

Ecology Planning

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Harvey Crescent, Sandfields, Port Talbot

Ecology Appraisal



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Contents

1. Introduction	3
2. Methodology	4
Desk Study	4
Site Survey	4
Constraints.....	4
3. Results.....	5
Desk Study	5
Habitat Survey	5
Protected Species	6
4. Planning Policy, Legislation and Conservation Context	7
Planning Policy	7
5. Discussion and Recommendations.....	9
Evaluation	9
Impact Assessment	9
Enhancements	9
Conclusion	11
Appendix 1 – Photographs.....	12
Plan 1 - Habitat Features.....	14

1. Introduction

- 1.1 This report has been prepared by Ecology Planning on behalf of the applicant in support of a planning application for the construction of seven new dwellings at Harvey Crescent, Sandfields, Port Talbot, SA12 6DG, hereafter referred to as 'The Site'.
- 1.2 The Site extends to approximately 0.3 Ha within a built area of Port Talbot. It is centred at National Grid Reference SS 7548 8960. The Site has largely been cleared, although it is assumed that further levelling and excavation may be required. Recommendations are provided to enhance the remainder of land outside of the new curtilages.
- 1.3 The report includes full descriptions of all methods undertaken to gather ecological data, the results of survey with analysis and recommendations for appropriate mitigation and enhancement with regard to relevant legislation, planning policy and conservation documents.

2. Methodology

- 2.1 This section provides details of all methods used in this ecological assessment including timing of works, weather conditions and equipment used.

Desk Study

- 2.2 The impacts are extremely limited in extent and likely to affect only the Site in question. No background data has been purchased, but a search was made for statutory designated sites.

Site Survey

Phase I Survey

- 2.3 An extended Phase I habitat survey was undertaken on 31st January 2023 by Rebecca Bohane. The methodology used was based on that used for Phase I habitat survey¹ and entailed walking the Site and mapping habitat types, including dominant and notable species. Any potential for protected species to be present within the habitats or features found at the Site was also recorded and surrounding offsite areas were surveyed where possible.
- 2.4 Habitats and features may be used by protected species throughout the year or within certain seasons and may provide potential breeding sites, commuting routes, hibernation sites or resting places. Note was made of any direct evidence of protected species presence, which might include: droppings or latrines, burrows, nests or roosts, feeding remains or tracks.
- 2.5 The weather was suitable for survey being dry and still.

Constraints

- 2.6 The survey was undertaken outside of the optimal season for Phase I surveys. However, all plant species present were identifiable and the highly disturbed and recently cleared nature of the habitat present means that it is highly unlikely that any notable plant species are present that were not visible at the time of survey. Aerial photography shows the Site only marginally more vegetated and the presence of adjacent undisturbed patches of ruderal scrub provide a good indication as to the Site pre-clearance. It is highly unlikely that the Site is of botanical greater value than recorded during the survey.

¹ Joint Nature Conservation Committee (2010) *Handbook for Phase I habitat survey: a technique for environmental audit* JNCC

3. Results

Desk Study

- 3.1 There are no designated sites within 2km of the Site.

Site Setting

- 3.2 The Site is set within a residential housing estate and is the only undeveloped plot. There are commercial units to the north of the Site and housing on all other boundaries.
- 3.3 The River Afan lies in close proximity, approximately 125m to the south east of the Site, although this is separated by further residential housing. A marina lies beyond the River. The wider area is suburban in nature.

Habitat Survey

- 3.4 The following descriptions should be read in conjunction with **Appendix 1 – Photographs** and **Plan 1 – Habitat Features**.
- 3.5 Inference on Site habitat is taken from immediately adjacent habitat, where clearance has not taken place as this was likely continuous with the cleared areas of the Site.

Scattered Scrub

- 3.6 It is likely that scattered scrub was present in patches across much of the Site. There are root stumps remaining of bramble *Rubus fruticosus* agg. and buddleia *Buddleja davidii*, particularly in the north west of the Site. This was probably present in sparse patches across much of the Site, with aerial photography showing vegetation cover in the north west. This is marked as scattered scrub on **Plan 1**, but only the root stumps remain. The only remaining section is part of the north western boundary and there is a further small section off Site to the north east on a spoil mound just beyond the Site boundary.

