
SUPPORTING STATEMENT

**In support of the Application
for the Proposed Surfaced Footpath & Interpretive Feature**

Relating to:

**Brynau Farm
Tonna
Neath**

Prepared by
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1. Introduction & Background

Brynau Farm extends to 178 acres (72 hectares) and was acquired by the Applicant in 2019. The site was extended through the acquisition of a further 60 acres (24 hectares) of land at nearby Preswylfa the following year. The Applicant is the UK's leading woodland conservation charity and was established in 1972. The proposed development is planned for Brynau Farm.

The property was acquired primarily to extend woodland cover in a grazed setting and to extend and protect the existing 35 acres (14 hectares) of Ancient Woodland at Brynau Wood (Ancient Woodland is classified as woodland that has been in existence since at least 1600AD and its protection is one of the Applicant's key objectives).

Trees planted consisted of a diverse range of native broadleaved species including sessile oak, birch, rowan, wild service, small leaved lime, wild cherry and black polar. Much of the tree planting, particularly at the North of Brynau Farm is concentrated in copses and shelterbelts, complementing existing mature standard trees and veteran trees scattered across much of the property. The woodland areas will be actively managed, with the first thinning operation anticipated to take place in 15 – 20 years' time.

The pasture areas continue to be grazed, notably by the Woodland Trust's own Welsh White cattle herd. Hay is mown in the remaining grassland areas which is used for fodder for the Welsh White herd and the surplus sold to other farmers.

The primary purpose of Brynau Farm therefore remains agricultural incorporating some agro-forestry and woodland management use. Ancillary to this purpose is public access to parts of the Property which is permitted by the Applicant making use of existing agricultural tracks and woodland rides and limited to access on foot only. Most users tend to be local dog-walkers and people that have informally walked through the farm prior to the Applicant's ownership.

There are no plans to hold public events at Brynau Farm. Any gatherings that are held consist of private events such as guided walks and tree planting days, all of which require that participants pre-book to secure attendance.

2. Location & Setting

Brynau Farm is situated on the outskirts of Neath and within walking distance of the town as well as settlements at Cimla and Tonna. The site is located immediately adjacent to the Gnoll Country Park, managed by Neath Port Talbot CBC and Brynau is accessible from the Country Park directly via the public footpath network.

3. Pre-Application Advice

Pre-application advice for the proposal was sought and this has been provided by Mr Chris Davies, Planning Officer at Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council by means of a letter dated 25th February 2021 (ref: Q2021/0022). This in essence supported the principle of the proposed developments subject to provision of the appropriate detail.

4. The Proposed Development

The proposed development consists of two elements.

Surfaced Footpath:

For the benefit of less-abled / less mobile visitors, it is proposed to create a surfaced path that will follow a route from the Western boundary with the Gnoll Country Park and link to the Brynau Farm driveway. This will include passing places measuring 2m x 2m along its length. Discussions are progressing with Neath Port Talbot CBC to link this path with the Country Park path network. The Council has confirmed that it is looking to install a footbridge that would link this path with its own path network within the Country Park.

