

Parc Pelenna Environmental Statement

CHAPTER 5 – Alternative Sites

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CHAPTER 5 - ASSESSMENT OF ALTERNATIVES

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CHAPTER 5 - ASSESSMENT OF ALTERNATIVES

5.1. Introduction

- 5.1.1. This chapter sets out the approach taken for delivering alternative approaches to delivering the proposed development. This reflects on the proposed site location and also the nature and scale of the proposed development.

5.2. Development Site Selection

The Development History

- 5.2.1. The decision to locate the proposed development has not been a recent one; rather one that was made many years ago and the development form and scale has evolved over a number of years to its current proposed form. A review of the planning history of the site demonstrates the history of the development at the site location and the evolution of the development proposals at the site. The planning history establishes the principle of a leisure and tourism development (subject to sustainable design) at the development site:

- 87/0078 - 11 Holiday chalets - Approved 08.04.87
- 97/0226 - 7 - Chalets, storage and treatment of minerals - Refused 14.07.97
- 05/0036 - 7 Holiday chalets - Approved 22.02.05
- 05/0440 - Certificate of lawfulness for an existing use for 11 chalets - Refused 30.06.05
- 05/0962 - 7 Holiday chalets (amendment to 05/0036) - Approved 11.08.05
- 05/1921 - Construction of 4 holiday cottages - Withdrawn
- 08/0854 - Construction of 4 Holiday Lodges - Approved 18.08.08
- 10/0493 - Construction of 12 No. Holiday Homes (outline) - Withdrawn
- 12/0354 - Construction of 32 Holiday Homes access road, stables and children's play area (outline) - Approved
- 16/0430 - Construction of 22 holiday lodges, swimming pool, reception buildings, associated infrastructure and landscaping. (Outline application with means of access to be agreed) - Pending Determination

- 5.2.2. A review of the planning history identifies that the amount of the development now proposed is greater than the leisure and tourism uses previously approved. This is needed to ensure the commercial viability of the proposed development and is evidenced in the business case provided as part of the planning application.

5.2.3. At the outline stage, the total build cost for the 120-unit scheme is £28,701,371 which equates to £184.49 per sq ft. The total Gross Development Value (GDV) of the scheme has been calculated based on applying a yield to the total net rental income and additional income generated from the holiday park facilities (the gym, food and beverage etc.) This combined total gross income is estimated at £5,970,668 with net income estimated at £3,582,401 (accounting for operating costs at 40% of gross income). To generate a net yield the net income the business case applies an 8% yield, resulting in a total GDV of £44,780,010, which equates to £295.15 per sq ft, and a developers profit of £4,478,007. The output residual land value is identified as £9,063,469 which equates to £75,529 per plot. This is documented in the business case provided as appendix 5.1.

5.2.4. Previous versions of the development at a smaller scale could not generate the same strong financial performance and thus were not progressed. The appraisal is included as appendix 5.2.

Site Credentials

5.2.5. Notwithstanding the prior history of the development proposals at the proposed site; the site best meets a series of key criteria that are essential to the success of the projects. Key criteria include:

- Land ownership and certainty of acquisition
- Preference for brownfield land with
- High quality landscape and visual character
- Accessibility to the M4 corridor
- Access to local services
- Proximity to other leisure assets

5.2.6. Land ownership – This is fundamental as to why this site is still proposed for the development. Where the applicant does not directly control the site, they have a long-standing purchase option with the landowner to purchase the remaining areas subject to the grant of planning permission; and the landowner and applicant have a history of collaboration to progress the site. There is thus certainty on bringing the site forward for the proposed development. The area of wider ownership is included in this certainty, being owned by the applicant.

- 5.2.7. Preference for brownfield land – The site is largely brownfield in nature and the proposed development has been located in those parts of the site that have particularly been characterised by prior operations. For example, the access largely follows the alignment of an existing track from the B4434 and the lodges have been sited to take advantage of the previously developed plateaus and site areas.
- 5.2.8. High quality landscape and visual character – Located in the Vale of Neath the site is located in an any with excellent landscape character and striking views. The Special Landscape Area designation that the site is part of demonstrates the quality of the area. However, as the site is largely brownfield it is characterised by development, including residential properties and outbuildings, former quarry workings, significant energy infrastructure and forestry management operations. The site is also part of a Pre Assessed Area for wind energy, which evidences that the landscape, while of high quality, is able to assimilate landscape and visual change. In this respect the site has the perfect blend, of largely brownfield character, in a high-quality landscape setting that is adaptable to change.
- 5.2.9. Accessibility to the M4 – The site is located approximately 7 miles from the Junction 43 of the M4 and benefits from direct connections to the M4 via the A465 and B4334. This means that visitors are able to quickly access the site and its landscape character and leisure offer with 15 minutes travel from the M4.
- 5.2.10. Accessibility to local services – The site is strategically located between the settlements of Resolven (a large local centre in the Development Plan) and Tonna (a small local centre in the Development Plan) which have key everyday retail and health and wellbeing services plus access to existing public transport and taxi services. Tonna is located approximately 1.5 km to the west and Resolven 1 km to the east. There is a key opportunity for each of these town centres to benefit directly from increased visitors staying at the development.
- 5.2.11. Proximity to other local leisure assets – Located in the Vale of Neath the site has excellent connectivity to a range of other tourism features. Locally this includes the Neath Canal and River Neath and multiple walks and cycle routes located across the Vale. Of particular note is the secured £12m investment and imminently commencing improvement of the Gnoll Country Park visitor centre, which this scheme's visitors could positively contribute to an improved return on, and which is accessible by walking or cycling (especially if by e-bike) routes.

