 The Countryside Council for Wales, now Natural Resources Wales, has undertaken an extensive landscape character assessment of Wales using the LANDMAP information system.

3.14 LANDMAP is a GIS (Geographical Information System) based landscape resource where landscape characteristics, qualities and influences on the landscape are recorded and evaluated into a nationally consistent data set.

3.15 Specialists collect LANDMAP Information in a structured and rigorous way that is defined by five methodological chapters, the Geological Landscape, Landscape Habitats, Visual & Sensory, Historic Landscape and Cultural Landscape. Each of these elements and how they assess the site and its surroundings are further explored below:

Geological Landscape

3.16 With regards to its Geological Landscape, LANDMAP has located the site within the 'Blaenhonddan' aspect area. It states that the area, which is classified as being of moderate value, consists of a sandstone ridge and a synformal core of South Wales Pennant Formation Hughes Beds above Hughes/Wennallt coal. Large Gilfach quarry on plateau forming top of ridge.

3.17 The principal management recommendation and long-term guidelines for this area is to conserve as existing and monitor the extent of Gilfach Quarry extraction.

Landscape Habitats

3.18 With regards to Landscape Habitats, LANDMAP has located the site within the 'NPTLH036' aspect area. It states that the area is of moderate value, consisting of a very large area of semi-upland farmland on rolling slopes; complex mosaic of mainly grassland enclosures of variable quality, but with many other habitats; all essentially circum-neutral or acidic in character.

3.19 The principal management recommendations and guidelines for this area are to ensure land managers engage with agri-environment schemes and ensure designated BAP features are protected.

Historic Landscape

- 3.20 The Historic Landscape element of the LANDMAP assessment locates the site within the 'Bryncoch Cilybebyll' aspect area. This area has been classified as outstanding value and comprises an irregular fieldscape on a broad saddle of land between the Neath and Swansea valleys.
- 3.21 There are no principal management recommendations or guidelines available for this area.

Cultural Landscape

- 3.22 The Cultural Landscape element of the LANDMAP assessment locates the site within the 'Clydach valley' aspect area. This area has been classified as moderate value and includes attractive views both in and out of the area.
- 3.23 There are no principal management recommendations or guidelines available for this area.

Visual & Sensory

- 3.24 Finally, the visual and sensory element of the LANDMAP assessment locates the site within the 'Clydach valley' aspect area. This area has been classified as moderate value and consists of Broad upland valley with a mosaic of grazed land, predominantly enclosed by managed hedges, at times appearing over managed on lower ground. There are minor clumps of woodland which enhance the mosaic and provide some sense of enclosure. There are a scattering of settlements through the area, many located close to the A474 - the main access through the area. A number of minor roads and footpaths cross the area. Areas of pasture have degraded and now dominated by coarse grass and scrub. The main detractor in the area is Gilfach quarry. The open nature of the area allows wide panoramic views to surrounding high ground.
- 3.25 The principal management recommendation is to allow trees to develop within hedgerows.
- 3.26 Following a more detailed site-specific visual appraisal and landscape assessment carried out in July 2020 (refer to Section 4) it can be confirmed that the summaries made by LANDMAP are a broadly accurate description of the site and its context.
- 3.27 Indeed, the site and its immediate surroundings to the north consist of an irregular fieldscape on an upland valley slope, defined by field boundary hedgerows and linear woodland groups.
- 3.28 Due to a combination of the natural topography of the surrounding area, the boundary trees and vegetation and the surrounding, existing, residential development, the site's visual envelope and influence is generally restricted.

Section 4

VISUAL APPRAISAL & LANDSCAPE ASSESSMENT

Assessment Methodology

- 4.1 The following section has been produced in accordance with the 'Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (3rd Edition)' produced by The Landscape Institute and Institute of Environmental Management & Assessment (2013) and The Landscape Institute's Advice Note 01/11 'Photography and photomontage in landscape and visual impact assessment'.

Desktop Assessment

- 4.2 In addition to the research undertaken to establish the site's landscape context and character described in Section 3, a desktop assessment of the site was undertaken to identify local, publicly accessible, visual receptors.
- 4.3 TDA drawing no. TDA/2558/01 – Site Location & Photo Viewpoints (refer to Plans section of this document) clearly identifies local, publicly accessible, visual receptors.