Ruderal/ Bare Ground

- 3.7 The majority of the Site is currently bare ground, with very little vegetation present. This is unlikely to be just due to the time of year of survey as it seems that the Site was cleared in 2022 and the patches of vegetation present do not resemble the aerial photography. The photography still shows a sparsely vegetated Site, with bare ground present across much, punctuated with scattered scrub.
- 3.8 The south eastern section is currently almost entirely bare and it has clearly been very recently disturbed. The surface is uneven and loose, with frequent litter.
- 3.9 The vegetation present comprises broad-leaved dock *Rumex acetosa*, wild carrot *Daucus carota*, cock's-foot *Dactylis glomerata*, creeping buttercup *Ranunculus repens*, teasel *Dipsacus fullonum*, kidney vetch *Anthyllis vulneraria*, white clover *Trifolium repens*, *Diplotaxis muralis*, rough hawkbit *Leontodon hispidus*, hair rock cress *Arabis hirsute* and common bent *Agrostis capillaris*. Vegetation appears to be more permanent in patches and grasses dominate these areas. However, these are small patches, of no more than 2m by 2m.
- 3.10 There has been littering of the Site and evidence of frequent human disturbance.

Fence Line

- 3.11 The Site is bordered on all sides by a combination of wire mesh and wooden fencing on all sides. This is covered with scrub on the north western corner but is otherwise unobstructed.

Off Site Habitats

- 3.12 Immediately adjacent to the Site to the north east is rubble mound, presumed to have been created from spoil arising from neighbouring plots. This is dominated by bramble and buddleia scrub almost exclusively and is likely to be similar to the denser patches of scrub within the Site prior to clearance. A single semi-mature Swedish whitebeam *Sorbus intermedia* lies on the corner of the Site.
- 3.13 Residential gardens border the north east and south west. The gardens to the north east are larger and contain a number of large non-native pine trees.
- 3.14 To the north west and further to the north east lie further areas of scrub and disturbed habitat.

Protected Species

- 3.15 The recent clearance of the Site means that there is almost no vegetation present and no potential for protected species to be present. It is likely that over time sufficient vegetation will develop to support a range of invertebrates and birds. It is possible that notable invertebrate species could be recorded once the Site has more vegetation, but at present there is no potential.

4. Planning Policy, Legislation and Conservation Context

- 4.1 This section briefly recounts the various levels of planning policy, legislation and conservation status pertaining to the Site and the species, or likely species, of importance contained therein.

Planning Policy

Neath Port Talbot Local Development Plan (2011-2026)

- 4.2 The Local Development Plan was adopted in 2016 and will guide development within the county. The following policies are relevant to the Site:

Policy SP 15 Biodiversity and Geodiversity

- 4.3 Important habitats, species and sites of geological interest will be protected, conserved, enhanced and managed. All statutory sites of nature importance are identified and protected. This also applies to sites of regional and local importance and important natural heritage features.

Policy EN 6 Important Biodiversity and Geodiversity Sites

Development proposals affecting Local Nature Reserves (LNRs), Sites of Interest for Nature Conservation (SINCs), sites meeting SINC criteria or sites supporting Local Biodiversity Action Plan (LBAP) or S42 habitats or species will only be permitted where: 1. They conserve and where possible enhance the natural heritage importance of the site; or 2. The development could not reasonably be located elsewhere, and the benefits of the development outweigh the natural heritage importance of the site. Mitigation and/or compensation measures will need to be agreed where adverse effects are unavoidable.

