



Gnoll LUF  
Adventure Play Area  
Preliminary Ecological  
Appraisal

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by

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The information, advice and opinions which we have prepared and provided is true, and has been prepared and provided in accordance with the CIEEM's Code of Conduct. We confirm that the opinions expressed are our true and professional bona fide opinions.

Signed:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'L. Badham', with a horizontal line drawn underneath.

Lewis Badham

Ecologist (Planning)

The following report is considered a reasonable and true representation of the ecological situation on the site assessed. The report is however just a snapshot assessment therefore the authors are unable to guarantee that all biodiversity interest has been identified. In addition, if works are not undertaken, a programmed re-assessment will be required. The survey information is considered applicable for two years from the date of the survey.

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Gnoll Country Park is currently the focus of a Levelling up Fund grant which has been approved to improve multiple features in the Park (for full details please see The Stage 2 Report. Rev\_B. Hiraeth).

The project has been subdivided up into multiple planning applications and the focus of this report is the proposed Adventure Playground Area works.

The Phase-1 Habitat survey of the proposed Adventure Playground Area comprised a walkthrough of the proposed development site by an NPTCBC Ecologist to identify habitats present within the site and determine any ecological constraints to the development.

A ground based visual roost assessment of the trees was undertaken which assessed the potential suitability of the trees to support roosting bats. No potential roosting features were identified over the course of the survey; roosting bats are likely absent from the site. The site was deemed unsuitable to support Badger and Dormouse given the lack of suitable habitat conditions and characteristics. Works should be undertaken outside of the bird nesting season, which runs between the months of March and August inclusive.

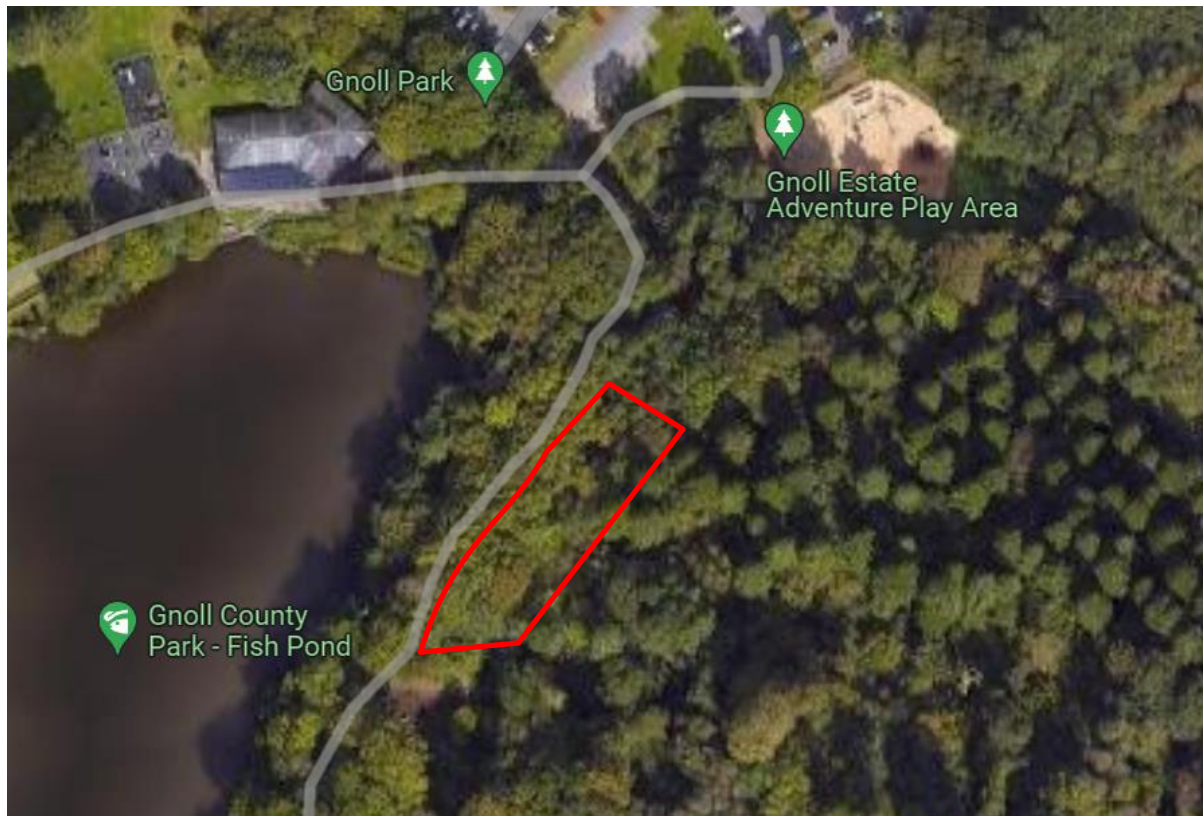
There are several opportunities to enhance the habitats on site. Bird and bat boxes should be erected upon trees within the local vicinity. Montbretia and Himalayan Balsam, invasive species listed under Schedule 9 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, should be eradicated.