Visual Appraisal

- 4.4 As a consequence of the assessment described above, photo viewpoints were carefully selected to review the development's possible impacts upon visual receptors throughout the surrounding area.
- 4.5 For document clarity and ease of interpretation, views are categorised according to their distance from the site as follows:
- Short-range – 0-0.5 kilometres from the nearest site periphery.
Mid-range – 0.5-1.0 kilometres from the nearest site periphery.
Long-range – 1.0+ kilometres from the nearest site periphery.
- 4.6 The significance of the proposed development's impact upon existing views from areas accessible to the general public has been reviewed and assessed using the significance criteria for visual impact included in Appendix 1. The likely visual impact of the proposed development upon each photo viewpoint is described in ***bold italics*** below.
- 4.7 Due to the natural topography of the area combined with intervening residential development, trees and vegetation, the visual envelope of the site is generally restricted and the proposed development would be well screened from the majority of surrounding public viewpoints. This is clearly illustrated by the photographs taken from publicly accessible areas adjacent to and surrounding the site which are further described below.

Photo Viewpoints

- 4.8 Photo viewpoints 1-9 below can be found in the Photographs section of this document. Their locations and view angles are illustrated by TDA drawing no. TDA/2558/01 – Location of Photo Viewpoints, located in the Plans section of this document.
- 4.9 **Photo Viewpoint 1** is a mid-range view looking north east from a public footpath linking the A474 with Leiros Park Drive. The site is screened by intervening topography and residential properties. ***Developments visual impact: no change.***

- 4.10 **Photo Viewpoint 2** is a short-range view looking north west from Bittern Close. The site is screened by intervening residential properties and the liner woodland group that follows the site boundary
Developments visual impact: no change.
- 4.11 **Photo Viewpoint 3** is a short-range view looking north from a public footpath off Bittern Close. Small glimpses of the site will be possible from this viewpoint.
Developments visual impact: slight adverse impact
- 4.12 **Photo Viewpoint 4** is a short-range view looking north east from Daphne Road. The site is predominantly screened by intervening vegetation and existing residential properties. Small glimpses of the site will be possible from this viewpoint.
Developments visual impact: slight adverse impact
- 4.13 **Photo Viewpoint 5** is a short-range view looking south east from Gilfach Road. The site is screened by intervening vegetation.
Developments visual impact: no change
- 4.14 **Photo Viewpoint 6** is a mid-range view looking north west from a public footpath off the A4230. The site is screened by intervening topography and woodland.
Developments visual impact: no change
- 4.15 **Photo Viewpoint 7** is a Long-range view looking north east from the junction of Dwr y Felin Road and Twyn Teg. The site is screened by intervening topography and existing residential properties.
Developments visual impact: no change
- 4.16 **Photo Viewpoint 8** is a short-range view looking south from a public footpath off Cwmbach Road. The site is visible.
Developments visual impact: Substantial adverse
- 4.17 **Photo Viewpoint 9** is a short-range view looking south from a public footpath off Cwmbach Road. Views of the proposed homes beyond the public open space may be possible.
Developments visual impact: Slight adverse
- 4.18 **Photo Viewpoint 10** is a long-range view looking north west from Fairyland. The site is partially visible beyond the linear belt of woodland that follows the eastern and southern boundaries.
Developments visual impact: Slight adverse

Visual Impact Assessment

- 4.19 The visual appraisal has established that, with the exception of Photo Viewpoints 3, 4, 8, 9 and 10 views of the site from the surrounding area and locations accessible to the general public are screened by a combination of the natural topography of the area, existing residential properties and existing trees & vegetation.
- 4.20 However, with regards to viewpoints 3, 4, 8 and 9 it should be noted that the viewpoints are immediately adjacent to the site boundaries, as such any visual impact is highly localised.
- 4.21 Furthermore, as the surrounding residential properties are already clearly visible, glimpses of additional dwellings will not be out of context and the development will not be visually incongruous.
- 4.22 With regards to viewpoint 10, the site will be viewed in the context of the existing residential properties that surround it and, at a distance of approximately 1.6km, will therefore not appear visually incongruous.

