

PLANNING STATEMENT

Waterfall Country Pontneddfechan - Visitor Infrastructure Scheme

September 2024



Summary

Proposal:

Proposed development of Waterfall Country Pontneddfechan Visitor Infrastructure Scheme to include retail shop, welfare facilities, tourist accommodation, ancillary plant room, car parking facilities, demolition of outbuildings adjoining Sgwd Gwladys and existing toilet block, and creation of farm track access with associated infrastructure works

Location:

Land at Pontneddfechan and south of Pontneathvaughan Road,
Pontneathvaughan Road, Pontneddfechan, Glynneath, SA11 5NR

Date:

September 2024

Project Reference:

S23.118

Client:

Head of Property and Regeneration for Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council

Product of:

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Introduction

- 1.1 This planning application has been prepared on behalf of The Head of Property and Regeneration at Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council (NPTCBC) for the proposed development of Waterfall Country Pontneddfechan Visitor Infrastructure Scheme to include retail shop, welfare facilities, tourist accommodation, ancillary plant room, car parking facilities, demolition of outbuildings adjoining Sgwd Gwladys and existing toilet block, and creation of farm track access with associated infrastructure works at land at Pontneddfechan and south of Pontneathvaughan Road, Pontneathvaughan Road, Pontneddfechan, Glynneath, SA11 5NR. These works include:
- Dedicated car parking including EV charging, and accessible, coach and minibus space provision;
 - Creation of public squares within the centre of Pontneddfechan which will create a sense of arrival into the village and a gateway for visitors to the waterfalls;
 - Construction of warden's office, a community shop and accommodation block;
 - Additional public WC's as there is currently inadequate provision in the village; and
 - Integrated sustainable drainage schemes, ecology and arboricultural enhancement works, and highways and traffic calming improvements.
- 1.2 The entire proposal has been supported by Levelling Up Funding (LUF) from Welsh Government which *"is especially intended to support investment in places where it can make the biggest difference to everyday life, including ex-industrial areas, deprived towns and coastal communities."* It has been introduced to help local areas identify real local priorities for investment. The scheme aims to utilise the LUF to create an attractive environment and priceless tourism opportunity that will benefit Pontneddfechan along with the wider area, making it a highly desirable destination with many economic benefits. The LUF funding will help deal with the large sums of visitors attending the waterfalls in the area, that has led to several issues in terms of visitor parking. This was highlighted in a BBC article in June 2023 where a ban was to be imposed to deal with inconsiderate parking by visitors in the village. Further information about this can be found in the following link: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-65793955>
- 1.3 The aim of this Planning Statement is to offer a clear and logical document to outline the planning considerations and planning policies pertinent to the application. The document also acts as a

method of representing the details of the planning application in a way that can be read both by professionals and the public.

- 1.4 This Planning Statement acts as a supporting document for the accompanying planning application and should be read in conjunction with all other elements of the application which include the following documents:

Drawing name	Drawing reference
Site Location Plan	2081-00-HIR-A-DR-00020-S2-P9
Existing Site Roof Plan	2081-00-HIR-A-DR-01039-S2-P7
Proposed Site Plan	2081-00-HIR-A-DR-00200-S2-P13
Site Demolition Plan	2081-00-HIR-A-DR-01139-S2-P5
Proposed Ground Floor Plan	2081-00-HIR-A-DR-01300-S2-P15
Proposed First Floor Plan	2081-00-HIR-A-DR-01310-S2-P13
Proposed Roof Plan	2081-00-HIR-A-DR-01390-S2-P11
Proposed Accommodation Elevations	2081-01-HIR-A-DR-02410-S2-P8
Proposed Shop Elevations 1	2081-02-HIR-A-DR-02420-S2-P6
Proposed Shop Elevations 2	2081-02-HIR-A-DR-02421-S2-P6
Proposed Welfare Elevations 1	2081-04-HIR-A-DR-02440-S2-P6
Proposed Welfare Elevations 2	2081-04-HIR-A-DR-02441-S2-P6
Existing Site Sections	2081-00-HIR-A-DR-03050-S2-P6
Proposed Site Sections	2081-00-HIR-A-DR-03500-S2-P6
Waste Management Plan and Proposed Bin Store	2081-04-HIR-A-DR-00450-S2-P5
Proposed Bike and Water Tank Enclosure Elevations	2081-04-HIR-A-DR-00452-S2-P4
Highway Works - Existing & Proposed Drainage	2081-05-JUB-C-DR-00540-S2-P05
Highway Works - General Arrangement	2081-05-JUB-C-DR-00100-S2-P06
Highway Works - Swept Path Analysis - Delivery Vehicles	2081-05-JUB-C-DR-00151-S2-P04
Highway Works - Swept Path Analysis - MPV and Estate Car	2081-05-JUB-C-DR-00150-S2-P04
Highway Works - Swept Path Analysis - Refuse and Recycling Vehicles	2081-05-JUB-C-DR-00152-S2-P04

Highway Works - Swept Path Analysis – Tractor and Trailer	2081-05-JUB-C-DR-00153-S2-P05
Highway Works – Swept Path Analysis - Coaches	2081-05-JUB-C-DR-00154-S2-P01
Proposed Car Park - Drainage Layout	2081-04-JUB-C-DR-00500-S2-P07
Proposed Car Park - General Arrangement	2081-04-JUB-C-DR-00100-S2-P06
Proposed Car Park - Swept Path Analysis - Coaches	2081-04-JUB-C-DR-00150-S2-P04
Proposed Car Park - Swept Path Analysis - Delivery and Refuse Vehicles	2081-04-JUB-C-DR-00152-S2-P04
Proposed Car Park - Swept Path Analysis - MPV and Estate Cars	2081-04-JUB-C-DR-00151-S2-P04
Proposed Car Park – Access Track External Works	2081-04-JUB-C-DR-00730-S2-P02
Ecological Enhancements Plan	2228-DLA-DR-L-05-P03
Hard Landscape Plan	2228-DLA-DR-L-01-P13
Landscape Sections	2228-DLA-DR-L-04-P04
Soft Landscape Plan	2228-DLA-DR-L-02-P08
Tree Pit Details	2228-DLA-DR-L-03-P02
Lighting Strategy	2081-00-MCP-E-DR-9000
Tree Survey Plan	TS589
Topographical Survey	6785A

- 1.5 In addition, the following supporting documents have been submitted.

Document name (reference where appropriate)	Prepared by
Application Form	Asbri Planning
Cover Letter	Asbri Planning
Planning Statement	Asbri Planning
Welsh Language Action Plan	Asbri Planning
PAC Report	Asbri Planning
Site Waste Management Plan	Andrew Scott
Design and Access Statement including Energy and Sustainability Statement	Hiraeth Architecture
Accommodation Schedule	Hiraeth Architecture
Drainage Strategy	Jubb
Flood Risk Technical Note	Jubb

Transport Statement	Asbri Transport
Preliminary Ecological Assessment	Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council
Tree Survey	Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council
Landscape Management Plan	Davies Landscapes
Green Infrastructure Statement	Davies Landscapes
Factual Exploratory Investigation	Earth Science Partnership
Ground Conditions Assessment Report	Jubb
Historic Environment Desk Based Assessment	Dyfed Archaeological Trust

- 1.6 In terms of the content of this Planning Statement, this chapter is followed by a site description and its features which includes a contextual analysis regarding the local character and nearby land uses and review of planning history. Next, Chapter 3 offers an outline of the proposed development. Subsequently, Chapter 4 provides a summary of the relevant national and local planning policies which provide the framework for appraising the proposed development. Meanwhile, Chapter 5 pulls together the vital points and conclusions from the supporting technical documents to demonstrate the overall suitability of the proposal in planning terms. To conclude, Chapter 6 states why the proposal should be granted planning permission.

Site Description and Context

Site and Surroundings

- 2.1 The application site is positioned within the village of Pontneddfachan, straddling the boundary between Powys and Neath Port Talbot, and on the outskirts of Bannau Brycheiniog National Park. The site itself is located in the centre of the village and extends to approximately 1.83 hectares. The proposed development area consists of land to the south of Pontneathvaughan Road, an area of public realm in the centre of the village, part of the land/buildings occupied by Sgwd Gwladys and agricultural land.
- 2.2 A site location plan has been provided by Hiraeth Architecture which is reproduced below in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Site Location Plan (Source: Hiraeth Architecture)



- 2.3 The site itself is relatively flat although levels slope gradually towards the site, and at the centre of the site lies Sgwd Gwladys which is shown in Figure 2, containing a café/restaurant along with four rooms for guests to stay in. The building is owned by the Council but is leased for private enterprises. The site's immediate surroundings are fairly rural in nature, with the site surrounded by trees to the east and south, and pasture land lies to the south.