Management of the woodland surrounding the adventure playground will also be implemented as it is currently unmanaged, and the woodland is stuck at an immature stage due to the amount of trees present and competing for resources. Thinning out of some of the trees will allow the remaining trees to mature.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 SITE LOCATION

An outdoor adventure playground area is proposed to be created within a small portion of woodland within Gnoll Country Park as part of the LUF scheme. The site Location is shown on the aerial photograph below (Fig 1). Grid reference for the centre of the site is SS 76589 97401.



**Figure 1 Adventure Play Ground Location**

The proposed area of woodland is situated to the north-east of the lake of Gnoll Country Park. To the west of the woodland area are hard standing pathways. Car parking areas and visitor facilities are situated to the north.

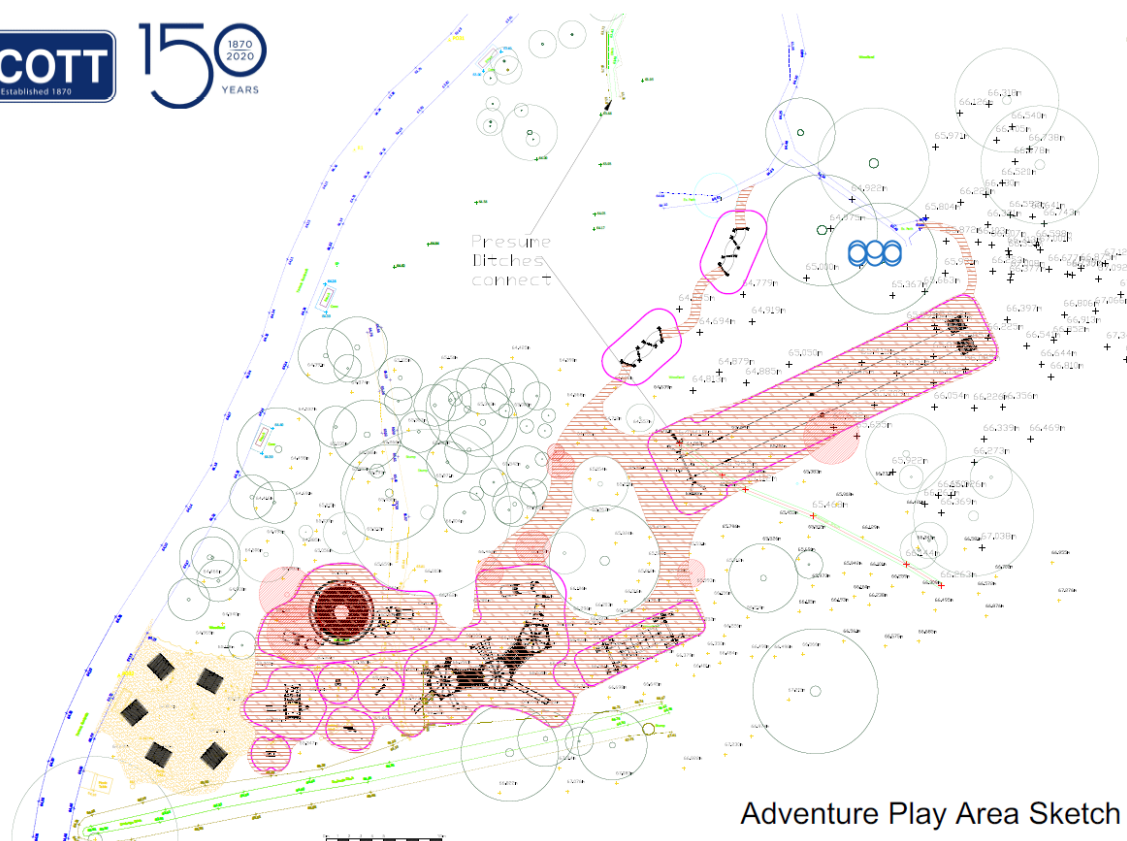
### 1.2 DESCRIPTION OF DEVELOPMENT

At the time of writing, the full extent of the proposed works are not yet finalised; however, it is known that the development will cover a smaller footprint than the blue-line boundary outlined in Figure 2 below; areas A3, A4 and A5 are now irrelevant and will not be a part of the development. Works include the construction of a children's outdoor playground area with associated infrastructure.