Views from the Site

4.23 As can be seen in the Hammond Architectural drawing no. 1602-PL-01, the existing footpath that crosses the site is to be retained within a soft landscape buffer. Views out of the site from this local visual receptor will therefore be largely preserved where possible.

Landscape Character Assessment

4.24 It is clear from the above assessment that a future development would be viewed in the context of the existing properties that envelope the site. Whilst any proposed residential development would change the character of the site itself, the site would represent a logical infilling of development and would therefore be in keeping with the wider landscape character of the area.

4.25 Consequently, based on the established landscape character of the area, the screening provided by a combination of the natural topography of the area, the surrounding residential properties & trees, it is considered that the site could accommodate a new residential development without unacceptable landscape character or visual amenity impacts upon its immediate setting or the wider landscape.

Section 5

THE PROPOSALS & LANDSCAPE MITIGATION

5.1 Following close consultation with Asbri Planning and Hammond Architectural, an outline landscape strategy for the proposed new residential development (Refer to drawing no. TDA/2558/02 located in the Plans section of this document) has been carefully developed. The strategy will facilitate the improvement of the landscape characteristics of the site in the medium to long term. The strategy includes:

- The integration of the development into the existing field pattern and the retention of all existing trees and hedgerows wherever possible.
- The enhancement of field boundaries with new native planting to soften the edges of the development and increase screening. Field boundary hedgerows will be maintained at an increased height of 1.8m.
- Detailed on plot landscape scheme and public open space provision to break up massing of the development and improve the biodiversity and landscape value of the site.
- Native and ornamental tree planting to provide biodiversity improvements and a strong arboricultural character.
- Retention of the existing footpath within a reinforced soft landscape buffer

5.2 In Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council's Pre-App response (ref: Q2019/50033), concerns were raised about the visual prominence of the proposed 3 and 4 storey properties in comparison to smaller 1 and 2 storey homes. As discussed above, views of these properties will be from approximately 1.6km to the south of the site. At this distance, the adverse visual impact of these larger properties versus that of smaller structures, when viewed in the context of the surrounding homes and green fields beyond, will be limited.