Figure 2: Sgwd Gwladys



- 2.4 The site is positioned approximately 1km northeast of Glynneath, and is less than twenty minutes away from both Neath and Aberdare. Pontneddfechan offers a gateway for locals and tourists to the 'Waterfall Country' which neighbours the application site. 'Waterfall Country' contains several hiking trails as shown in Figure 3 which leads to a series of waterfalls including Sgwd Gwladys, Sgwd yr Eira and Porth yr Ogof as shown in Figure 4, and is visited by around 300,000 people annually.

Figure 3: Information Board in Pontneddfechan



Figure 4: Sgwd Gwladys Waterfall

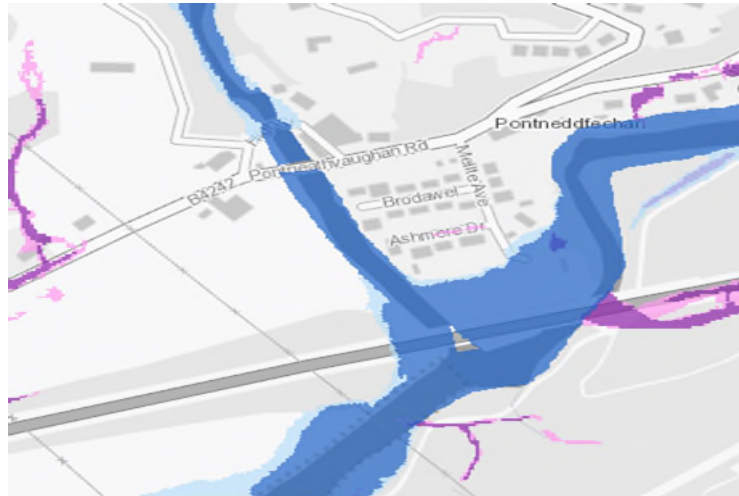


- 2.5 The site is situated within close proximity to some community facilities which are within walking distance of the site. These include public houses, a golf club and chapel. Pontneddfechan Village Hall is 0.7 miles east of the site, whilst the town of Glynneath is 1.3 miles south west of the site and contains several facilities including a library, playground, park, restaurants and convenience store.
- 2.6 The majority of the application site lies within Zone A in the Natural Resources Wales (NRW) Development Advice Map, however the south eastern corner of the site is within Flood Zone C2. The NRW Flood Map for Planning places the south eastern portion of the site within Flood Zones 2 and 3 for rivers and seas. Please refer to Figures 5 and 6 below for further information.

Figure 5: Development Advice Map (Source: NRW)



Figure 6: Flood Map For Planning (Source: NRW)



- 2.7 A review of Cadw's shows that there are no historic assets in close proximity to the site. There are several Scheduled Monuments to the east of the site which include Glynneath Gunpowder Works, Dinas Silica Mine and Craig Y Ddinas Hillfort.
- 2.8 The Coal Authority's Interactive Map reveals that no part of the site is within a Coal Mining Development High Risk Area.
- 2.9 Within the Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council Local Development Plan (2011-2026) Proposals Map, the following policies are applicable to the application site:
- Policy SP6 – Valleys Strategy Area;
 - Policy M1 – Safeguarded Coal Resource

The Local Development Plan (LDP) Proposals Map in Figure 7 shows immediately north of the site is the Coedydd Nedd a Mellte Special Area of Conservation, and Dyffrynoedd Nedd a Mellte a Moel Penderyn Site of Specific Scientific Interest.

Figure 7: LDP Proposals Map (Source: Neath Port Talbot Council)



Access

- 2.10 The site is approximately two miles from the Heads of the Valleys Road (A465), a trunk road that runs from Junction 43 of the M4 at Llandarcy to Bromyard in Herefordshire. It is 66 miles in total and connects settlements including Neath, Abergavenny, Merthyr Tydfil and Hereford. Junction 43 of the M4 is only a 20 minute drive away in a south westerly direction, offering access to several destinations within South Wales and across the border in England.
- 2.11 On the southern end of Pontneathvaughan Road there is a 260m unrestricted parking layby, which contains approximately 48 spaces for visitors to use. At the eastern end of the carriageway visitors tend to park on the kerb or on the road as illustrated in Figure 8. Parking opportunities are also provided at the Angel Inn car park, Dinas Rock car park and by Pontneddfechan Village Hall. Vehicle traffic is a challenge that Pontneddfechan has to deal with, and is exacerbated during summer weekends and holiday periods. This application aims to resolve the traffic and parking matters associated with Pontneddfechan as it leads to congestion and causes a nuisance to the local community.

Figure 8: Existing parking situation along Pontneathvaughan Road



- 2.12 The site is positioned in a sustainable location, with eastbound and westbound bus stop positioned in close proximity to the site. The stops are by the following buses:

No. 55 – Neath to Pontneddfechan/Min Yr Awel and vice versa

No. 161 – Neath to Min Yr Awel and vice versa

No. 162 – Glynneath to Min Yr Awel and vice versa

No. 906 – Neath College to Min Yr Awel, and vice versa

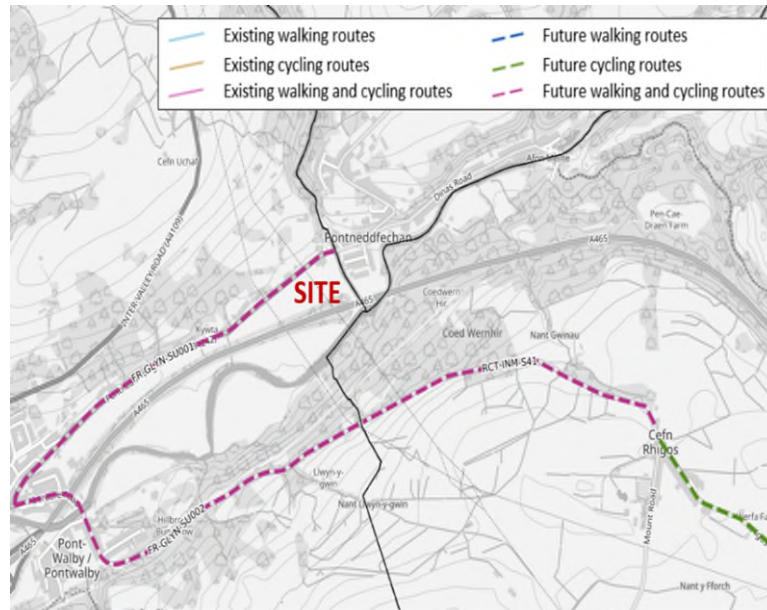
The no. 161, 162 and 906 services run on weekdays, whilst the no. 55 service only runs on Sundays. The no. 55, 161 and 906 services all call at Neath Bus Station which has services heading to several destinations including Swansea, Skewen, Margam, Pontardawe and Brecon.

- 2.13 Neath Train Station is approximately 20km from the site whilst Aberdare Train Station is only 17km away. At Neath Train Station, hourly services are operated by Great Western Railway travel between Swansea and London Paddington in both directions. Transport for Wales services also call at the station, with their services terminating at destinations including Manchester Piccadilly, Cardiff Central, Carmarthen and Milford Haven. Aberdare Train Station is the terminus of the Aberdare branch of the Merthyr Line. On Mondays to Saturday daytimes, Aberdare provides a half-hourly service to Barry Island, whereas in the evenings this drops to an hourly service. On Sundays there is a reduced to Barry Island.

- 2.14 Approximately 0.5km south of the site is National Cycle Route 46, with the route linking Neath and Bromsgrove and is almost 150km

long. Throughout Glynneath and Pontneddfechan it is an on-road cycle route. The route links up with National Cycle Route 4 in Swansea and National Cycle Route 478 in Aberdare. According to the Active Travel Network Map, there is a proposed walking and cycle route that will run from the site to Cefn Rhigos, that will link up to a future cycling route, as shown below in Figure 9 which has come from the Transport Assessment.

Figure 9: Active Travel Network Map (Source: Asbri Transport)



- 2.15 In terms of pedestrian provision, footpaths along Pontneathvaughan Road are narrow and predominantly limited to one side of the carriageway. Footway provision is provided all the way to Glynneath which is a half hour walk in a south-westerly direction. In the immediate surroundings of the site, pedestrian safety is brought into question as a result of frequent pavement parking by visitors.

