

Parc Pelenna Leisure Development Environmental Statement

VOL.3 - NON TECHNICAL SUMMARY

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theurbanists

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1. Introduction

This document provides a non-technical summary of the Parc Pelenna Environmental Statement. The summary provides a brief overview of the proposed development site and scheme, followed by a summary of the environmental assessments outlined in the Environmental Statement.

2. Background

The proposed development is an evolution of prior proposals for leisure and tourism development at the site, which have been granted planning permission. The Vale of Neath has an excellent landscape setting and a great outdoor recreational offer. The proposed development seeks to tap into these offerings and elevate the local tourism experience. In the process, it will deliver significant local socio-economic benefits. The proposed development is greater in extent than previously approved; this is required to make the scheme commercially viable. Alongside the site are areas of wider ownership land, proposed for ecological enhancement.

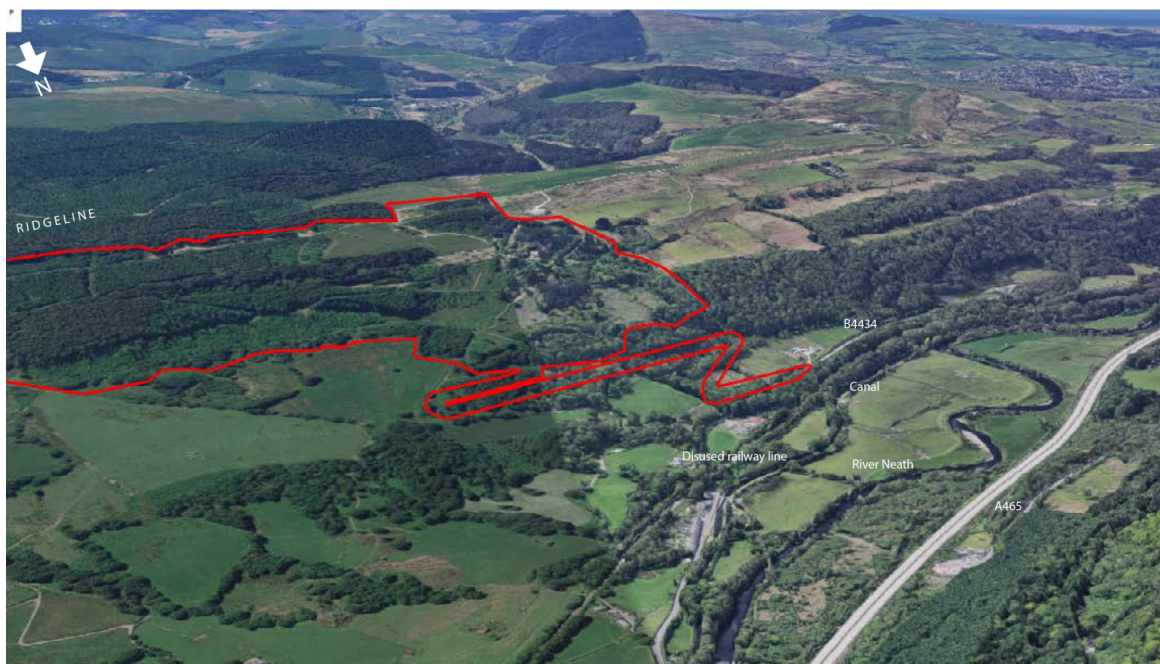


Figure 1: Indicative Site, wider area of ownership and wider assessment area location.

3. The Site and wider area

The site and wider area of ownership is approximately 46.32ha of commercial forestry, a former quarry, and grazing land on the southeastern slopes of the Vale of Neath. The site comprises

approximately 22ha of this and is located between the settlements of Tonna and Resolven. Access to the site is currently via Fairyland Road, to the southeast with an informal track also present to the north. The site is mainly bounded by other woodland, recently felled woodland, or pasture fields, some of which is a wider area of ownership comprising approximately 24ha. In the wider local area, there are a variety of small properties, farm buildings, and infrastructure developments. Further north of the site, in the valley below, exists the River Neath, as well as the Neath Canal.