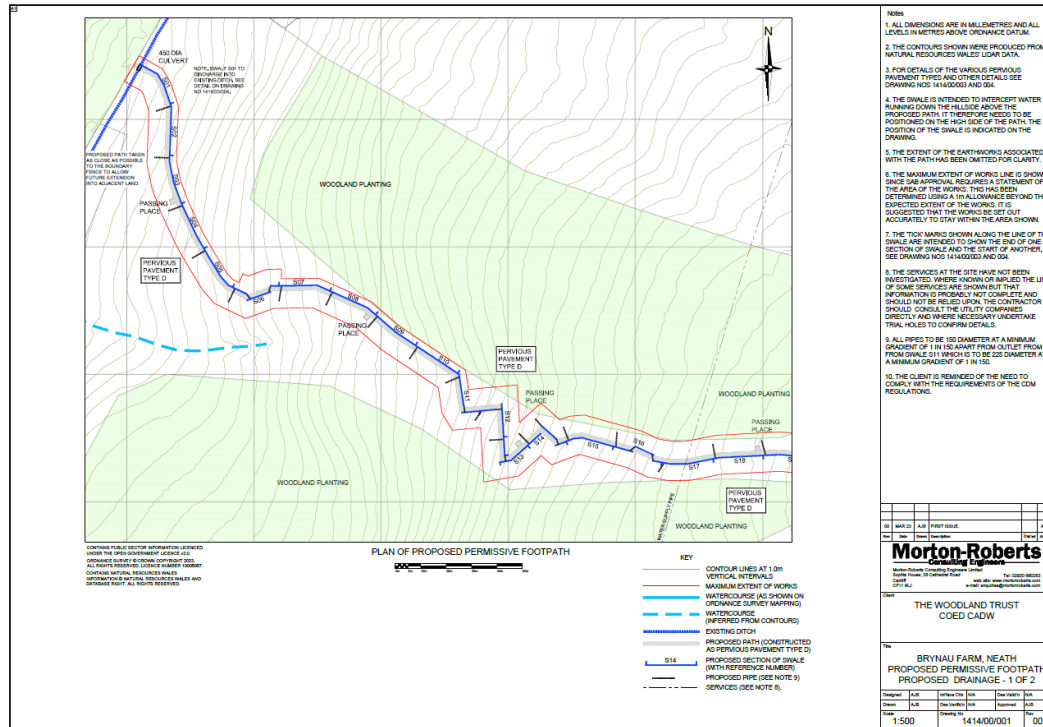


Figure 1: plan of proposed surfaced footpath – Western section adjacent to the boundary with the Gnoll Country Park

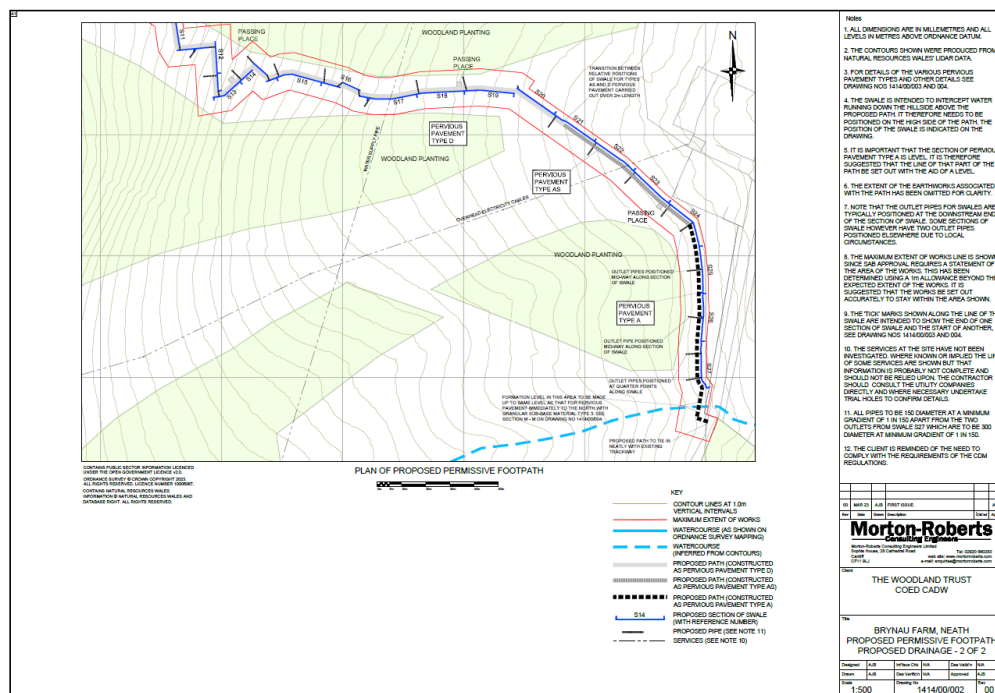


Figure 2: plan of proposed surfaced footpath – Eastern section

The majority of the footpath (Sections S01 – S21 on Drawing Nos 1414/00/001 and 1414/00/002 copied above) will be constructed using geotextile fabric sheet at the base with minimum 150mm sub-base of compacted Type 3 limestone crusher run. This would be overlaid with interlocking plastic geo-grid and backfilled with 40mm of sharp sand to achieve a durable surface (referred to as Pervious Pavement Type D on Drawing Nos 1414/00/001 and 1414/00/002).

Consulting engineers have devised a drainage scheme for the path as a result of which it is proposed to install a swale (open ditch) parallel to the path to receive water running through the pervious (permeable) surface of the footpath and any surface water running off the adjacent land. The swale is proposed for the majority of the length of the footpath and will connect to an existing ditch at its Western end.

The swale would be constructed in 20m lengths and each length would drain via a 150mm perforated pipe at 20m intervals under the path which would discharge onto the lower slope. Drawing Nos 1414/00/001 and 1414/00/002 show the flow paths of the discharges from the swale and has been designed thus to distribute the flow of water of water intermittently along its length.

