

Parc Pelenna Environmental Statement

CHAPTER 3 – SITE DESCRIPTION

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CHAPTER 3 - SITE DESCRIPTION

3.1 Introduction

- 3.1.1 This chapter describes the site location, the site and the area surrounding the site. It also provides an overview of relevant planning history. The site location and key features of the site and surrounding area are identified in the Chapter 3 Figures.

3.2 Site Location

- 3.2.1 The site is approximately 22ha of commercial forestry, a former quarry, and grazing land, located on the south-eastern aspect slopes of the Vale of Neath. A further area of wider ownership (the 'wider area') comprises adjacent land to the east and west of site, of approximately 24ha. For the purposes of some specialist studies, additional adjacent area is also considered to the south-west of site / wider area. These areas are discussed only where it is considered relevant to do so, below.
- 3.2.2 These areas are located between the settlements of Tonna and Resolven. The site is normally accessed via Fairyland Road on the edge of Neath, to the south-east of the site, with an informal track also existing to the north. The site is mainly bounded by other woodland, recently felled woodland, or pasture fields; including those comprising the area of wider ownership. In the wider study area is an area of superficial peat and an Ancient Monument comprising cairns. In other surrounding local areas exist a variety of small properties, farm buildings, and infrastructure developments. North of the site, in the valley below, exists the River Neath, as well as Neath Canal.

3.3 Site Description

Current and Previous Land Use

- 3.3.1 The site is currently used as a residential property and the surrounding grounds for commercial forestry, grazing, and occasional use for shooting parties. The wider area is similarly commercial forestry land.
- 3.3.2 The previous uses of the site have included extensive mining activities, comprising both above ground quarrying more recently and more historic coal mining below ground, also located in the wider area. Evidence of both can still be seen within both the site and wider area.
- 3.3.3 Similarly, existing over ground electrical pylons cross part of the site, and an underground high-pressure gas main pipeline crosses or lies close to the site / wider area, and both could present a risk zone to development. Similarly, the pipeline owner has its own 'Building Proximity Distance' considerations relating to what they consider may be acceptable development.

Site Boundaries

- 3.3.4 The boundaries of the site, including those that comprise the area of wider ownership, are characterised by similar areas of commercial forestry and grazing land as those within the site. To the north-west to south-eastern aspects is a mixture of extensive wooded areas and pasture mix. In some areas this woodland has been felled recently and is instead recolonising woodland and scrub.

Access

- 3.3.5 The road connections for the site are from Fairyland road, a variable surface single lane track, which accesses multiple properties, with the site being the terminal of these. That track continues further beyond the site as access into area of relatively managed and un-managed but publicly accessible land. Fairyland road continues along the road network further to the B4434, the A465, and reaches the M4 motorway or in the opposite direction to the Heads of the Valleys. A variety of other A and B roads connection exist from the B4434 into the surrounding areas. A more basic track exists to the north of the site through an area of woodland, connecting the southern upper-slopes to the lower northern area of the site, adjacent to the B4434.
- 3.3.6 A public right-of-way crosses the site, and adjacent is also a bridleway and designated cycle route. The Tennant Canal is located nearby, and a cycle route is located along its canal path which provides connectivity to local settlements.

Topography

- 3.3.7 The topography of the site and wider area is generally of a south to north slope downward to the valley below. Across the slope, east and west are varying shallow valleys, which split the site into three small catchments. A small distance south of the site and wider area is the Pelenna Forest, located at the top of the Neath valley, and the beginning of a differing hydrological catchment.