The site is currently used as residential property, and the surrounding wider area grounds are designated for commercial forestry, grazing, and occasional use for shooting parties. Past uses of the site and wider area have included extensive mining activities, including both surface quarrying in recent years and historical underground coal mining. Evidence of both can still be observed at the site. Similarly, existing over-ground electrical pylons cross part of the site and wider area, and underground high-pressure gas mains cross or lie close to the site and present a risk zone for development. No parts of the site, or adjacent areas, have any statutory designations over them.



Figure 2: Site photograph looking north over the Vale of Neath.



Figure 3: Site photograph of the upper plateau looking west.



Figure 4: Site photograph of the middle tier looking west.



Figure 5: Photograph of the site looking east.



Figure 6: Photograph of the site's upper slope with Gas Governor.

4. The Development

The proposed development consists of the following:

- Up to 120 holiday lodges, and associated parking;
- Highway access and pedestrian routes;
- Communal leisure building, offering hospitality and a pool;
- Associated back-of-house and waste service buildings;
- Naturalistic play and leisure areas, walking and foraging routes;
- Associated services infrastructure including sustainable drainage, and on-site wastewater treatment option;
- Nature enhancement spaces and features, including extensive new tree planting and enhanced management; and



Figure 7: Illustrative masterplan, the lodges are in the centre and surrounded by an extensive existing landscape.

The proposed holiday lodges will come in various forms to complement the surrounding landscape. They are designed to be highly efficient buildings, maximising opportunities for sustainable construction and minimising building footprints. Each lodge would be provided with a discrete parking area, often underneath the building footprint. Additionally, a communal leisure hub would provide onsite leisure services, including a swimming pool. The building would be set within an area of the site where it is screened by the site's slopes and existing planting.

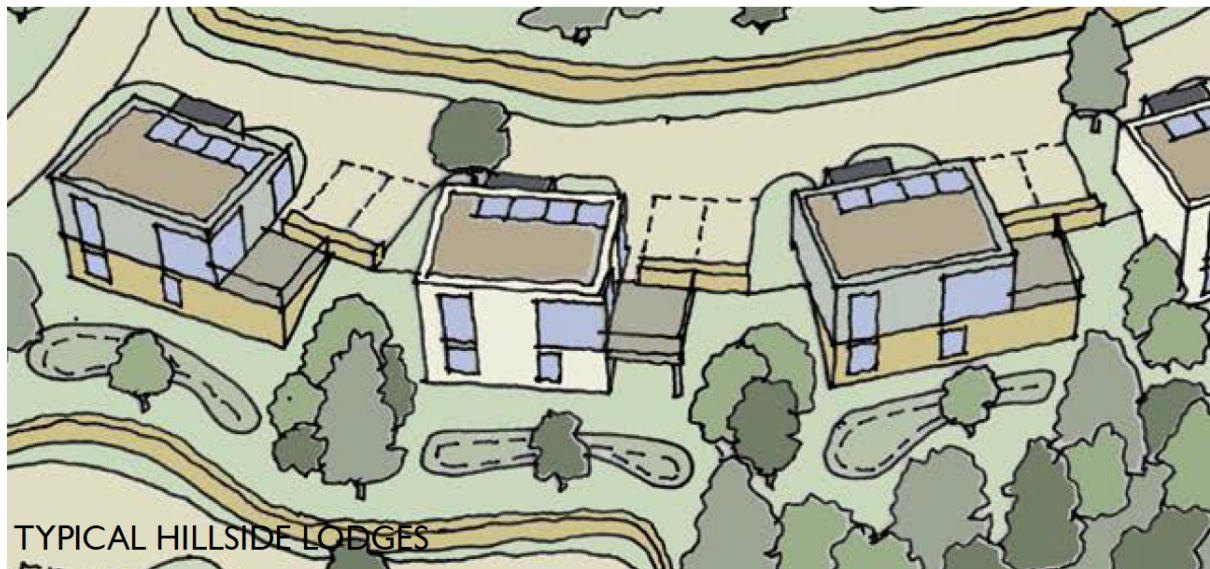


Figure 8: Artist's impression of typical hillside lodges.