Planning History

- 2.16 A review of Neath Port Talbot's online planning history identifies the following planning history of importance relating to the site and its immediate surroundings dating back to 2011.

LPA Reference	Proposal	Decision
P2011/0447	Retention of detached stables	Approved 24 th October 2011
P2017/0103	New vehicle access onto Pontneathvaughan Road	Refused 7 th April 2017

	<i>(B4242) with associated access track</i>	
<i>P2017/0310</i>	<i>Change of use of former Tourist Information Centre to a mixed use cafe (Use Class A3) on ground-floor and tourist residential lodging accommodation at first-floor (Use Class C3).</i>	<i>Approved 16th May 2017</i>
<i>P2017/0505</i>	<i>Details to be agreed in association with conditions 3 (Bin storage), 4 (parking scheme), 6 (delivery management plan) and 7 (car parking management scheme) of planning permission P2017/0310 granted on 16/05/2017.</i>	<i>Approved 13th June 2017</i>
<i>P2017/0805</i>	<i>Non-material amendment to P2017/0310 to allow change of window to door - facilitating access to bunk house</i>	<i>Approved 29th August 2017</i>
<i>P2017/0837</i>	<i>Variation of Condition 9 (Opening Hours) of Planning Application P2017/0310 granted on 16/05/17 to allow extended operating hours from 18.00pm to 23.00pm</i>	<i>Approved 22nd September 2017</i>
<i>P2018/0860</i>	<i>Retention of premises as cafe/restaurant/bar (Use Class A3) with tourism accommodation at first-floor (Use Class C1); retention and alteration of detached storage building/servery with new pitched roof in lieu of seating area and stepped access, plus formation of dedicated parking area for 6 vehicles on land to the north-east of the Angel Hotel and one disabled persons parking space on site (amended description)</i>	<i>Approved 15th January 2019</i>

P2018/0859	Retention of 1 x externally illuminated fascia sign; 6 x non-illuminated signs and 1 x non-illuminated totem sign	Approved 4 th December 2018
P2019/0344	Details to be agreed in association with Conditions 4 (Materials); 5 (Construction Method Statement) and 6 (Fuel Spill Procedure) of Planning Permission P2018/0860 granted on 15/01/19	Approved 14 th May 2019
P2019/0377	Non-Material Amendment to Planning Application P2018/0860 relating to the in-filling of the front elevation of the storage/servery building with timber plus insertion of door and window	Approved 3 rd May 2019
P2019/5389	Retention of existing detached outbuilding plus single-storey side extension to connect it with main building to facilitate relocation of kitchen into outbuilding; construction of 2m high fence & gate to enclose external storage area; insertion of door in lieu of window to side elevation of main building	Approved 7 th November 2019
P2020/0685	Construction of new agricultural building for the storage of machinery	Approved 14 th September 2020
P2020/0841	Change of use of vacant ground for the siting of a mobile catering trailer (converted vintage horsebox) (Use Class A3) to serve passing tourists hot and cold drinks and cold pre-packaged food	Refused 10 th December 2020
P2021/0415	Construction of temporary (until January 2022) semi-	Withdrawn 8 th June 2021

	<i>enclosed external seating area</i>	
<i>P2021/0574</i>	<i>Detached building for use as additional indoor seating in association with Sgwd Gwladys Lodge</i>	<i>Approved 5th August 2021</i>
<i>P2022/0121</i>	<i>Replacement agricultural building for housing of livestock, plus storage of feed and machinery</i>	<i>Approved 21st October 2022</i>

Proposal

- 3.1 The proposal seeks full planning permission for the proposed development of Waterfall Country Pontneddfechan Visitor Infrastructure Scheme to include retail shop, welfare facilities, tourist accommodation, ancillary plant room, car parking facilities, demolition of outbuildings adjoining Sgwd Gwladys and existing toilet block, and creation of farm track access with associated infrastructure works.
- 3.2 A new vehicle entrance is proposed from Pontneathvaughan Road leading to the new car park for visitors. The new entrance runs in close proximity to Sgwd Gwladys, and can be entered and exited in a safe manner by vehicles as evidenced by the vehicle tracking provided by Jubb.
- 3.3 The new car park will provide 159 spaces in total consisting of:
- 126 standard parking spaces (Of which 13 will be electric vehicle bays);
 - 12 motorcycle spaces;
 - 10 accessible parking spaces;
 - 10 designated larger parking spaces; and
 - 1 coach parking space.
- 3.4 The existing toilet block and parking spaces at High Street will be replaced with a designated emergency vehicle bay that will aid emergency services when attempting to help those who get into difficulty at the Waterfall Trails.
- 3.5 Highway improvements will take place along the road and pavement at the junction of Pontneathvaughan Road and High Street. Furthermore, a pavement will be provided to the south of the B4242 that will link the car park to the new crossing point at the key pedestrian entrance.
- 3.6 To the west of the proposed car park, a new field gate and junction is proposed, which will create a convenient new access into the adjacent agricultural land for the landowner. This access will consist of a stone track.
- 3.7 The community shop is intended to welcome pedestrians into the central courtyard. The building itself contains an open plan floor shop, storage room, coffee kiosk and staff accessible WC.

- 3.8 The welfare building contains a warden's office that will provide a contact/information point for those visiting the area. A waiting area, along with 7 WC's and an external dog/bike/boot wash down zone are also proposed. The proposed location of the welfare building allows it to be a destination that most visitors will pass entering/exiting the car park.
- 3.9 The accommodation block intends to provide a similar offering to Sgwd Gwladys. The accommodation targets couples/families, providing 8 no. self-contained bedrooms all with en-suites, along with a drying room for guests and reception area. It is a two-storey building, with 3 no. rooms on the ground floor and 5 no. rooms on the second floor. A lift is provided which can be used by guests.
- 3.10 To facilitate this development, the outbuildings adjoining Sgwd Gwladys will be demolished. Their ecological potential has been considered as part of the submitted Preliminary Ecological Assessment.
- 3.11 The proposals focus upon visitor activity and target a broad strategy for tourism and regeneration not only in Pontneddfechan, but across the Waterfall Country. The scheme contributes towards the Waterfall Country strategy that is an on-going collaboration between several authorities which looks at visitor management and environmental/socio-economic regeneration.
- 3.12 The development aims to take into consideration the historic and environmental value of the area and improve the experience of visitors to the area, and creating a place that the local community is proud of.
- 3.13 The applicant has consulted with the Neath Port Talbot Leisure Services Team and is suggesting the following maximum opening times for the car park, toilet block and shop:

Car Park – Maximum opening times

	Weekdays	Saturday	Sunday
Summer	7am – 11pm	7am – 11pm	7am – 10pm
Winter	7am - 11pm	7am - 11pm	7am – 10pm

Toilets - Maximum opening times

	Weekdays	Saturday	Sunday
Summer	7am – 11pm	7am – 11pm	7am – 10pm
Winter	7am – 5pm	7am – 5pm	7am – 5pm

Shop - Maximum opening times

	Weekdays	Saturday	Sunday
Summer	7am – 10pm	7am – 10pm	7am – 10pm
Winter	7am – 10pm	7am – 10pm	7am – 10pm

- 3.14 Whether the end tenant decides to open the facilities to this extent has yet to be established but the above hours offer maximum. The Summer season is defined as Good Friday or 1st April (whichever is earliest) to 30th September, whilst the Winter season is defined as October 1st to Good Friday or 1st April (whichever is earliest).
- 3.15 In terms of landscaping, the proposal attempts to connect the Elidir Trail entrance with the proposed community/visitor facilities and car park, whilst preserving existing landscape features and wildlife corridors. Existing vegetation and ecological features will be retained where possible, plant species will be used that are suitable for the area and an attempt will be made to integrate the car park into the wider surroundings in a sensitive manner.
- 3.16 The applicant has embraced the introduction of green infrastructure principles into this project as evidenced in the submitted detail. A joined-up approach between different disciplines including ecology, landscaping and drainage has been adopted. This has manifested itself in the incorporation of a planting scheme and ecological enhancement proposals.
- 3.17 In terms of materials, they will be carefully considered in order to help integrate the development into the wider surroundings. Sustainable, natural and locally sourced materials will be used where possible. The palette of materials will reflect the features of the surrounding environment, with different types of timber proposed, and a green roof will be incorporated into the development to enhance its biodiversity credentials.
- 3.18 In light of the above, the following material finishes are proposed:
- External walls – treated vertical timber cladding, vertical timber cladding, sinusoidal metal roofing system.
 - Roof – Sinusoidal metal roofing system
 - Rooflight – PPC metal unit
 - Windows – PPC timber/aluminium composite window, double glazed PPC aluminium curtain walling system, PPC timber/aluminium composite sliding serving window
 - Doors – PPC aluminium double glazed PPC door, flush panel door, sliding timber `bam` door, PPC metal grillage door.