- 5.2.12. Proximity to other nearby leisure assets – Further afield, but still located close is the Afan Valley Forest Park, with its outstanding natural landscape adventure offer and the Brecon Beacons National Park, including the waterfall country, which is located just west of the nearby Glynneath settlement, one of the largest closest towns to the site (a district centre in the Development Plan). Towards the coast, there are also several beaches within a distance to allow day trips. All of those opportunities could be centrally organised, by any management company to reduce potential impacts and improve accountability of visitors.
- 5.2.13. The site's suitability across each of these factors means that it is the ideal location for the proposed development

Development Need

- 5.2.14. Beyond the history of the development and the site's credentials, there is also an overriding development ambition to unlock the untapped tourism and leisure potential of the local area and deliver inward investment that can deliver positive socio-economic benefits to the local area that can support ongoing public sector led regeneration initiatives.

- 5.2.15. The business case prepared for the development evidences that there has been an increase in the volume of overnight trips to Wales by UK residents between 2022 and 2023. Annual tourism data shows that there has been a 4% increase in visitor numbers with data for January to September of each year evidencing an increase from 6.53 million to 6.79 million.
- 5.2.16. Localised demand statistics demonstrate Neath Port Talbot had a total of 1.51 million tourism visits in 2019 (pre-Covid levels / latest data publicly available) which equates to 10.3% of all tourism visits to South West Wales. Of the 1.51 million tourism visitors about 0.36 million were staying visitors with 1.15 million day visitors. From 2010 to 2019 visitor days and visitor numbers (combining day trips and overnight stays) have both increased by more than 11% (Neath Port Talbot Destination Management Plan 2023-2028).
- 5.2.17. In terms of the visitor profiles, the Neath Port Talbot Visitor Survey in 2022 found that the main reason for visiting the area was to take part in outdoor or sporting activities (65%). The survey also found that 65% of visitors came from Wales, with 31% from England, 1% from Scotland and Northern Ireland and 3% from overseas.
- 5.2.18. Overall, from these statistics, there is a evidence large demand for tourism in Neath Port Talbot, which appears to be on an upward trajectory and that the Welsh tourism industry appears to have recovered from both Covid-19 and cost of living effects on the industry. The proposed development would help to meet the growing demand for a tourism experience in Wales and the Vale of Neath.
- 5.2.19. In respect of socio-economic benefits for the local area, the business case for the development identifies that its operation would generate 58.25 FTE jobs, contribute £1,972,330 of GVA annually to the local economy and generate annual business rates of £92,160 and tourism spend in the local area at £8,626,988. In respect of the construction a GVA of £10,923,672 is predicted by the business case with 322.56 FTE jobs. This would represent a significant inward investment that would help to deliver on the development's ambition to create local socio-economic opportunities.
- 5.2.20. Locating the proposed development in the site location would also help to diversify the local holiday accommodation offer. The Neath Port Talbot Destination Management Plan 2023-2028 undertook a recent SWOT analysis of the tourism industry and found that there is a current lack of high-quality accommodation and limited private sector engagement. The Destination Management Plan's SWOT analysis found that key opportunities was for transformation impact of private sector investment.
- 5.2.21. The current holiday park offering in Neath Port Talbot consists mainly of timber clad static caravans timber lodges. Examples include L&A Outdoor Centre, Riverside Holiday Park and Bryn Bettws. Although the proposed scheme at Parc Pelenna would compete with the current offering (as well as hotels and other self-catering accommodation), the proposed scheme would also increase and diversify the visitor types.

- 5.2.22. The majority of the tourism accommodation available are either hotels located in the larger towns or small self-catering accommodation and second homes. The proposed scheme offers a different type of accommodation to the majority of the hotel accommodation and would again diversify the visitors, so the hotels are not a full direct competitor. In terms of the self-catering accommodation, these are more of a competitor in terms of location and type of accommodation provided, however, none of the nearby self-catering accommodation consist of a high-quality holiday park with supporting amenities such as a swimming pool. The proposed development is likely to attract a wider pool of tourists compared to the surrounding self-catering accommodation.
- 5.2.23. The main competitor to the proposed development would be the Wildfox Resort in Afan Valley; a £400m adventure resort which will incorporate over 550 lodges, a hotel, apartment hotel, food and beverage offers alongside supporting leisure facilities. However, the lodges at the development would be of a higher specification and would be tailored to a different market for those wanting to enjoy the outside, but in a more tranquil surrounding. The proposed development would complement Wildfox Resort, bringing more than one type of holiday maker to the area, as well as providing high quality tourism accommodation in Neath Port Talbot.