Ecology

- 3.3.8 No area of the site, wider area, or wider study area has either statutory and non-statutory designations for reasons of nature conservation interest. Areas of the site, wider areas, and adjacent shown as Ancient Woodland on NRW mapping are clarified by historic OS mapping as not meeting the criteria for this designation, not being continuously wooded.
- 3.3.9 Habitats on site, including other woodland, scrub, grassland, and other habitats including buildings, do present some potential for priority and otherwise protected species. Those habitats are varying of negligible importance, or of importance at either the site level or local level (or in between). Only in combination, to form a Fridd Zone, are some of those habitats considered to be a priority habitat (as listed in Section 7 of the Environment (Wales) Act 2016). The wider areas comprises some of those same habitats as the site, as does the wider study area, and are similarly of varying importance.

- 3.3.10 The following priority species (as listed in Section 7 of the Environment (Wales) Act 2016) were present or likely to be present on the site, wider area, wider study area, or the surrounding area: bats (common pipistrelle, soprano pipistrelle, brown long-eared, *Myotis* sp., barbastelle), bullfinch, dunnoek, lesser redpole, skylark, song thrush, polecat, hedgehog and brown hare. Other such species, including the European nightjar were largely able to be excluded from considerations, after extensive surveys effort. For some of these species recorded on the site or wider area, those areas habitats can be considered of a local level importance, and others only site level where there were only few recordings or their presence unknown on site (but are recorded in the wider area).
- 3.3.11 The extended Phase 1 habitat surveys, invertebrate surveys, reptile surveys, bird surveys and bat surveys confirmed that the site, wider areas, and wider study area are of nature conservation importance up to the Local Level, and that there are no statutory / non-statutory designated sites within the site, with land previously considered designated as Ancient Woodland on and adjacent to the site / wider area.
- 3.3.12 The Ecology Chapter of the EIA fully assesses the likely impacts of the proposed development and sets out the mitigation measures to be implemented to acceptably reduce impacts.

Landscape

- 3.3.13 The site and wider area are located in a Pre-Assessed Area for wind energy, and approximately 4.5km northeast (at a minimum) is the Pen y Cymoedd Wind Farm. The inclusion of the site in this area demonstrates that it is deemed to be located in a landscape that can assimilate change to the visual and landscape character. The delivery of the Wind Farm has already delivered such change, and others are proposed.
- 3.3.14 There are a series of existing residential and outbuilding properties located across the site, and electrical power lines transect parts of the site. The site is largely green and natural, but of a commercial nature in many areas (as it is also in the wider area). Areas of built structures, historic mineral workings, access tracks, and power lines, visibly reflect the development and infrastructure operations that have taken place in the area. An easement is also present across the site and wider area, with regard to the gas pipeline cross those areas, and a wider non-statutory Building Proximity Distance status is understood to be applied by the asset owner.
- 3.3.15 There is a sloping nature to the site and wider area, where it sits within the Vale of Neath. Woodland plantations are characteristic of the Special Landscape Area the site is within, as well as the broader landscape. This is perceptible at the site and wider area, which contains a large amount of woodland. Of note, Pelenna Forest is a managed woodland plantation (broadly conifer) which forms a natural backdrop to the site, and the site sits below the crest of the ridge in views from the wider site context. View of

the site are still possible from multiple receptors, despite the large tree cover of the site screening many areas, but generally at extended distances.

Cultural Heritage

- 3.3.16 The site and wider area contains no designated assets, but do site adjacent to a scheduled monument in the wider study area, known as Pen-Rhiw-Angharad Round Cairns, thought to date from the Bronze Age. The site and wider area have the potential for cairns, or other funerary or ritual features of the Bronze Age to be located within dense woodland on the higher south-eastern slopes.
- 3.3.17 The site and wider area both contain earthwork remains relating to late 19th and early 20th century coal mining. These earthworks have been assessed as historic assets of low significance
- 3.3.18 Beyond the heritage assets identified above, the site and wider area have very low potential for any archaeological remains of any other period, other than very low value remains related to post-medieval land organisation and agriculture.

