



**Koru
Ecology
Associates**



Our ref: 269 Green Infrastructure Statement.docx

2nd July 2024

Author: Diana Clark MSc MCIEEM (Director/Principal Ecologist)

Technical Note: Green Infrastructure Statement

Site: Gorphwysfa Chapel, Skewen

Introduction

This Green Infrastructure (GI) Statement relates to the proposed change of use application of a school house at Gorphwysfa Chapel in Skewen, from an educational facility to residential (the proposed development site) and is centred on approximate National Grid Reference SS7303997404. Its location is shown in Figure 1 below.

The proposed development site is a Grade II listed building and will therefore also be subject to a Listed Building Consent.

Existing Green Infrastructure

The proposed development site is limited to the rear school house, however the wider site (within the applicant's land ownership boundary) also includes the main chapel building, concrete footpaths, several small outbuildings, a small patch of bramble scrub and an area of grass to the front of the chapel, as well as some clipped hedges around the grass.

Ecological surveys

A Pre-Application response from Neath Port Talbot Council (NPTC) (reference Q2023/0106) indicated that surveys for bats would be required in relation to this application. A Preliminary Roost Assessment (PRA) has therefore been completed and reported separately, and forms part of the planning application. No evidence of bats was noted during the survey, and whilst a number of features were identified that could support roosting bats, no impacts of the proposed change of use application on bats are predicted.

Surrounding Green Infrastructure

The Site is located close to the edge of Skewen and not far from Neath Abbey to the east. The Site is on the north side of New Road (A4230), which is lined with residential properties to the west and east. A nursing home and a single dwelling house is present immediately adjacent to the Site. Further afield, to the north there are several areas of woodland (including Darran Wood and Stanley Wood) which extend out into open countryside. To the south, there are further residential properties and the Tennant Canal is located approximately 200m to the south east. The River Neath with associated wetland habitat is located 400m to the south east of the Site.

The PRA report notes that the suitability of commuting and foraging habitats for bats close to the Site is considered to be moderate, in accordance with current survey guidance (Collins, 2023).

The Stepwise Approach (also known as the mitigation hierarchy)

The following table sets out how the stepwise approach has been followed.

Step	Comments
Avoidance	No impacts on bats are predicted as a result of the proposals, therefore all impacts on bats will be avoided. Measures to avoid impacts on nesting birds have been included within the PRA report. If followed correctly, no impacts on nesting birds are predicted and therefore all impacts on nesting birds will be avoided. Due to the scale and nature of the proposals, no other impacts on ecological features are predicted and will therefore be avoided.

Minimise	Since all impacts will be avoided, minimisation of impacts is not required.
Mitigate/restore	Since all impacts will be avoided, mitigation of impacts and/or restoration is not required.
Compensate on site	Since all impacts will be avoided, on-site compensation is not required.
Compensate off site	Since all impacts will be avoided, off-site compensation is not required.

Enhancements

A number of potential enhancements have been suggested within the PRA report, however several of those may come into conflict with the requirements of Cadw, in relation to the Grade II Listed Building status of the chapel. In particular, it is understood from the pre-app response that the front façade of the chapel, as well as the lawn and hedgerow to the front, should be maintained as at present. Changes to the hedges and grass management may therefore not be appropriate. Cadw does however recognise that some changes may be required in order to ensure the school house is habitable, and that planning consent can be obtained. However, they emphasised within the pre-app response that the ability reverse these changes in the future would be looked upon favourably.

In order to confirm this and better understand what ecological enhancements would be acceptable to all, Koru Ecology Associates contacted Jonathan Green (Cadw officer who previously visited the site), Delyth Lewis (NPTC staff member who is the liaison officer between the NPTC planning department and Cadw) and Megan Price (Planning Ecologist at NPTC) by email on 20th June 2024, with a follow-up message on 28th June. No response from anyone was received.

In the absence of further clarification on this matter, the following proposals are made in order to address the requirement for net benefit for biodiversity, whilst at the same time being unlikely to cause issues with the listed building status.