Section 6

SUMMARY & CONCLUSION

Summary

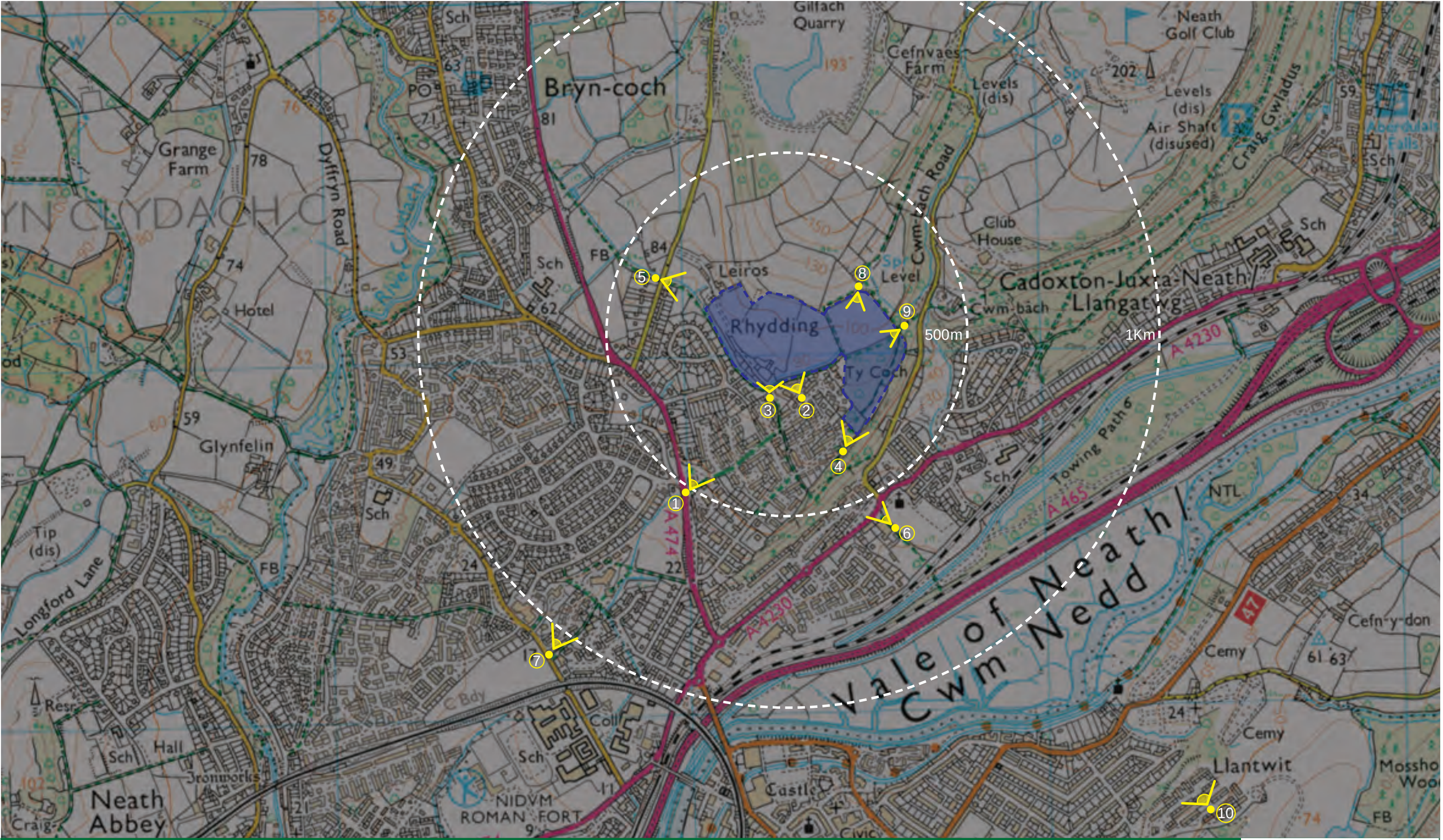
- 6.1 In assessing whether the site at Leiros Park can accommodate a new residential development without unacceptably impacting upon the landscape character or visual amenity of its immediate setting or the wider landscape this study has:
- Undertaken a desktop assessment of the site's landscape character;
 - Undertaken an on-site visual appraisal and landscape assessment.
- 6.2 Section 1 of this document identified a key question in relation to the site, this being:
- 'Can the site at Leiros Park accommodate a new residential development without unacceptable impacts upon the visual amenity of its surroundings and the landscape character of its immediate setting?'**
- 6.3 This section of the document will summarise the study's findings in helping to answer the question.
- 6.4 Firstly, Section 3 – Leiros Park: Site/Landscape Context and Landscape Character established that, Due to a combination of the natural topography of the surrounding area, the boundary trees and vegetation and the surrounding, existing, residential development, the site's visual envelope and influence would be generally restricted.
- 6.5 Secondly, Section 4 – Visual Appraisal & Landscape Assessment established that, with the exception of Photo Viewpoints 3, 4, 8, 9 and 10 views of the site from the surrounding area and locations accessible to the general public are screened by a combination of the natural topography of the area, existing residential properties and existing trees & vegetation.
- 6.6 However, with regards to viewpoints 3, 4, 8 and 9 it was noted that the viewpoints are immediately adjacent to the site boundaries, as such any visual impact is highly localised.
- 6.7 Furthermore, it was established that as the surrounding residential properties are already clearly visible, glimpses of additional dwellings will not be out of context and the development will not be visually incongruous.
- 6.8 With regards to viewpoint 10, it was established that the site would be viewed in the context of the existing residential properties that surround it and, at a distance of approximately 1.6km, would therefore not appear visually incongruous.
- 6.9 With regards to landscape character, it was noted that a future development would be viewed in the context of the existing properties that envelope the site. Whilst any proposed residential development would change the character of the site itself, the development would represent a logical infilling of development and would therefore be in keeping with the wider landscape character of the area.
- 6.10 Finally, Section 5 – Landscape Mitigation & Enhancement described how biodiversity and screening of the site will be enhanced through a carefully designed landscape strategy.

Conclusion

- 6.11 Overall it is therefore considered that the site can accommodate a new residential development without unacceptable landscape character or visual amenity impacts upon its immediate setting or the wider landscape.