- Rainwater goods – PPC aluminium flush jointed half round gutter and round downpipe, galvanised steel flush jointed half round gutter and round downpipe
- Bench – Timber
- Security screen – Vertical timber

Design

- 3.19 This section addresses the five objectives of good design which include access, character, environmental sustainability, movement and community safety. These are expanded upon further in the Design and Access Statement produced by Hiraeth Architecture.

Access

- 3.20 A new vehicular entrance road will be provided from the Pontneathvaughan Road offering access to the new car park and coach drop-off lay-by at the southern end of the application site. It will also enable access to the bin store for refuse vehicles. To the west of this main access road, a new field gate and junction which will provide access into the agricultural land adjacent for the landowner. This is set back from the B4242 to allow farm vehicles to pull off the main road to open the gate which will result in minimal disruption to the flow of traffic. The road and pavement at the junction of Pontneathvaughan Road and High Street will be amended resulting in enhanced pedestrian safety and movement. A continuous pavement is proposed on the southern side of Pontneathvaughan Road that will run from the new entrance road to the car park, all the way to the proposed new crossing point at the key pedestrian point leading to the waterfalls.

Character

- 3.21 The distinctive character of Pontneddfechan has significantly shaped the proposals. The intention is to respect existing buildings within the village, whilst providing a development that integrates into the neighbouring surroundings. Proposed buildings have been arranged to form a central courtyard which replicates a farmstead typology, and key routes/views have been created to draw the attention of visitors to the Angel Inn and Waterfall Trails. Moreover, the inspiration from traditional agricultural forms has continued with the internal layout of the buildings and the curated environments.

Environmental Sustainability

- 3.22 The new community/visitor facilities will be constructed to modern and up to date building regulations standards to ensure that it is as energy efficient as possible, adopting a fabric first approach to construction. The utilisation of locally sourced materials will contribute towards the reduction in the carbon footprint of the entire proposal. The principles of the development's sustainability goals have also

been associated with embodied carbon, renewable technologies, materials, and health and wellbeing.

Movement

- 3.23 A key aspect of any development is for the site to be accessed by numerous types of transport. Throughout this document, it has been emphasised that the site is well situated for public transport and active travel needs which permit access to some nearby facilities and settlements, and wider areas of NPTCBC. The site is positioned in a highly sustainable location, with bus stops in close proximity to the site. The closest train stations are located in Neath and Aberdare respectively. To the south of the site is National Cycle Route 46, that runs from Neath all the way to Bromsgrove. According to the Active Travel Network Map, there is a proposed walking and cycle route that will run from the site to Cefn Rhigos, that will link up to a future cycling route.

Community Safety

- 3.24 The community/visitor facilities will benefit from a good level of natural surveillance being within public view of those parking in the new car park and those walking around the village of Pontneddfechan. As part of the landscaping scheme, a new low wall and fencing are to be provided along the existing road edge to improve safety, signposting visitors towards the safer crossing point opposite The Angel.

Pre-Application Consultation

- 3.25 In accordance with Part 1A of the 'Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedures) (Wales) (Amended) Order 2016' (DMPO 2016), all major developments are required to be subject of statutory pre-application consultation, prior to the Planning Application being validated by the Local Planning Authority.
- 3.26 A comprehensive summary of the pre-application consultation is included within the accompanying pre-application consultation report, following responses received by statutory/specialist consultees as well as local councillors, community groups and residents.
- 3.27 A formal pre-application consultation took place which concluded on 8th August 2024, with site notices displayed, letters sent to statutory, other and community consultees, along with adjoining residents. Further information concerning the pre-application process and the responses gathered can be found in the submitted PAC Report.
- 3.28 Some community consultation had already occurred prior to this, with a survey and drop-in sessions taking place to gather feedback

on the early-stage proposals. Further details about the consultation undertaken can be found in page 36 of the Design and Access Statement.

Planning Policy Context

Introduction

- 4.1 The planning policy framework for the determination of this application is provided by the content and scope of national planning guidance, together with the adopted Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council Local Development Plan. National Planning Policy is largely contained within Planning Policy Wales (PPW) – 12th Edition, published by the Welsh Assembly Government in February 2024. PPW is supplemented by 19 Technical Advice Notes (TANs), the relevant TANs will also be discussed within this chapter.
- 4.2 Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires that planning applications be determined in accordance with the Development Plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. The Development Plan for the purposes of this Planning Application comprises the following:
- National Development Framework: Future Wales – The National Plan 2040 (February, 2021);
 - Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council Local Development Plan (January, 2016)
- 4.3 In addition to the Development Plan, the Planning Application has been informed by policy and guidance set out in the following:
- Planning Policy Wales Edition 12 (February, 2024), informed by The Well-Being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, and supplemented by Technical Advice Notes; and
 - Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council Supplementary Planning Guidance

National Level

The Well-Being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015

- 4.4 The Well-Being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 (which came into force on 1st April 2016) requires “*public bodies to do things in pursuit of the economic, social, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales in a way that accords with the sustainable development principle*”. The Act sets out seven ‘well-being’ goals as follows:
- A prosperous Wales: An innovative, productive and low carbon society which recognises the limits of the global environment and therefore uses resources efficiently and proportionately (including acting on climate change); and which develops a skilled and well-educated population in an economy which generates wealth and provides employment opportunities, allowing people to take advantage of the wealth generated through securing decent work.
 - A resilient Wales: A nation which maintains and enhances a

biodiverse natural environment with healthy functioning ecosystems that support social, economic and ecological resilience and the capacity to adapt to change (for example climate change).

- A healthier Wales: A society in which people's physical and mental well-being is maximised and in which choices and behaviours that benefit future health are understood.
- A more equal Wales: A society that enables people to fulfil their potential no matter what their background or circumstances (including their socio-economic background and circumstances).
- A Wales of cohesive communities: Attractive, viable, safe and well-connected communities.
- A Wales of vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language: A society that promotes and protects culture, heritage and the Welsh language, and which encourages people to participate in the arts, and sports and recreation.
- A globally responsive Wales: A nation which, when doing anything to improve the economic, social, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales, takes account of whether doing such a thing may make a positive contribution to global wellbeing.

- 4.5 Within the Act, sustainable development is defined as follows: *"the process of improving the economic, social, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales by taking action, in accordance with the sustainable development principle, aimed at achieving the well-being goals"*. The Act sets out that when making decisions, public bodies need to take into account the impact they could have on people living in Wales in the future and must apply the sustainable development principle in all decisions.

National Development Framework: Future Wales – The National Plan 2040

- 4.6 The National Development Framework: Future Wales – the National Plan 2040 was published on 24th February 2021. 'Future Wales' sets out the Welsh Government's strategy for addressing key national priorities through the planning system, including sustaining and developing a vibrant economy; achieving decarbonisation and climate-resilience; developing strong ecosystems; and improving the health and well-being of our communities. As stated above, the National Development Framework has Development Plan status.
- 4.7 Future Wales sets out its overarching ambitions based on the national planning principles and national sustainable placemaking outcomes set out in Planning Policy Wales by means of 11 Outcomes.

As set out on Page 52 of Future Wales, the 11 Outcomes are collectively a statement of where the Welsh Government aspire Wales to be in 20 years' time, as follows:

A Wales where people live:

- 1. ...and work in connected, inclusive and healthy places*
- 2. ...in vibrant rural places with access to homes, jobs and services*
- 3. ...in distinctive regions that tackle health and socio-economic inequality through sustainable growth*
- 4. ...in places with a thriving Welsh Language*
- 5. ...and work in towns and cities which are a focus and springboard for sustainable growth*
- 6. ...in places where prosperity, innovation and culture are promoted*
- 7. ...in places where travel is sustainable*
- 8. ...in places with world-class digital infrastructure*
- 9. ...in places that sustainably manage their natural resources and reduce pollution*
- 10. ...in places with biodiverse, resilient and connected ecosystems*
- 11. ...in places which are decarbonised and climate-resilient*

- 4.8 The Welsh Government's strategic growth strategy is set out in Policy 1 of Future Wales as follows:

Policy 1 – Where Wales will Grow

The Welsh Government supports sustainable growth in all parts of Wales. In three National Growth Areas there will be growth in employment and housing opportunities and investment in infrastructure. The National Growth Areas are:

- Cardiff, Newport and the Valleys*
- Swansea Bay and Llanelli*
- Wrexham and Deeside*

- 4.9 It is identified at Page 76 that the strategic focus of Future Wales on urban growth requires *"an increased emphasis on biodiversity enhancement (net benefit) in order to ensure that growth is sustainable"* (page 76).