1. **Installation of two bat boxes on the external walls of the school house.** These boxes will be suitable for species of bat likely to be present within the surrounding area and therefore most likely to colonise, for example a Beaumaris box or similar. This type of box would support crevice-roosting bats such as pipistrelles, which desk study data have indicated are present in the vicinity of the site. Any type of bat box to be installed will be of woodcrete

construction (or similar) to ensure maximum longevity of the feature, and be installed using stainless steel screws, again to avoid degradation of the fixings by rust. The screws which attach the boxes to the external fabric of the building will be placed within mortar between the stonework, thus ensuring no material damage to the building that cannot be reversed, which is likely to be a requirement of Cadw. The boxes will be installed at a suitable height (at least 4m) and orientation (ideally on south, south-east or south-west elevations), as well as not being placed directly over existing doors or windows.

2. **Installation of three swift boxes on the external walls of the school house.** Swift boxes have been shown to support several different species, including swifts and house sparrows, both of which are recorded within the desk study and are known to be declining in Wales. The boxes will be placed close together, as both swifts and sparrows are colony nesters, and will be of woodcrete construction (or similar) to ensure maximum longevity of the feature. They will be installed using stainless steel screws which will be attached within the mortar of the existing building, again to ensure no material damage to the building that cannot be reversed. The boxes will be installed at a suitable height (at least 5m) and orientation (ideally on north or east elevations), as well as not being places directly over existing doors or windows.

Suggested locations for these features are given in Figures 2 – 4 below, and it is recommended that these be incorporated into the formal drawings submitted as part of the planning application. This will allow NPTC to condition the drawings within the consent notice.

Assuming the above measures are put into place, this should result in provision of net benefit for biodiversity in the form of increased provision of potential roosting places for bats and nesting spaces for birds.

Figure 1. Site location.

Figure 2. Proposed location of bat box on western elevation of the school house.

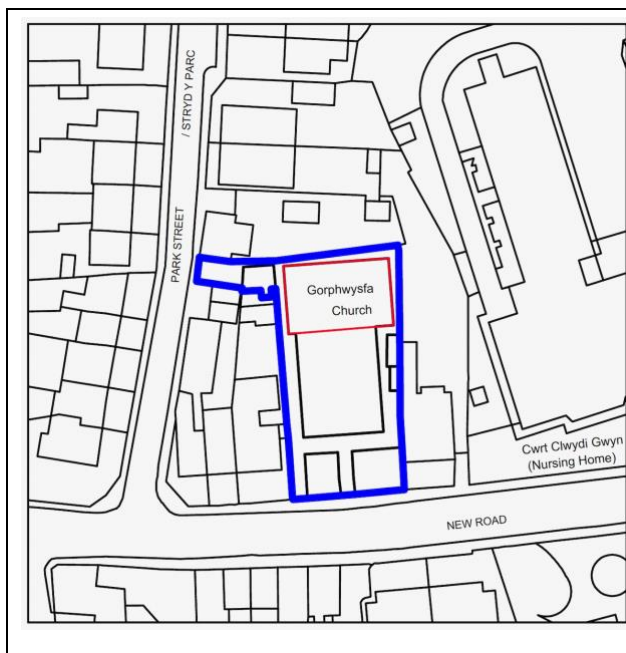
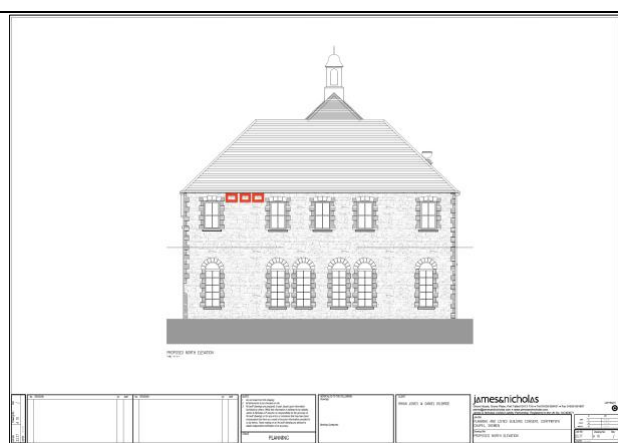


Figure 3. Proposed location of bat box on western elevation of the school house.

Figure 4. Proposed location of three swift boxes on northern elevation of the school house.



References

Collins, J. (ed) (2023) Bat Surveys for Professional Ecologists: Good Practice Guidelines (4th edn). The Bat Conservation Trust, London.