Section S21 - S24: referred to as Pervious Pavement Type AS on Drawing Nos 1414/00/001 and 1414/00/002. Similar to Pervious Pavement Type D but incorporates concrete check dams in the sub-base for use on sloping part of path and sub-base would be to minimum of 450mm. No gravel would be required in the swale.

Section 24 - S27: referred to as Pervious Pavement Type A on Drawing Nos 1414/00/001 and 1414/00/002. Construction and materials similar to Pervious Pavement Type AS described above except that water draining through the permeable surface of the footpath would drain through the underlying soil rather than to the swale. Also the sub-base of compacted Type 3 limestone crusher run would be laid to a minimum depth of 275mm.

Pictures 1 – 4 below provide a series of photographs showing the route of the path at different points running in the direction West to East:



Picture 1: view from Brynau looking North-West - the surfaced path would commence here at the boundary with the Gnoll Country Park
 Picture credit: Morton Roberts



Picture 2: view looking North-West – the path will follow a route between recently planted trees behind the fences to the left and right
 Picture credit: Morton Roberts



Picture 3: view to North-West further East along the route of the proposed path
Picture credit: Morton Roberts



Picture 4: view to North to farmyard at Brynau. The new path will end here where it links into the track to Brynau Farm on the right of the picture. The interpretive feature (see below) will be located to the left of the farm yard visible in the distance
Picture credit: Morton Roberts

Interpretive Feature / Sculpture:

The second part of the proposed development would create a focal point at the Eastern end of the surfaced footpath in an elevated position close to the yard area at Brynau Farm that will consist of an interpretive feature in the form of a bespoke sculpture of an owl in flight to be created by a local sculptor / artist.

The sculpture will serve two purposes, firstly to create a feature of interest for the site and secondly to provide detail on features of interest visible from the viewpoint in an innovative way with place names etc noted on the slate tail feathers of the sculpture.