- 4.10 In addition, the associated importance of green infrastructure is highlighted: *"As the population of Wales becomes increasingly urban, the opportunity to optimise well-being benefits from green infrastructure will be greatest in and around these areas. Innovative use of nature-based solutions and integrating green infrastructure in and around urban areas can help restore natural features and processes into cities and landscapes. Providing locally accessible, high quality green spaces and corridors helps to maintain and enhance the strategic functioning of our natural resources and ecological networks and address physical and mental well-being"* (page 78).

- 4.11 Policy 9 of Future Wales is of key relevance in regard to green infrastructure and biodiversity enhancement, which states the following:
Policy 9 – Resilient Ecological Networks and Green Infrastructure
To ensure the enhancement of biodiversity, the resilience of ecosystems and the provision of green infrastructure, the Welsh Government will work with key partners to:
- *identify areas which should be safeguarded and created as ecological networks for their importance for adaptation to climate change, for habitat protection, restoration or creation,*
 - *to protect species, or which provide key ecosystems services, to ensure they are not unduly compromised by future development; and*
 - *identify opportunities where existing and potential green infrastructure could be maximised as part of placemaking, requiring the use of nature-based solutions as a key mechanism for securing sustainable growth, ecological connectivity, social equality and well-being.*
- 4.12 Future Wales identifies that transport in Wales is currently dominated by the car and that *“our reliance on travelling by car is limiting the opportunity for physical activity and social contact to be built into people’s everyday lives and is exacerbating air and noise pollution, particularly along major routes and at busy destinations...This has an adverse impact on people’s health and well-being, contributing to life-limiting illnesses associated with physical inactivity, loneliness and isolation”* (page 85).
- 4.13 The importance of the implementation of policies which require development to be directed towards sustainable locations and designed to make it possible for everyone to make sustainable and healthy travel choices is highlighted in Future Wales, and it is stated that planning authorities will be required *“to refuse planning permission for car-dependent developments which would otherwise encourage car use and undermine sustainable travel”* (page 85).
- 4.14 Policy 28 (National Growth Areas - Swansea Bay and Llanelli) of Future Wales is also of relevance, as it states that Swansea Bay and Llanelli will be the main focus for growth and investment in the South West region. This national growth area is considered as the hub for economic and housing growth.

Planning Policy Wales (Edition 12)

- 4.15 Planning Policy Wales (PPW) sets out land use planning policies of the Welsh Government which is supplemented by a series of Technical Advice Notes (TANs), Welsh Government Circulars and policy clarification letters, which together with PPW provide the national

planning policy framework for Wales.

- 4.16 Its primary objective is to ensure that the planning system contributes towards the delivery of sustainable development and improves the social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales as required by the Planning (Wales) Act 2015, the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and other key legislation.
- 4.17 Sustainable Development is defined at Page 7 of PPW as follows: *"the process of improving the economic, social, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales by taking action, in accordance with the sustainable development principle, aimed at achieving the well-being goals"*.
- 4.18 Paragraph 1.18 sets out that *"Legislation secures a presumption in favour of sustainable development in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise to ensure that social, economic, cultural and environmental issues are balanced and integrated"*.
- 4.19 The significance of good design for development proposals is highlighted in Paragraph 3.3 of PPW where it is noted *"Good design is fundamental to creating sustainable places where people want to live, work and socialise. Design is not just about the architecture of a building but the relationship between all elements of the natural and built environment and between people and places. To achieve sustainable development, design must go beyond aesthetics and include the social, economic, environmental, cultural aspects of the development, including how space is used, how buildings and the public realm support this use, as well as its construction, operation, management, and its relationship with the surrounding area"*.
- 4.20 Paragraph 3.6 notes that development proposals should allow inclusivity and accessibility for everybody. It states *"This includes making provision to meet the needs of people with sensory, memory, learning and mobility impairments, older people and people with young children. There will often be wider benefits to be gained through the sensitive consideration of such provision, for example, whilst the presence of visual cues will be invaluable in assisting those with hearing loss to engage in a noisy environment, a navigable environment will benefit all. Good design can also encourage people to meet and interact with each other, helping to address issues surrounding loneliness. Good design must also involve the provision of measures that help to reduce the inequality of access to essential services, education and employment experienced by people without*

access to a car. Design measures and features should enable easy access to services by walking, cycling and public transport."

- 4.21 Design is not only about the architecture of a structure but the relationship amongst every facet of the natural and built environment and between people and places. Furthermore, good design encourages environmental sustainability and contributes towards meeting well-being targets. Paragraph 3.7 states: *"Developments should seek to maximise energy efficiency and the efficient use of other resources (including land), maximise sustainable movement, minimise the use of non-renewable resources, encourage decarbonisation and prevent the generation of waste and pollution. An integrated and flexible approach to design, including early decisions regarding location"*.
- 4.22 Paragraph 3.8 discusses good design within an environmental context. It *"can help to ensure high environmental quality. Landscape and green infrastructure considerations are an integral part of the design process. Integrating green infrastructure is not limited to focusing on landscape and ecology, rather, consideration should be given to all features of the natural environment and how these function together to contribute toward the quality of places. This embraces the principles of 'ecosystems services' and sustainable management of natural resources where multiple benefits solution become an integral part of good design. In a similar manner, addressing environmental risks can make a positive contribution to environmental protection and improvement, addressing land contamination, instability and flood risk and providing for biodiversity, climate protection, improved air quality, soundscape and water resources benefits"*.
- 4.23 Paragraph 3.9 focuses on how the special characteristics of an area should be fundamental for development design: *"The layout, form, scale and visual appearance of a proposed development and its relationship to its surroundings are important planning considerations. A clear rationale behind the design decisions made, based on site and context analysis, a strong vision, performance requirements and design principles, should be sought throughout the development process and expressed, when appropriate, in a design and access statement"*.
- 4.24 Paragraph 3.12 states that *"Good design is about avoiding the creation of car-based developments. It contributes to minimising the need to travel and reliance on the car, whilst maximising opportunities for people to make sustainable and healthy travel choices for their daily journeys"*.

- 4.25 Paragraph 3.50 notes *"A broad balance between housing, community facilities, services and employment opportunities in both urban and rural areas should be promoted to minimise the need for long distance commuting. Planning authorities should adopt policies to locate major generators of travel demand, such as housing, employment, retailing, leisure and recreation, and community facilities (including libraries, schools, doctor's surgeries and hospitals), within existing urban areas or areas which are, or can be, easily reached by walking or cycling, and are well served by public transport"*. Locating development where there are existing facilities and amenities is a key consideration of any proposal.
- 4.26 Paragraph 3.55 concerns brownfield sites, stating that *"Previously developed (also referred to as brownfield) land (see definition overleaf) should, wherever possible, be used in preference to greenfield sites where it is suitable for development. In settlements, such land should generally be considered suitable for appropriate development where its re-use will promote sustainability principles and any constraints can be overcome."*
- 4.27 Paragraph 4.1.10 highlights that any development should focus on sustainable travel and reduce the reliance on cars, with a particular emphasis on short journeys as these are most frequently made by individuals. *"The planning system has a key role to play in reducing the need to travel, particularly by private car, and supporting sustainable transport, by facilitating developments which:*
- are sited in the right locations where they can be easily accessed by sustainable modes of travel and without the need for a car;*
 - are designed in a way which integrates them with existing land uses and neighbourhoods; and*
 - make it possible for all short journeys within and beyond the development to be easily made by walking and cycling."*
- 4.28 Paragraph 4.1.11 supports the above information, by encouraging development of active travel and sustainable transport infrastructure and services. It notes that *"proposals must seek to maximise accessibility by walking, cycling and public transport, by prioritising the provision of appropriate on-site infrastructure and, where necessary, mitigating transport impacts through the provision of off-site measures, such as the development of active travel routes, bus priority infrastructure and financial support for public transport services."*
- 4.29 In Paragraph 4.1.13, the sustainable transport hierarchy is considered. It states that *"The sustainable transport hierarchy should be used to reduce the need to travel, prevent car-dependent developments in*

unsustainable locations, and support the delivery of schemes located, designed and supported by infrastructure which prioritises access and movement by active and sustainable transport".