PLANS

TDA/2558/01	Location of Photo Viewpoints
TDA/2558/01	Outline Landscape Strategy



Key



Site Location



Photo Viewpoints
& Approximate View Angles

NOTE:
General visual receptors such as public rights of way, other routes of public access and roads / paths represented by standard Ordnance Survey symbols

Client	Hale Construction Ltd
Project	Leiros Park, Neath
Drawing Title	Location of Photo Viewpoints
Drawing No.	TDA/2558/01
Scale	Not to Scale
Date	July 2020



Environment | Landscape | Design
The Granary
Newland Fawr Farm, Llangan, CF35 5DN
Tel: 01446 7789367. admin@tirlun-design.co.uk



KEY:

-  PROPOSED SITE ENTRANCE
-  Existing boundary trees & vegetation to be retained and enhanced with new native understorey & standard native trees
-  Existing footpath route within existing green corridor to be retained and enhanced with new native understorey & standard native trees
-  Existing green corridor to be retained and enhanced with new native understorey & standard native trees
-  Proposed public open space to include native hedgerow planting and standard native trees
-  Proposed on-plot ornamental / street tree planting


 Environment | Landscape | Design
 The Granary
 Newland Fawr Farm, Llangan,
 CF35 5DN Tel: 01446 789367
 admin@tirun-design.co.uk

Outline Landscape Strategy Proposed Residential Development, Lieros Park

PHOTO VIEWPOINTS

- | | |
|--------------------|--|
| Photo Viewpoint 1 | Mid-range view looking north east from a public footpath linking the A474 with Leiros Park Drive |
| Photo Viewpoint 2 | Short-range view looking north west from Bittern Close |
| Photo Viewpoint 3 | Short-range view looking north from a public footpath off Bittern Close |
| Photo Viewpoint 4 | Short-range view looking north east from Daphne Road |
| Photo Viewpoint 5 | Short-range view looking south east from Gilfach Road |
| Photo Viewpoint 6 | Mid-range view looking north west from a public footpath off the A4230 |
| Photo Viewpoint 7 | Long-range view looking north east from the junction of Dwr y Felin Road and Twyn Teg |
| Photo Viewpoint 8 | Short-range view looking south from a public footpath off Cwmbach Road |
| Photo Viewpoint 9 | Short-range view looking south west from a public footpath off Cwmbach Road |
| Photo Viewpoint 10 | Long-range view looking north west from Fairyland |

Approximate location of site (screened)



Photo Viewpoint 1: Mid-range view looking north east from a public footpath linking the A474 with Leiros Park Drive

The site (screened)

Bittern Close



Photo Viewpoint 2: Short-range view looking north west from Bittern Close

The site (partially screened)



Photo Viewpoint 3: Short- range view looking north from a public footpath off Bittern Close

The site (partially screened)



Photo Viewpoint 4: Short-range view looking north east from Daphne Road

Approximate location of site (screened)



Photo Viewpoint 5: Short-range view looking south east from Gilfach Road

Approximate location of site (screened)



Photo Viewpoint 6: Mid-range view looking north west from a public footpath off the A4230

The site (screened)



Photo Viewpoint 7: Long-range view looking north east from the junction of Dwr y Felin Road and Twyn Teg

The site



Photo Viewpoint 8: Short-range view looking south from a public footpath off Cwmbach Road

The site



Photo Viewpoint 9: Short-range view looking south west from a public footpath off Cwmbach Road

The site (partially visible)



Photo Viewpoint 10: Long-range view looking north west from Fairyland

APPENDIX 1

Significance Criteria for Visual Impact.

Extract of 'Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact
Assessment produced by The Landscape Institute and Institute
of Environmental Management & Assessment.

SIGNIFICANCE CRITERIA FOR VISUAL IMPACT

Substantial adverse impact.

Where the scheme would cause a significant deterioration in the existing view.

Moderate adverse impact

Where the scheme would cause a noticeable deterioration in the existing view.

Slight adverse impact

Where the scheme would cause a barely perceptible deterioration in the existing view.

Slight beneficial impact

Where the scheme would cause a barely perceptible improvement in the existing view.

Moderate beneficial impact

Where the scheme would cause a noticeable improvement in the existing view.

Substantial beneficial impact

Where the scheme would cause a significant improvement in the existing view.

No change

No discernable deterioration or improvement in the existing view.