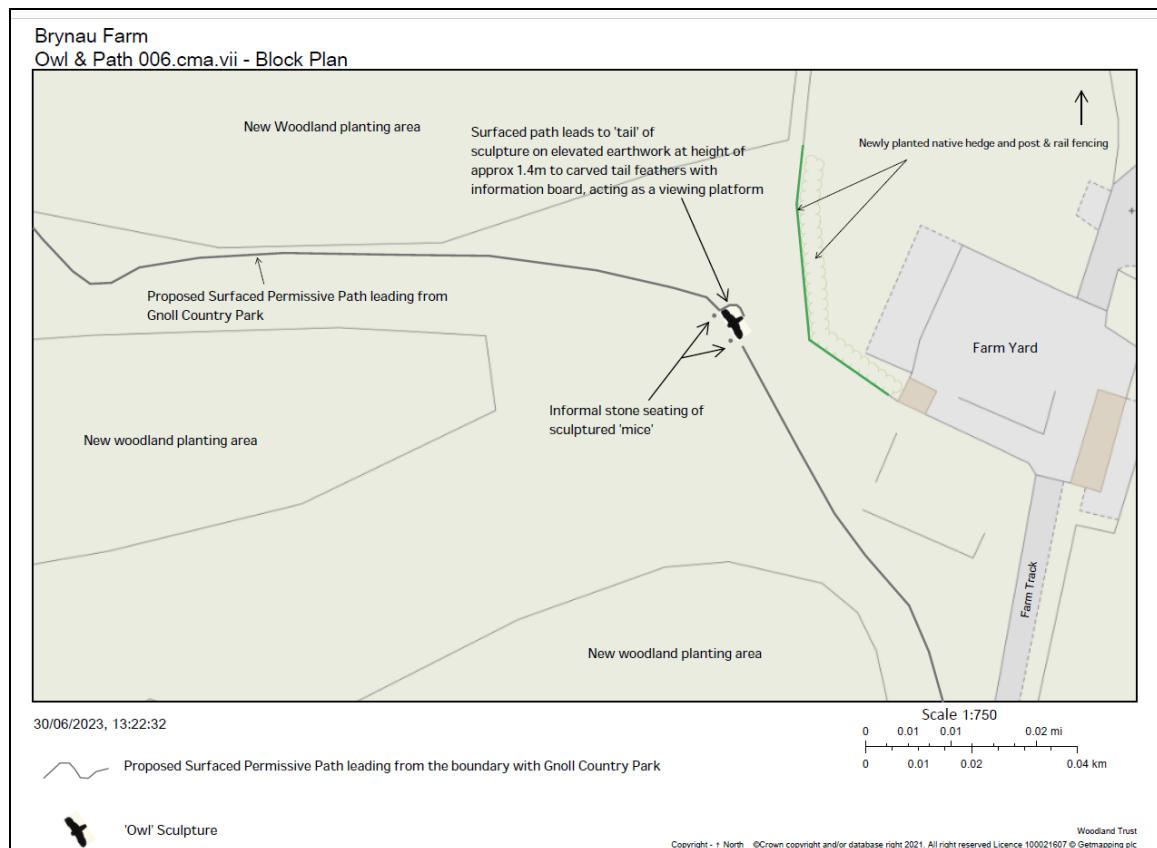


Figure 3: layout plan of proposed interpretive feature



Picture 5: aerial photograph indicating proposed position of interpretive feature – looking North, similar orientation to the plan in Figure 3 above

The owl sculpture known as "Blodeuwedd ar yr Bryn / Blodeuwedd on the Hill" is based on the character Blodeuwedd from the Mabinogi that starts life as a flower princess and is later turned into an owl. As well as having an eye to Wales's cultural heritage, this bird species is also representative of the wildlife present on site and that would once have been commonplace.

The sculpture will be constructed using natural materials and materials present on site as far as possible to minimise environmental impact. In brief, the main body will be created by re-forming the soil / ground on the chosen site including potentially re-using spoil from the construction of the footpath. The surface would be seeded or turfed using a wildflower mix. The full width (wingspan) would measure maximum 11.5 metres and the length 4.0 metres.

The owl face, with a max. height of 1.4m and width of 1.5m, will be formed in cast bronze. The leading edge of the wings would be formed from timber and the tail feathers would be created using carved reclaimed Welsh slate slabs.

At the front of the sculpture will be 2 sculptures of mice, carved in stone, that will be provided as informal seating. These will each occupy a footprint of 1.0m length x 0.5m width.

A photograph of a model of the flying owl sculpture is provided below:



Picture 6: Model of Blodeuwedd Flying Owl

5. Biodiversity

The Applicant commissioned an ecology survey of Brynau Farm in 2019⁽¹⁾. The following points are noted in respect of the proposed development site.

(a) Habitat

The proposed development site forms part of a grassland area that is improved and is characteristic of NVC MG6 *Lolium perenne*-*Cynosurus cristatus* grassland, a commonly

occurring grassland type occurring wherever there has been intensive improvement for grazing. The sward is typically characterised by poor sward diversity comprised of commonly occurring grasses including Common bent *Agrostis capillaris*, sweet vernal grass *Anthoxanthum odoratum*, crested dogs tail *Cynosaurus cristatus* and Yorkshire fog *Holcus lanatus*. The presence of rye grass *Lolium perenne* indicates that the fields have been reseeded in the past. It is considered possible that reseeded was undertaken some years ago and this grass has declined in the sward.

As part of the ecology survey, a search of biological records within a 500m buffer of the survey site was requested from the local biological records centre SEWBREC (South East Wales Biodiversity Records Centre). This revealed that there are no Nationally or Internationally important sites (eg SSSIs, SACs, SPAs) within the search buffer. There are four Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation namely Fairyland Woods, Mosshouse Woods & Gnoll Ponds, watercourses that lie on adjacent land to the North flowing down towards Mosshouse Wood, Preswylfa Dingle which skirts the southern margin of the site and various stands of Ancient Semi-Natural Woodland including two stands within Brynau Farm, Brynau Wood and a small stand near the Brynau Farmyard. None are located within the proposed development site.

(b) Priority Species

The biological records show that a number of Priority species have been recorded within the 500m buffer including European Protected Species Otter, Daubentons bat, Common pipistrelle bat, Soprano bat and Noctule bat. The survey noted that these are mostly associated with the woodlands and lakes located on neighbouring land at Gnoll Country Park although it was advised that the mature trees on the boundaries and patches of woodland at Brynau are likely to be significant as supporting habitat for bat populations in the area. However, the ecological advice is that any impact on such species by the proposed development in the open grassland area will be negligible.

(c) Invasive Non-Native Species (INNS)

The biological records show that there are a number of Invasive Non-Native Species (INNS) within the 500 metre buffer area and these should be monitored and controlled if necessary. Those recorded by SEWBREC are yellow archangel, cherry laurel, wall cotoneaster, Japanese knotweed, Himalayan balsam, Himalayan honeysuckle and rhododendron. None of these species have been noted or recorded in the proposed development site.

References:

- (1) Alison J Wheeler MSc MICFor (HW Forestry Ltd) Ecological Assessment of land at Neath: Brynau & Preswylfa (2019)

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Powells Chartered Surveyors
4th July 2023**