- 4.30 Paragraph 4.1.36 states that *"The availability of public transport is an important part of ensuring a place is sustainable. It enables people to undertake medium and long journeys without being dependent on having access to a car".*
- 4.31 In Paragraph 4.1.51, the need for car parking is considered. It notes that *"A design-led approach to the provision of car parking should be taken, which ensures an appropriate level of car parking is integrated in a way which does not dominate the development. Parking provision should be informed by the local context, including public transport accessibility, urban design principles and the objective of reducing reliance on the private car and supporting a modal shift to walking, cycling and public transport".*
- 4.32 Paragraph 4.4.1 states *"Community facilities perform various functions which cover a broad range of activities and services that can be delivered by the public, private and third sectors. Community facilities contribute to a sense of place which is important to the health, well-being and amenity of local communities and their existence is often a key element in creating viable and sustainable places."*
- 4.33 Paragraph 4.5.1 notes that *"Recreational spaces are vital for our health, well-being and amenity, and can contribute to an area's green infrastructure. They provide a place for play, sport, healthy physical activity and a place to relax often in the presence of nature, and they contribute to our quality of life".*
- 4.34 In Paragraph 5.4.1 is states that *"For planning purposes the Welsh Government defines economic development as the development of land and buildings for activities that generate sustainable long term prosperity, jobs and incomes. The planning system should ensure that the growth of output and employment in Wales as a whole is not constrained by a shortage of land for economic uses".*
- 4.35 Paragraph 5.5.1 notes *"Tourism involves a wide range of activities, facilities and types of development and is vital to economic prosperity and job creation in many parts of Wales. Tourism can be a catalyst for regeneration, improvement of the built environment and environmental protection."*

- 4.36 Paragraph 5.5.3 of Planning Policy Wales states that *"In rural areas, tourism-related development is an essential element in providing for a healthy and diverse economy. In addition to more traditional forms of rural tourism, planning authorities should plan positively for active, green and cultural tourism where they are appropriate. Development should be sympathetic in nature and scale to the local environment"*.
- 4.37 A proactive approach towards green infrastructure has been adopted within PPW. It "plays a fundamental role in shaping places and our sense of well-being, and is intrinsic to the quality of the spaces we live, work and play in. The planning system must maximise its contribution to the protection and provision of green infrastructure assets and networks as part of meeting society's wider social and economic objectives and the needs of local communities".
- 4.38 Paragraph 6.2.11 echoes the above, noting that *"The quality of the built environment should be enhanced by integrating green infrastructure into development through appropriate site selection and use of creative design. With careful planning and design, informed by an appropriate level of assessment, green infrastructure can embed the benefits of biodiversity and ecosystem services into new development and places, help to overcome the potential for conflicting objectives, and contribute to health and well-being outcomes"*.
- 4.39 In Paragraph 6.4.1 it states *"Biodiversity underpins the structure and functioning of ecosystems. It is the diversity of living organisms whether at the genetic, species, habitat or ecosystem level"*.

Technical Advice Notes

- 4.40 The following Technical Advice Notes (TANS) are of relevance to the development proposal.
- Technical Advice Note 5: Nature Conservation and Planning;
 - Technical Advice Note 12: Design;
 - Technical Advice Note 13: Tourism;
 - Technical Advice Note 15: Development and Flood Risk;
 - Technical Advice Note 16: Sport, Recreation and Open Space;
 - Technical Advice Note 18: Transport; and
 - Technical Advice Note 23: Economic Development.

Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council Local Development Plan

- 4.41 The Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council Local Development Plan (LDP) was adopted in January 2016 and is the prevailing

development plan for the County. The application site lies outside the settlement boundary relating Pontneddfechan. The following policies are applicable to the application site from the proposals map:

- Policy SP6 – Valleys Strategy Area; and
- Policy M1 – Safeguarded Coal Resource

4.42 The following LDP policies are considered relevant in the context of the proposed development:

Policy Reference	Relating To...
Policy SP1	Climate Change
Policy SP2	Health
Policy SP3	Sustainable Communities
Policy SC1	Settlement Limits
Policy SP4	Infrastructure
Policy I1	Infrastructure Requirements
Policy SP6	Valleys Strategy Area
Policy SP11	Employment Growth
Policy SP13	Tourism
Policy TO1	Tourism Development in the Countryside
Policy SP15	Biodiversity and Geodiversity
Policy EN7	Important Natural Features
Policy M1	Development in Mineral Safeguarding Areas
Policy RE2	Renewable and Low Carbon Energy in New Development
Policy W3	Waste Management in New Development
Policy SP20	Transport Network
Policy TR2	Design and Access of New Development
Policy SP21	Built Environment and Historic Heritage
Policy BE1	Design

Supplementary Planning Guidance

4.43 The following Supplementary Planning Guidance are considered relevant to the proposal:

- Biodiversity and Geodiversity
- Renewable and Low Carbon Energy
- Parking Standards
- Design

Appraisal

Overview

- 5.1 As stated above, Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires that planning applications be determined in accordance with the Development Plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. This section of the statement aims to identify the main issues of relevance to the determination of the planning application, and assess the scheme against the Development Plan.
- 5.2 The key material considerations of relevance in the determination of the application are as follows:
- Principle of Development;
 - Impact on Visual and Residential Amenity;
 - Access and Highway Considerations; and,
 - Other Material Considerations.

Principle of Development

- 5.3 The proposed development consists of a series of works including:
- Dedicated car parking including EV charging, and accessible, coach and minibuss space provision;
 - Creation of public squares within the centre of Pontneddfechan which will create a sense of arrival into the village and a gateway for visitors to the waterfalls;
 - Construction of warden's office, a community shop and accommodation block;
 - Additional public WC's as there is currently inadequate provision in the village; and
 - Integrated sustainable drainage schemes, ecology and arboricultural enhancement works, and highways and traffic calming improvements.
- 5.4 In considering the principle of development, the key LDP policies to consider are policies SP13 (Tourism), TO1 (Tourism Development in the Countryside) SP20 (Transport Network), TR2 (Design and Access of New Development), SP21 (Built Environment and Historic Heritage) and BE1 (Design) which are noted in the Neath Port Talbot Local Development Plan that was adopted by the Council in January 2016.
- 5.5 The application does not lie within the settlement limits. Having said this, the proposal complies with Policy SC1 (Settlement Limits) as development outside limits is permitted for sustainable tourism proposals that are located in a countryside location.

- 5.6 The scheme forms part of the vision for the Waterfall Country which covers several Local Authorities, Natural Resources Wales, the National Trust and Community Councils. It aims to address several issues currently associated with the village of Pontneddfechan including traffic and parking problems, lack of visitor facilities and the quality of life of residents.
- 5.7 The proposal itself has been discussed thoroughly in Section 3 of this document, and it aims to address a number of current issues associated with the village. There are several opportunities associated with the proposal including taking advantage of the popularity of the Waterfall Trails which can aid local companies, provide improved pedestrian connectivity and movement by delivering highway improvements, reducing the existing parking problems through development of a new car park, and offer additional facilities that can be used by both visitors to the area and the local community.
- 5.8 Once focus of the scheme is to alleviate the pressure on the village due to the influx of tourists heading to the Waterfall Trails, in addition to taking advantage of the revenue generated by them that will boost the local economy. Consequently, tourism policies SP13 (Tourism) and TO1 (Tourism Development in the Countryside) are pertinent to this application. Policy SP13 advocates “*high quality, sustainable tourism development*”.
- 5.9 Policy TO1 states: *Tourism proposals outside of settlement limits will only be permitted where all of the following criteria are satisfied:*

- 1. It is demonstrated that the proposal is viable and contributes towards the quality and economic sustainability of the tourism industry;*
- 2. It is demonstrated that either the proposal requires a countryside location or it could not be accommodated within an existing settlement;*
- 3. The proposal would not have an adverse impact upon the landscape, ecology, and cultural heritage and would not adversely impact upon the social, economic, environmental or residential amenity of the area;*
- 4. The proposal does not create unacceptable levels of vehicular traffic, cause a detriment to highway safety and access can be provided by a range of transport modes.*

An assessment of the proposals against the above criteria is provided below:

1. It is demonstrated that the proposal is viable and contributes towards the quality and economic sustainability of the tourism industry

It is evident that the proposal is viable as it will provide high quality facilities that will benefit the local economy and community, all whilst

providing an improved visitor experience. The proposal represents a form of sustainable development that improves the existing infrastructure of Pontneddfechan, in addition to respecting its rural character.