3.4 Surrounding Area Description

Local Highway and Transport Network

- 3.4.1 As set out previously, the site is currently accessed via Fairyland road, which is a single-track road and starts at the B4434 at The Church of St. Illtyd, Tonna, and continues 4km north east into Pelenna Forest. Fairyland Road meets a private road with no public vehicular access at Pelenna Forest.
- 3.4.2 The B4434 single-carriageway leads to the dual carriageway A465, its Heads-of-the-Valley sections to the northeast, and further southwest to the M4 Motorway. There are also numerous other connections from the B4434 to a series of A and B road in the local area, leading up and down the valley as well as further north. These routes enable connections to other local settlements, toward Bannau Brycheiniog National Park, and southern connection via the M4 to major settlements of Swansea, Cardiff, and further east/west.
- 3.4.3 An existing dirt track to the north of the site connects it to the valley floor and further, via what is currently pasture, to the adjacent B4434.
- 3.4.4 A Public Right-of-Way (PRoW) crosses the site, which leads between the valley bottom and to a wider network of pathways towards Tonna. Adjacent to the south of site is also a bridleway and designated cycle route, which cross the valley side into the wider areas of surrounding forestry and other land, and towards Tonna and Neath. Furthermore, the Neath Canal is located nearby to the north, and a cycle route is located along its canal path which provides connectivity to local settlements.

- 3.4.5 The town of Clyne is located 1.2km north of the site, Tonna is located 2.3km west of the site and Neath is located 6.4km the south-west of the site.

Landscape

- 3.4.6 The site lies within surrounding landscape characterised by similar woodland as found within the site or adjacently (including wider areas). The Vale of Neath is considered in part a Special Landscape Area, partially because of its wooded character, and this includes the site but also the wider areas, and further area surrounding those. This character extends to the opposite valley side from the site, which may have some views towards it. The wider woodland context in the wider area, and those other surrounding areas largely limits and filters views of the site. Despite this there is still a large sensitivity of the character of the wider area that includes the site.

3.5 Statutory and Local Designations

- 3.5.1 No parts of the site, wider site, wider study area, or adjacent areas, have any statutory designations over them.
- 3.5.2 There do exist Scheduled Monument features present in the wider study area that would be considered to have statutory protections, under section 1 of the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979
- 3.5.3 Similarly, Ancient Woodland Inventory (2021) mapping indicates a consideration that the site contains and lies adjacent to areas of 'Ancient Woodland'. While not protected by statute, these are considered an irreplaceable habitat and many of their floral components given regard by the Section 7 list of organisms of principle importance, under the Environment (Wales) Act 2016. This habitat type, and therefore relevant protection, is understood by a consideration of OS historical mapping to not apply to the site and some adjacent areas, although some Section 7 species may still be present.
- 3.5.4 Associated with the above, some of the site and wider area habitats are considered to meet or potentially meet the requirements for being a locally designated non-statutory Site of Nature Conservation Interest (SINC). The site and wider area includes a collection of habitats indicative of a Ffridd Zone, that are collectively considered of greater importance, at the County Level, and which meet the criteria for being a SINC. Other smaller areas of water may be considered SINC habitats, but are only of importance at the local level. Likewise, the site could be considered as a SINC where habitats support Brown Hare, but is only potentially of local level importance.

3.6 Relevant Planning History

Site Associated Development

- 3.6.1 The relevant planning history for the site is set out in detail in the Planning Statement, which accompanies the planning application. An overview of the key permissions is also provided here for convenience. These are the recent unimplemented permissions of relevance:

Figure 3-1 – Planning History

Reference	Proposal	Date	Decision
P2006/1084	Details under condition 5 (materials for parking areas and tracks) under previous planning consent P2005/0962	27.07.06	Approved (14.09.06)
P2003/0946	Removal of condition restricting the occupation of dwelling to a person solely/mainly or last employed in agricultural forestry.	04.06.03	Withdrawn (20.09.03)
P2005/1283	Extend period of time relating to condition 1 of previous planning consent p2003/0261 (removal of near surface pennant sandstone)	09.08.05	Approved (02.11.05)
P2008/0854	Construction of 4 holiday lodges	15.07.08	Approved (18.08.08)
P2012/0354	Construction of 32 Holiday homes, new access road, stables and children's play area (Outline).	20.05.14	Approved (20.08.14)
P2017/0628	Variation of condition 3 to allow an extension of time for a further 2 years for the submission of reserved matters.	30.06.17	Approved (02.08.17)
P2018/0618	Section 73 application to vary wording of condition 3 of Planning Application P2017/0628 granted on August 2nd 2017 to allow extension of time.	24.06.18	Withdrawn
P2024/0186	Request for Screening Opinion under Regulation 6 of the Town and Country Planning (Environment Impact Assessment) (Wales) Regulations 2017 for the construction of a series of holiday lodges, supporting infrastructure (access, parking, landscaping and drainage) and a clubhouse with a pool, food and drink hospitality and associated road.	02.04.24	EIA required (12.04.24)

<u>P2024/0318</u>	Request for a Scoping Opinion in accordance with Regulation 14(1) of the Environmental Impact Assessment (Wales) Regulations 2017 for a leisure holiday resort development.	21.05.24	EIA Scope (15.08.24)
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Nearby Development

- 3.6.2 The screening opinion raised the possibility for two separate proposed developments to interact with the proposed site. Of these, only one has actually submitted a planning application.
- 3.6.3 A request for a screening opinion to the Local Planning Authority for a major leisure development located at Rheola House, further north from the site, returned that it would be EIA development. The proposed location is within the same valley as the site, and therefore considered to possibly interact with the site and any proposal that comes forward.
- 3.6.4 The other proposed development which may interact with the site is a Development of National Significance (DNS) and as such is to be decided by Welsh Ministers and handled by Planning and Environment Decisions Wales (PEDW). The proposal is currently progressing towards a decision on the erection of a series of Wind Turbines and supporting infrastructure, located to the distant south-east, but with some potential effects on the site.
- 3.6.5 The scoping opinion reiterated the opinion that the proposed Mynydd Foch Dwm Wind Farm site and its proposed development impacts should be considered with regard to potential cumulative impacts on this proposed site and development at Parc Pelenna.

3.7 Cumulative Development

- 3.7.1 The above history of the development existing at site is largely irrelevant to any potential cumulative effect of future proposed development of the site; given the small scale of implemented development, with no extant planning permissions outstanding for areas within the site (or indeed the wider area).
- 3.7.2 Instead, proposed or other potential development nearby the site is more likely to be of more relevance, and are the 'development' that will be considered in the cumulative assessment of each technical chapter. This based on the opinion that these are both relevant, as raised in the screening response from the Local Planning Authority.
- 3.7.3 The Rheola House proposal is only considered relevant should that proposed development's planning application coincide with any planning application proposal for the site, or the Rheola House development approval proceeding this site's planning

application entirely. Irrespectively, it's potential to have a potential 'significant' cumulative environmental development effect with any proposal for this site is to be had. This can only be carried out with regard to the principles of the likely proposed development, as set out in its own screening opinion request, as no more certainty is possible without a progressing planning permission application, and its details, for that site's development. As such, only limited consideration and weight, if any, should be given to the potential cumulative effects. This is backed-up as the correct approach by the scoping opinions later disregard for this proposal when considering the need for cumulative impacts.

- 3.7.4 Alternatively, the proposed Mynydd Foch Dwm Wind Farm development will be considered with more regard to its potential to have a 'significant' cumulative environmental development effect, in combination with any proposal for this site. This is explicitly set out as a requirement of the Local Authority's scoping; despite the key aspect of potential impact (noise), as considered by the screening response, being scoped out. The potential for such a cumulative effect can be thoroughly considered with regard to this Wind Farm development, due to the evidence and considerations made available as part of its DNS planning application process. As such, more certainty can be given as to this Wind Farm site's potential cumulative effects.