Policy EN 7 Important Natural Features

Development proposals that would adversely affect ecologically or visually important natural features such as trees, woodlands, hedgerows / field boundaries, watercourses or ponds will only be permitted where: 1. Full account has been taken of the relevant features in the design of the development, with measures put in place to ensure that they are retained and protected wherever possible; or 2. The biodiversity value and role of the relevant feature has been taken into account and where removal is unavoidable, mitigation measures are agreed

Legislation

- 4.4 Specific ecological resources, including habitats and species receive legal protection in the UK under various pieces of legislation, including:
- The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2019 - this affords protection to: sites known as Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) that are of importance at a European level for habitats and species, excluding birds; sites known as Special Protection Areas (SPAs) that are of importance to birds; and it also protects certain species of plant and animal that are considered to be most in need of conservation at a European level;
 - The Wildlife and Countryside Act (WCA) 1981 (as amended) forms the key legislation protecting habitats and species. Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs), representing the best examples of our natural heritage, are notified under the Act;
 - The Countryside and Rights of Way Act (CROW) 2000 strengthens the species enforcement provisions of the WCA 1981 (as amended) and makes it an offence to 'recklessly' harm or disturb a place of rest or shelter of a protected species;
 - The Environment (Wales) Act 2016 includes a duty on all public authorities, including Local

Authorities, to have regard to biodiversity conservation. Section 7 protects those Species and Habitats that are of Principal Importance (SOPs and HAPs, respectively) for the purpose of conserving biodiversity in Wales;

- 4.5 Where relevant, the assessment takes account of the legislative protection afforded to specific habitats and species.

5. Discussion and Recommendations

Evaluation

Habitats

- 5.1 The habitats within the Site are of negligible ecological value, being almost exclusively bare ground with a small amount of scrub. The wider area is primarily residential and it is clear that this is the last remaining plot to be developed. There are further patches of scrub adjacent to the Site, suggesting that prior to clearance the Site was largely bramble and buddleia scrub. The areas of scrub off Site appear to be very limited in both botanical value and their potential to support notable species. Therefore the Site has negligible supporting value to off Site habitat.
- 5.2 The species present are generally common and widespread and not indicative of the presence of any notable habitat prior to clearance.
- 5.3 There is no likelihood for protected species to be present.

Impact Assessment

- 5.4 The proposals include:
- Minor levelling/excavation of the Site and creation of seven new dwellings with associated parking; and
 - Creation of a SuDS feature and amenity space.
- 5.5 There will be no significant ecological impacts, but the cleared Site offers the opportunity to deliver ecological enhancements above the existing baseline.
- 5.6 In the event that a significant amount of time elapses between the date of this assessment and the commencement of works, so that new scrub develops, it may be possible that nesting birds would use this Site. In this event, clearance works will not take place between March and August, inclusive, unless a check by a suitably qualified Ecologist confirms no birds are present.

Enhancements

- 5.7 There are various elements that, if incorporated within the design of a residential development at this Site, would likely result in an overall enhancement of biodiversity.

Hedgerow and Tree Planting

- 5.8 There will be new hedgerow planting around the boundary of the Site which will comprise approximately 180m of native planting. Hedgerows will comprise a staggered double line of planting.
- 5.9 The new hedgerows will be of locally native species of local provenance, with a suitable example mix being:
- | | |
|---|---|
| • 15% Holly <i>Ilex aquifolium</i> | • 10% Hawthorn <i>Crataegus monogyna</i> |
| • 15% Hazel <i>Corylus avellanara</i> | • 10% Blackthorn <i>Prunus spinosa</i> |
| • 15% Rowan <i>Sorbus aucuparia</i> | • 5% Elder <i>Sambucus nigra</i> |
| • 15% Goat willow <i>Salix caprea</i> | • 5% Honeysuckle <i>Lonicera periclymenum</i> |
| • 10% Guelder rose <i>Viburnum opulus</i> | |

- 5.10 Six medium sized trees of locally native species will be included, scattered throughout the development, with suitable species being rowan, silver birch, wild cherry, elder and crabapple.

Bird Box Provision

- 5.11 At least one bird box will be provided per new dwelling of several types suitable for various species and models that will ensure provision for the full lifespan of the development. The provision would include:
- 3 external woodcrete bird boxes with 32mm entrance holes such as 1MR Schwegler Avianex² or Vivara Pro WoodStone 32mm Nest Box³ for various species;
 - 2 house sparrow nest boxes such as or *Schwegler House Sparrow terrace 1SP*⁴; and
 - 1% double house martin nest boxes.