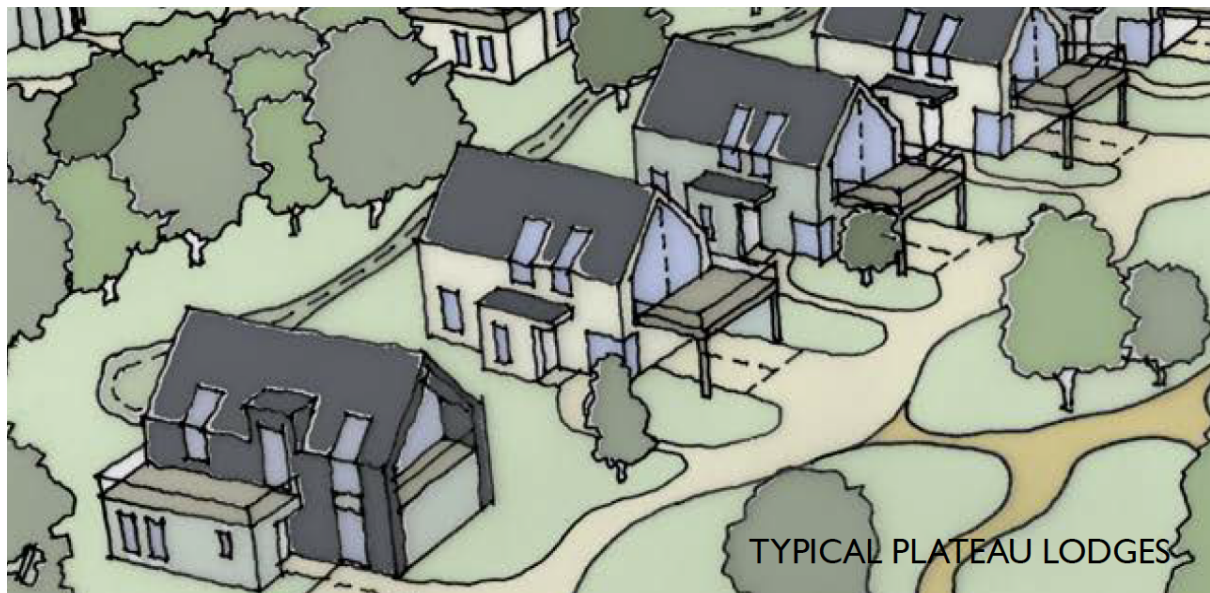


Figure 9: Artist's impression of a typical plateau lodge

A new proposed access to the site is to be located to the north, mostly located along the route of an existing track through woodland areas. This would connect to the B4434 and be of a suitable gradient for all services (including emergency vehicles) to climb the slope up to the development area. It would be a two-lane road.

5. Alternatives

The Environmental Statement describes the alternative approaches that have been considered for the development and clarifies the rationale behind selecting the current site. As previously mentioned, the proposition of establishing a leisure and tourism development at the site has been a longstanding consideration, with previous planning permissions being granted for a smaller-scale development. The Environmental Statement explains that this is needed to deliver a commercially viable development and provides commercial analysis to support this.

The prior planning history is a key reason why the development is proposed at the site, but regardless of this, the site also meets the following success criteria that the project requires:

- 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

The Statement also explains that another key reason to locate the development on the site and in the local area is to take advantage of the untapped leisure and tourism potential of the local area and wider Vale of Neath and deliver the associated socio-economic benefits. The Statement identifies that the operation of the development would create 58 FTE jobs and contribute £1,972,330 of GVA annually to the local economy.

The Environmental Statement discusses various alternative design strategies for the proposed development. The Statement explains how the location and layout of the proposed development have been gradually shaped to respond to the site's topography, valuable woodland and biodiversity habitat, existing utilities, and heritage assets. Although the design of the lodges will not be determined at the outline planning application stage, the illustrative design has been informed by the site, with a split-level approach used to work with the site levels. The intention is for those lodges to be of a sustainable wood construction and built to a high standard of thermal efficiency.