2. It is demonstrated that either the proposal requires a countryside location or it could not be accommodated within an existing settlement

It is evident that this infrastructure project requires a countryside location as it needs to be in close proximity to where the Waterfall Trails begin. The site boundary adjoins Sgwd Gwladys which contains a café and accommodation which is used by visitors all year round who head to Waterfall Country.

3. The proposal would not have an adverse impact upon the landscape, ecology, and cultural heritage and would not adversely impact upon the social, economic, environmental or residential amenity of the area

Under subsequent headings, it is confirmed that there will be no impact upon ecology, landscape or cultural heritage. Furthermore, there will be no negative social, economic or environmental impact, and instead the highway and car park improvements, community/visitor facilities and improved public realms will further enhance the experience of people visiting the village.

4. The proposal does not create unacceptable levels of vehicular traffic, cause a detriment to highway safety and access can be provided by a range of transport modes.

Vehicular traffic and parking matters are discussed in depth later in this appraisal. As noted previously in this document, there are bus stops in close proximity to the site and National Cycle Route 46 lies 0.5km south of the village. The proposal is not considered to exacerbate vehicular traffic issues in the area.

- 5.10 Policy SP21 (Built Environment and Historic Heritage) states that one way of enhancing the built and historic environment is through “*encouraging high quality design standards in all development proposals*”. The proposal aims to complement the historic heritage of the village, with the Angel Inn and Pontneddfechan Bridge being listed as locally important structures. It is an opportunity to enhance the interpretation in the village in order to recognise the unique history of Pontneddfechan, and the visitor/community facilities aim to make reference to the village’s past.
- 5.11 Another pertinent consideration is Policy BE1 (Design) which advocates high quality design of proposals that take into account the existing environment to create beautiful places and spaces. This policy recognises the importance of the proposed development fitting in with the current character of the site, whilst considering its impact on

the surrounding areas. Moreover, the design should factor in accessibility for all users, create an attractive, safe place for visitors and use materials in the build that are locally sourced and match the characteristics of the area. A palette of materials has been provided on page 65 of the submitted Design and Access Statement.

5.12 It can be confirmed that the proposal aligns with Policy BE1 (Design), with all the following measures proposed as part of the development:

- The design of the buildings takes into consideration the existing context and surroundings;
- Locally sourced materials will be used during construction, and elements of hard and soft landscaping will be incorporated in order to incorporate the buildings into its immediate surroundings;
- There will be no detrimental impact on highway safety;
- Ecological enhancements are proposed as part of this application;
- Natural surveillance is encouraged, with clear entrances and exits provided; and
- Sustainable urban drainage systems will be incorporated into the proposal.

5.13 In summary, the principle of development accords with the following LDP Policies SC1 (Settlement Limits), SP6 (Valleys Strategy Area), SP13 (Tourism), TO1 (Tourism Development in the Countryside) SP20 (Transport Network), TR2 (Design and Access of New Development), SP21 (Built Environment and Historic Heritage) and BE1 (Design), in addition to the Supplementary Planning Guidance and Technical Advice Note's 13 (Tourism), 16 (Sport, Recreation and Open Space) and 23 (Economic Development).

Impact on Visual and Residential Amenity

5.14 The proposed development has been designed to have minimal impact upon visual amenity. The buildings and car park aim to respond to the immediate surroundings of the village and the natural landscape setting. The materials used in the build will also need to be appropriate for the setting to allow it to blend in with its surroundings. In terms of residential amenity, the proposal seeks to alleviate parking pressure on the local highway, by directing cars into a dedicated car park. There are very few residential dwellings in close proximity to the site, therefore there is limited impact on residential amenity. The proposal complies with Policy BE1 (Design) as careful consideration has been given to the *"siting, design, appearance, massing and scale to minimise any visual intrusion and where appropriate enhance the visual aspects of the area"*.

- 5.15 To summarise, the proposal accords with Policies TR2 (Design and Access of New Development) and BE1 (Design), in addition to the Design Supplementary Planning Guidance and Technical Advice Note 12 (Design).

Access and Highways Considerations

- 5.16 As previously mentioned, the site lies in a fairly sustainable location that can be accessed via bus. The site is approximately two miles from the Heads of the Valleys Road (A465), a trunk road that runs from Junction 43 of the M4 at Llandarcy to Bromyard in Herefordshire. There are bus services which stop in close proximity to the site, that head to Glynneath, Neath and Min Yr Awel and operate on a regular basis. In terms of train provision, both Neath and Aberdare Train Stations are approximately 20km away from the application site. Roughly 0.5km south of the site is National Cycle Route 46, with the route linking Neath and Bromsgrove and is almost 150km long.
- 5.17 Vehicular access for the development will be provided with the formalising of an existing gated access into the site. The main site access and internal layout has been designed to accommodate all likely vehicle movements, including refuse vehicles and coaches. The various swept path analysis drawings produced by Jubb illustrate this. The development will provide a total of 159 parking spaces. These will consist of:
- 126 standard parking spaces (Of which 13 will be electric vehicle bays);
 - 12 motorcycle spaces;
 - 10 accessible parking spaces;
 - 10 designated larger parking spaces; and
 - 1 coach parking space
- 5.18 Highway improvements are proposed along the road and pavement at the junction of Pontneathvaughan Road and High Street. A pavement is to be provided to the south of the B4242 that will link the car park to the new crossing point at the key pedestrian entrance which will provide improved connectivity towards the Waterfall Trails.
- 5.19 To the west of the new car park, a field gate and junction is proposed, creating a new access into the adjacent agricultural land for the landowner. This access will consist of a stone track.
- 5.20 A Transport Statement has been produced by Asbri Transport to support the application. In respect of trip generation, it is not anticipated that the proposals will lead to any new trips on the local highway network and will not result in an increased number of visitors to the area. The proposed development of the car park will lead to fewer lo-

cal issues and obstructions along Pontneathvaughan Road. Trip generation is not anticipated to rise as a result of the development, with only improvements occurring along the local highway system to aid both visitors to the area and the local community. Moreover, there are opportunities for users to reach the site via public transport and active travel that will reduce the need to travel by car and consequently lower the pressure on the local highway network.

- 5.21 As a result of the above, the proposal is considered to align with LDP Policies SP1 (Climate Change), SP20 (Transport Network), TR2 (Design and Access of New Development) and BE1 (Design), along with the Neath Port Talbot Parking SPG, and Technical Advice Note 18 (Transport). It is acceptable in traffic and transport terms, with ability to accommodate the proposal along the highway network and there won't be a negative effect on the flow of traffic utilising the local highway network.

Other Material Considerations

Impact on Flood Risk and Drainage

- 5.22 In terms of surface water drainage, along Pontneathvaughan Road the proposal is to alter existing road gully positions to accommodate the changes however the principles of stormwater drainage will remain the same. Acceptance of this strategy will be confirmed through SAB pre-application discussions. Surface water runoff for the car park and buildings is to infiltrate to the ground with an option to discharge to the adjacent watercourse at greenfield rates. Further soak-away testing will be needed before construction to confirm whether the proposed strategy is acceptable. The Ground Conditions Assessment uncovered that the infiltration rates were between 9.447E-05 and 3.70E-05 m/sec. The greenfield rate for the site has been calculated at 23.6 l/s for 1 in 1 year storm events. In terms of attenuation storage, this will be provided via permeable paving and a SuDS basin. Moreover, raingardens and filter strips are proposed adjacent to hardstanding areas to the buildings and at the side of access roads. Attenuation has factored in every storm event up to and including 100 year + 40% climate change.
- 5.23 The foul network will use an existing gravity system with the site prior to entering a private package pumping station. This will cross Pontneathvaughan Road and link to an off-site Welsh Water foul sewer. A pre-application has been conducted with Welsh Water to confirm the connection point and capacity within the existing network for the proposal.
- 5.24 In respect of the developments SuDS strategy, building roofs will drain via rainwater pipes whilst car parking areas are to drain to per-

meable paving in the car park. In terms of the road, this will fall towards undrained swales, raingardens and permeable paving that will offer interception for the first 5mm of surface water runoff and treatment, whilst hardstanding/footpath areas will only fall toward rain gardens for treatment and interception.