- 5.12 The boxes can be set on various aspects and all built into/onto external walls just under the eaves at a height of about 5m.

Bat Box Provision

- 5.13 At least one bat box per new dwelling would be provided, of a range of types suitable for various species and models that will ensure provision for the full lifespan of the development.
- 5.14 The provision will include:
- 4 larger cavity bat boxes built into external walls such as *Schwegler Bat Tube 1FR or 1WI*; and
 - 2 external bat boxes such as *Schwegler 1FQ Summer/Winter Bat Box*.

Amenity Grassland

- 5.15 In order to offset loss of existing grassland, all lawn and other grassland areas will be sown with the *Flowering Lawn Mix* available from *Habitataid*. The areas of bare topsoil will be sown at a rate of 4g/m² and seed will be well raked in. Reseeding would ideally take place in autumn or early spring and the sward will require mowing roughly every 6 weeks during the first year to aid establishment.
- 5.16 When established, the majority of the lawn will ideally be mown infrequently between April and September and left unmown for a period of at least one month between June and August to allow most species to flower and set seed. Will the mowing lawn areas within private gardens cannot be controlled, the mix will provide a basic diversity of species that will survive in most areas, with more surviving in less intensively managed gardens and even more in suitably managed public spaces.

SuDS Attenuation Feature

- 5.17 The SuDS feature and surrounding grassland will be sown with a River Floodplain / Water Meadow (MG8 Grassland)⁵.
- 5.18 This will be suitable for intermittent flooding of the SuDS basin and the species composition is likely to vary over time depending on the dryness levels. Species from the flowering lawn mix may establish on drier areas.
- 5.19 The topsoil will be removed from the SuDS area and a finely cultivated seedbed established to a depth of 150mm. Two equal sowings will be carried out at right angles to each other and diagonally to main axis. These will be broadcast manually or with a seed drill. The area will then be

² <http://www.nhbs.com/title/158599/1mr-schwegler-avianex> [Accessed online 24/02/23]

³ <https://www.nhbs.com/vivara-pro-seville-32mm-woodstone-nest-box> [Accessed online 24/02/23]

⁴ <http://www.nhbs.com/title/174850/1sp-schwegler-sparrow-terrace> [Accessed online 24/02/23]

⁵ Available from: <https://germinalamenity.com/re3-river-floodplain-water-meadow-mg8-grassland> [Accessed online 24/02/23]

raked level and rolled to ensure good seed to soil contact.

- 5.20 Seed will be sown at 5 g per square metre (20 kg per acre, 50 kg per hectare). Seed sown in the spring is likely to require regular watering.
- 5.21 During the growing season, the grassland should establish within two months. At this point, the grassland will be assessed and any significantly patchy areas subject to a second sowing. This will be repeated until the sward is established and fit for purpose.
- 5.22 The grassland will be subject to one cut in August and one cut in March to a height of 70-100mm. All clippings will be removed.

Conclusion

- 5.23 It is expected that the proposals including the above mitigation and enhancements would serve local and national policy requirements. Detailed design and delivery of mitigation and enhancements are expected to be controlled via suitably worded planning conditions.

Appendix 1 – Photographs



Photograph 1. View of the Site from the south eastern boundary looking north west.



Photograph 2. Disturbance and litter in the south eastern corner.



Photograph 3. Disturbance and litter in the south western corner.



Photograph 4. Chain link fencing and non-native pines on the north eastern boundary.



Photograph 5. Small Swedish whitebeam and off Site scrub to the north east.



Photograph 6. Off Site scrub to the north east on a spoil mound.



Photograph 7. The retained bramble scrub on the south western boundary.



Photograph 8. Evidence of former scrub along the south west.

Plan 1 - Habitat Features



KEY

-  Application Boundary
-  Tree (non-native)
-  Bare ground
-  Scrub



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Ecology Planning

Ecological Planning Advice and
Protected Species Surveys

Project: Harvey Crescent, Port
Talbot

Drawing Number: 1746/01

Drawn by: RJB

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