6. Environmental Assessments

Informally, the consideration of several topics of potential environmental impact are reviewed to a suitable degree as part of the description of proposal, including next stage Reserved Matters works. These are those that were raised in the scoping statement, but are considered to be adequately dealt with by the proposal already.

The Environmental Statement includes the following stand-alone assessments:

- Ecological Impact Assessment
- Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment

A non-technical summary of these assessments is provided below.

6.1 Ecological Impact Assessment

The purpose of the Ecological Impact Assessment is to identify the likely ecological effects of delivering the proposed development. The Assessment included in the Environmental Statement has been prepared by Ramboll (Chartered Ecological Consultants) and has been prepared following best practice.

Numerous ecological surveys have been undertaken at the site over several years to support the current proposals and previous planning applications. A full suite of ecological surveys was carried out in 2020, with updated surveys completed in 2021, 2022, 2023, and 2024 to ensure up-to-date data was assessed for the current chapter. These include Phase 1 habitat surveys, invertebrate surveys, reptile surveys, breeding bird surveys, targeted honey buzzard, barn owl, crossbill, and nightjar surveys, and bat roosting and activity surveys.

The design team has worked collaboratively throughout the design process, following the mitigation hierarchy, to ensure that development avoids the most sensitive habitats and woodland areas wherever possible. Landscape proposals would be developed at the detailed design stage to ensure that there is a net benefit for ecologically important habitats. Calculations show that there is sufficient space in retained areas of poorer-quality habitat to enable this to occur.

By fulfilling commitments made by the development, including the provision of extensive landscape planting, working under method statements, following mitigation strategies for bats, and implementing management plans to enhance and restore habitat, the proposed development is likely to conform with relevant planning policy and legislation on ecology.

Upon completion of construction and following the implementation of mitigation, compensation and enhancements outlined in this report, the ecological impact assessment identifies no significant negative residual effects on ecological features beyond the Site Level (which is negligible in EIA terms). Furthermore, the assessment highlights the potential for substantial positive effects at the Site Level.

6.2 Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment

The purpose of the Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment is to identify the likely effects of the proposed development on the landscape of the site and the surrounding area, as well as the visual amenity experienced on the site and the surrounding area. The Assessment has been prepared by EDP (Chartered Landscape Architects).

Regarding visual effects, the Assessment considers the potential for visual change from a series of key local viewpoints during the construction and operation. During the development's operation, the Assessment concluded there would be no significant visual effects. At the construction stage, the Assessment identifies some adverse effects beyond the site boundary due to construction vehicles; however, it is noted that this would be temporary and only at certain points of the day, which can be managed.

In terms of landscape effects, the Assessment concludes that the operation of the development would likely have neutral or beneficial effects. During construction, the Assessment identifies that there would only be significant landscape effects on the site itself and immediately adjacent to the site, and again, this would be temporary.

To conclude, the Assessment notes that the receiving landscape is large in scale and can accommodate the use and scale of the proposed development. Furthermore, the Assessment notes the considered design response that has been followed and which will ensure the future scheme works with existing landscape resources on the site and delivers a comprehensive landscape strategy for new planting and biodiversity enhancement. The Assessment considers the development can be delivered without adverse landscape and visual effects.

7. Conclusion

This Non-Technical Summary of the Parc Pelenna Environmental Statement is provided to accompany the outline planning application for the development. The Summary describes the site and wider area location and the form of the new development proposed, while also discussing the alternative options that were evaluated. It highlights that the key reason for selecting the proposed development site is its historical significance, which has been centred for many years on the development site.

The Environmental Statement documents the Environmental Impact Assessment process that has been followed for the proposed development and demonstrates that ecological, landscape, and visual effects have been fully considered and have informed the design of the proposed development.

The Assessments included in the Statement demonstrate that while there would be some ecological, landscape, and visual effects associated with the proposed development, these effects can be suitably mitigated and minimised to acceptable levels. It is therefore concluded that there are no environmental reasons to prevent the progression of this proposed development, which will help to grow the existing tourism offer and deliver significant local socio-economic benefits.