**Figure 2 Current proposals**

The works will involve the removal of some trees from the area of the woodland, the extent of which can be found in Figure 3 below, represented by the red-hashed areas.



**Figure 3** Extent of tree clearance (rad hashed area)

## 1.3 LEGISLATION AND POLICY

### 1.3.1 ENVIRONMENT (WALES) ACT 2016

Under Section 6 of the Environment (Wales) Act 2016 (Environment Act), NPTC has a statutory duty to maintain and enhance biodiversity in the exercise of its functions.

Section 7 (S7) of the Environment (Wales) Act 2016 lists habitats and species that the Welsh Government consider are of key significance to sustain and improve biodiversity in Wales.

### 1.3.2 LDP POLICY EN6

This policy states:

**Policy EN 6**

**Important Biodiversity and Geodiversity Sites Development proposals that would affect Regionally Important Geodiversity Sites (RIGS), 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.**

NPTCBC usually requires that the area of replacement mitigation/compensation, for any habitat loss, is to be provided at a 2:1 ratio; however, a smaller area can be sufficient, provided it can be demonstrated that the mitigation habitat is of higher quality than what was previously present, and that it can be preserved and managed in perpetuity.

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### 1.3.3 WILDLIFE AND COUNTRYSIDE ACT 1981

Primary legislation for wildlife protection in the U.K. The legislation pertaining to wildlife and nature conservation covers three main areas: wildlife protection, including safeguarding wild birds, their nests and eggs, other animals and plants; nature conservation, countryside and National Parks; and other miscellaneous provisions.

## 1.4 SCOPE OF SURVEY

The survey comprised a walkthrough of the proposed development site by an NPTC Ecologist to determine any ecological constraints to the development. The objectives of the survey were to obtain sufficient data to:

- Identify any protected habitat and species present/likely to be present that may pose potential constraints to redevelopment of the site e.g. birds, reptiles, or mammals in and around the surrounding area;
- Assess whether the proposed development would be likely to have an impact upon those species;
- Recommend a mitigation strategy (where possible) for those habitats/species present that pose a constraint to the redevelopment of the site; and
- Identify any opportunities for enhancement of the ecological value of the site.

## 2 BASELINE SURVEY RESULTS

### 2.1 BATS

#### 2.1.1 LEGISLATION

In the U.K. all bat species and their roosts are legally protected, by both domestic and international legislation (Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) & Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations (2017) (as amended)).

It is an offence to:

- deliberately take, injure or kill a wild bat
- intentionally or recklessly disturb a bat in its roost or deliberately disturb a group of bats
- damage or destroy a place used by bats for breeding or roosting (even if bats are not occupying the roost at the time)
- possess or advertise/sell/exchange a bat of a species found in the wild in the UK (dead or alive) or any part of a bat
- intentionally or recklessly obstruct access to a bat roost.

#### 2.1.1.1 PRELIMINARY SURVEY METHOD

A ground based visual roost assessment was undertaken which assessed the potential suitability of the trees to support roosting bats.

Externally the trees were surveyed, with the aid of binoculars where necessary, for potential roosting features (PRFs) which are likely to be attractive to roosting bats such as cavities and rot-holes, splits, cracks, rugose or delaminating bark and dense ivy cover. In addition, a search was conducted for obvious signs of occupation by bats, including droppings, urine stains and scratching around cavity entrances etc.

#### 2.1.1.2 SURVEY RESULTS

See Table 1 below for photos providing an overview of the habitats within the site.

No PRFs were observed within the trees during the walkover survey of the site.

### 2.2 EXTENDED PHASE 1 HABITAT SURVEY

#### 2.2.1 SURVEY METHODOLOGY

An Extended Phase-1 Habitat Survey was undertaken by Ecologist (Consultancy & Planning) Megan Price (BSc) and Ecologist (Planning) Lewis Badham (BSc) in clear weather conditions on 20<sup>th</sup> March 2024. The survey is based on the standard Phase-1 survey technique (JNCC, 2010) which involved identifying and mapping the principal habitat types. In addition, any actual or potential protected/priority species are identified.

The site survey was undertaken in dry weather conditions.

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### 2.2.2 SURVEY LIMITATIONS

No elements of the assessment were deemed to be constrained.