5.3. Alternative Design Proposals

- 5.3.1. The development as proposed in its current amount was first presented to the Planning Authority in April 2023 when pre-application advice was sought and following engagement was also undertaken with the Health and Safety Executive and potential operators of the development. Since this time the approach to the development parameters has evolved as the advice provided was considered and the proposals have progressed through the environmental assessment and planning process. Advice provided by the Planning Authority and Health and Safety Executive is included in Section 3 of Volume 2 of the Environmental Statement, along with Figures 5.1-5.6 which show the evolution of the masterplan. A summary of how the scheme has evolved to respond to key constraints and opportunities is provided below.
- 5.3.2. Location of holiday units and key buildings – Following initial pre-application advice and the receipt of more information on the site provided by improved topographic survey data, the location of built form on the development site has been focused on existing site plateaus and gentler slopes. The location of holiday units has also considered the location of historic coal mining activity at the site, avoiding higher risk areas as known from mapping. The design update thereafter was made to contribute to reducing the landscape and visual impact, but also to reduce the amount of cut and fill required to deliver the development, which would increase the extent of development on the site and result in a less sustainable form of development.

- 5.3.3. Trees, woodland and ecological habitats of importance – Each version of the layout has been subject to ongoing refinement to avoid woodlands areas and trees / tree groups that have been mapped as higher value. This has been an iterative process as further information has been collected from arboricultural surveys and landscape assessment work. The layout has also evolved to retain ecological habitats deemed to be of potential importance, for example, development was moved out of an area identified as superficial peat habitat. The existing landscape planting has also informed the design of the development and the siting of the built form. Later iterations of the masterplan, for example, locate built form in the west of the site where substantial visual screening is proposed via existing tree, woodland and scrub planting. This design approach works in synergy with the design choice to focus development on the plateaus and gentler slopes, combining to greatly minimise the land take and impact on the local landscape character and its key views.

- 5.3.4. Holiday unit / lodge design – Originally single storey units were proposed for the development but this has since been amended to split level units and room in the units roof space. This is proposed to better respond to the site topography and importantly reduce the footprint of the development within the landscape.
- 5.3.5. Gas pipeline offset zone – Initially two hub buildings were proposed, but these are now combined into a single hub building in the centre of the layout; this is located away from the existing gas pipeline, and was recommended by the Health and Safety Executive. Amendments to the layout and siting of the lodge units were also considered in the context of the offset zone for the gas pipeline, so that now only three units are located in the zone. While a Building Proximity Distance is known to be a non-statutory designation applied by the pipeline owner, the details of unacceptable development types in that area have not been forthcoming, and so the Health and Safety Executive consideration is currently relied upon.
- 5.3.6. Development access – A prior planning application for 11 lodge units on the site relied on the use of Fairyland Road to provide access, but in the determination of the application the Local Authority advised that Fairyland Road was only suitable to provide access for up to 11 units. Subsequent planning applications thus proposed the use of the access now used by the proposed development. The access follows an existing track to minimise the requirement for greenfield land, and the grant of prior planning permissions established the principle of its use. As part of the current development proposals the access is retained, but it has been evolved from previous designs to ensure that a 1:12 gradient is achieved from the site entry at the B4334 to the main development hub building. This gradient is to be extended across the internal highway layout to promote walking and cycling and ensure inclusive access for all visitors to the development.
- 5.3.7. Sustainable Drainage Systems - The layout has evolved to be informed by a suitable SuDS strategy that consists of a network of swales and ponds which would ensure greenfield run off rates are maintained to existing watercourses, but also contribute biodiversity and amenity benefits as part of the site landscape strategy.
- 5.3.8. Archaeological assets – The development has avoided potential impacts on the cairns located south-west of the site. Improvements in the buffer distance from the site have, been delivered as the cairns are located in the high risk gas main zone, and development and been removed from this location in accordance with advice from the Health and Safety Executive.

5.4. Conclusion

- 5.4.1. This chapter explains the approach taken for delivering alternative approaches to delivering the proposed development. It explains how the location of the development is set by the history of the development, but also recognises the unique assets that the site as which makes it so optimum for the proposed development, and positive impact the development would have on the local tourism and leisure sector and local economy. The chapter also summarises the design development, explaining how the scheme has evolved to respond to advice from the Local Authority and Health and Safety Executive and the site information that has been gained through following a robust planning and environmental assessment process.