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### 2.2.3 SURVEY RESULTS

The results of the phase 1 habitat survey are presented on the plan below (Figure 3). The below sets out descriptions of each habitat type represented on the site.



**Figure 3 Phase 1 habitat plan**

### **Broad-leaved semi-natural woodland**

The whole site comprises an area of unremarkable broad-leaved semi-natural woodland. The stand of trees is relatively immature, with no mature trees present. Species forming the overall structure and canopy of the woodland include Beech (*Fagus*

sylvatica), Ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*) and Sycamore (*Acer pseudoplatanus*). The shrub layer understory is largely absent, with occasional sapling Holly (*Ilex aquifolium*), Bramble (*Rubus fruticosus* agg.) and Ash sporadically found. The ground flora is sparse, with Ivy (*Hedera helix*), Hard Fern (*Blechnum spicant*) and Herb Robert (*Geranium robertianum*) among the few sparsely distributed species present. Overall species diversity is low.

|                                                                                                                                                           |                                                                                                                                                             |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|  <p>Overview of western edge of the woodland</p>                         |  <p>Overview of existing play area.</p>                                   |
|  <p>Highlighting the small watercourse which runs through the site</p> |  <p>Highlighting emergent Montbretia along western edge of woodland</p> |

Table 1. Photos highlighting notable features of the site

2.2.4 CORE SUSTENANCE ZONES

It is not anticipated this works will have any impact on the core sustenance zones of the local bat populations in the Gnoll Country Park due to it being such a small footprint, the works being mainly to a small area of unremarkable woodland. The area proposed for removal will not be affecting any significant areas of vegetation that would support important foraging resources.

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#### 2.2.5 BADGER

The Protection of Badgers Act (1992) is a piece of UK legislation which protects badgers and their setts by law.

It is an offence to:

- intentionally capture, kill or injure a badger
- damage, destroy or block access to their setts
- disturb badgers in setts

Habitats within the site are unsuitable for sett construction given the flattened topography and wet nature of the site. No characteristic field signs were observed during the current survey. Badgers are unlikely to be present on site as there is no suitable habitat and high levels of human disturbance, however, it is considered possible that badgers may occasionally forage/commute through site.

There are known badger setts in Gnoll Country Park. However, there are no setts within the immediate vicinity of the proposed works. Any development to be carried out within the vicinity of a sett may require a license from Welsh Government. Generally, use of heavy machinery within 30m of an active sett would need a license.

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#### 2.2.6 OTHER MAMMALS

##### **Dormouse**

This species is thought to be likely absent from the site given the lack of records and a lack of suitable habitat within the site. The woodland lacks an understory element, with only immature trees present. Choice plant species preferred by this species as forage and nesting material, namely Honeysuckle and Hazel, are also absent from the site.

##### **S7 Mammals**

Brown Hare is considered to be absent from the site given the unsuitability of the habitats present but may occasionally visit the site whilst commuting.

Polecat may occasionally visit the site whilst foraging and commuting through the landscape.

Hedgehog is considered likely present and may forage across the grassland habitats of the site.

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#### 2.2.7 BIRDS

Legislation: Section 1 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) affords general protection to all species of wild birds whilst nesting.

S7 species which are likely resident within the habitats of the site include: Bullfinch, Dunnock, House Sparrow, Marsh Tit, Song Thrush, Starling and Tree Pipit etc.

The trees within the woodland may offer nesting opportunities for nesting birds in the breeding season, between March and August inclusive.

### 3 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR MITIGATION

#### 3.1 SITE WORKS METHOD

As the area of woodland has potential to support breeding birds, it is recommended that works are undertaken outside of the nesting bird season, i.e. between the months of March and August inclusive. If this is not possible, the trees will need to be subject to a nesting bird check; this will involve a brief watch on the day of works commencing by a qualified ecologist.

#### 3.2 ECOLOGICAL ENHANCEMENT

In line with the general principles set out in SPG: Biodiversity and Geodiversity (May 2018) and the Environment Act, the applicant is required to demonstrate how biodiversity enhancement is to be achieved.

There are several opportunities to enhance the habitats on site. Bird and bat boxes should be erected upon trees within the local vicinity. Montbretia and Himalayan Balsam, invasive species listed under Schedule 9 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, should be eradicated.

Management of the woodland surrounding the adventure playground will also be implemented as it is currently unmanaged, and the woodland is stuck at an immature stage due to the amount of trees present and competing for resources. Thinning out of some of the trees will allow the remaining trees to mature.

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