- 5.25 The majority of the application site lies within Zone A in the Natural Resources Wales (NRW) Development Advice Map, however the south eastern corner of the site is within Flood Zone C2. The NRW Flood Map for Planning places the south eastern portion of the site within Flood Zones 2 and 3 for rivers and seas.
- 5.26 A Flood Risk Technical Note has been produced by Jubb in support of the proposal. The primary risk of fluvial flooding in the area comes from the River Neath positioned to the eastern and southern boundary of the site. The NRW mapping indicates that most of the areas for development are located beyond the extent of the flood zone, however the southern extent is within a flood zone but no development such as buildings, roads and car parks will be placed in this area which means it is not deemed to be at risk of fluvial flooding. The Ground Conditions Assessment Report states there is a high ground water vulnerability from secondary aquifers below the site. Nevertheless, the report states that groundwater will not be a risk to the site, and the greater risk posed will come from fluvial flooding. The technical note concludes that the site is at little or no risk from fluvial or coastal/tidal flooding and therefore is appropriate for development, and the flood risk does not need to be assessed further.
- 5.27 Having considered the above, the proposal aligns with the following point of Policy BE1 (Design): *"9. Its drainage systems are designed to limit surface water run-off and flood risk and prevent pollution"*. Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems are being implemented as part of the scheme, which is advised as part of the policy under paragraph 5.5.13 of the LDP. In terms of flood risk, the risk associated with the site has been justified within the submitted Flood Risk Technical Note. As a result of this, the proposal complies with Planning Policy Wales and Technical Advice Note 15 (Development and Flood Risk).

Ecology and Biodiversity

- 5.28 A Preliminary Ecological Appraisal has been provided that considers the ecological condition of the whole site. In the area of the proposed car park, the woodland is mature and contains many preliminary roost features. Moreover, a wooded riparian corridor of the River Neath is positioned immediately adjacent to the eastern boundary. The report advises that all mature trees are retained as part of the development, and lighting should be minimal in this area. The structures contained within the site include a small shed, metal

garage and stable block which were all not considered to be of roosting potential for bats, although the outbuildings did show features of previous use by nesting swallows. There is a large area of semi-improved neutral grassland where the car park and Visitor Centre are proposed, however there is no meaningful cover provided for sheltering purposes for common reptile species.

- 5.29 In terms of biodiversity enhancement, the report advises that bird/bat boxes are integrated within the structure of the visitor centre and accommodation. Ecological enhancements have been proposed in the form of Woodstone Burgos box swift boxes and Schwegler 1SP nest box sparrow terrace, which are shown on the Ecological Enhancement Plan (Drawing Ref: 2228-DLA-DR-L-05-P03). Furthermore, there are opportunities to improve the existing habitats, with proposed plantings and meadow creation/enhancement of the retained part of the semi improved neutral grassland.
- 5.30 Having discussed with an ecologist from NPTCBC, the precise details and locations of these ecological enhancements can be conditioned to be agreed with the LPA prior to completion of the development. As no further survey work is necessary and a set of ecological enhancements have been proposed, the scheme is compliant with Policies SP15 (Biodiversity and Geodiversity) and EN7 (Important Natural Features). The proposal will protect, conserve, enhance and manage *“Important habitats, species”* as noted in Policy SP15, whereas the development won’t *“adversely affect ecologically or visually important natural features such as trees, woodlands, hedgerows / field boundaries, watercourses or ponds”* which is requested as part of Policy EN7. No trees need to be felled as part of the development, and biodiversity enhancements have been put forward to boost the ecological credentials of the development.
- 5.31 In summary, the proposal accords with LDP Policies SP15 (Biodiversity and Geodiversity) and EN7 (Important Natural Features), the Biodiversity and Geodiversity Supplementary Planning Guidance, along with Technical Advice Note 5 (Nature Conservation and Planning).

Landscaping and Green Infrastructure

- 5.32 The Hard Landscaping Plan (Drawing Ref: 2228-DLA-DR-L-01-P13) shows a variety of finishes are proposed for the development site. These include 450mm high dry-stone walls, concrete plank paving, macadam vehicular/pedestrian surfacing and timber fencing. In terms of soft landscaping, shrub planting, native buffer planting, native hedgerow and tree planting are all proposed. These measures will aim to manage the visual impact of the buildings and car park. In summary, the landscaping additions preserve and enhance biodiversity, allow sustainable urban drainage systems to be used,

enable the use of locally sourced plants/materials and enable the scheme to pursue biodiversity net gain.

- 5.33 A Green Infrastructure Statement is provided confirming that the development demonstrates net benefit for biodiversity and has followed the stepwise approach set out in Chapter 6 of Planning Policy Wales Edition 12. The statement concludes that the impact of development will be mitigated through creation of planting zones, wildflower meadows and various landscape features that enhance biodiversity, offer key ecological habitats and improve site amenity. The implementation of the landscape design will result in a network of healthy and multifunctional green spaces providing a range of environmental benefits for wildlife and people. The Landscape Management Plan sets out how a high quality landscape can be achieved and preserved as part of the development, with specific reference to proposed trees, hedges, shrub planting, and buffer and scrub planting.
- 5.34 In terms of Policy BE1 (Design), the proposal adheres to the following point *"4. It utilises materials appropriate to its surroundings and incorporates hard and soft landscaping and screening where appropriate"*. As previously mentioned, the materials proposed for the build will be locally sourced, and a substantial amount of landscaping will be incorporated into the development in order to mitigate its impact. Moreover, the green infrastructure proposals are also considered to be in accordance with the recently updated Chapter 6 of Planning Policy Wales Edition 12.

Trees

- 5.35 The submitted tree report states there are 40 trees contained within the application site (14 Category B, 15 Category C and 11 Category U). Of the 40 trees, 7 require removal with all of these being Category U trees. The four remaining Category U trees can be retained for habitat and biodiversity purposes. The report advises that Category U trees need to be removed for safety reasons prior to commencement of any demolition work.
- 5.36 In terms of recommendations within the report, protective fencing needs to be erected around the root protection zones prior to any work on site. The report advises that the trees should be inspected for any protected species, and that any form of hard surfacing construction within root protection zones is ill-advised. Moreover, tree species planting is recommended as part of the development. Detail concerning proposed tree planting can be found in the Soft Landscape Plan produced by Davies Landscapes (Drawing Ref: 2228-DLA-DR-L-02-P08). Should all recommendations be carried out from the report, the development is not deemed to have any nega-

tive effect on the vast majority of retained trees. From a policy perspective, LDP Policy EN7 (Important Natural Features) is pertinent to this material consideration. In summary, the development won't adversely affect existing trees as all efforts will be made to retain them, and no tree requiring removal are Category A, B or C. Mitigation for those trees lost will be provided as additional trees will be planted on the development site. Having considered the above, the proposal is compliant with Policy EN7.

Site Investigation

- 5.37 A Factual Exploratory Investigation produced by Earth Science Partnership assessed the geotechnical character and properties of the ground below the site and levels of contamination. In terms of geology, the exploratory holes classified the site to be underlain mostly by topsoil overlying river terrace deposits. Localised areas of made ground were also encountered. The made ground was encountered to a maximum depth of 0.8m below surface level, whilst this was almost doubled for the river terrace deposits. Limited investigation depth was managed as a result of the density of the ground and constraints on allowed volume of material to be excavated. No ground water was present within any investigation area to a depth of 1.5m, and all the wells were dry.
- 5.38 The Ground Condition Assessment Report concludes that the site is at low risk of being contaminated. No specific mitigation measures are needed for protection of human health from site soils, or in terms of danger to controlled waters. The report advises that due to the limited investigation depth, additional trial pitting to greater depths would be required to confirm the continuation of the river terrace deposits beyond the depth of the zone of influence of the foundation. Trial pits have been conducted and are anticipated to be achievable using a mechanical plant, but dense gravels and cobbles may need use of large machinery. Any cut and fill activities are likely to be limited to the proposed attenuation basin in the central part of the site. The site is classified under geotechnical category 1 – conventional structures.
- 5.39 In terms of further work, the report states that additional trial pitting is required which includes soakaway testing and deeper groundwater monitoring in the area of proposed attenuation to determine groundwater levels. Excavations should investigate the area of proposed development to focus on the ground conditions within the zone of influence and to confirm the absence of groundwater likely to impact the viability of the drainage solution. Deeper excavations or boreholes are advised to determine groundwater levels in areas where attenuation drainage is proposed. Furthermore, an updated

site-specific radon report should be produced to confirm the radon requirement for any of the proposed buildings.

- 5.40 Having considered the above, should the above measures be undertaken, the proposal will accord with LDP Policy M1 (Development in Mineral Safeguarding Areas). In respect of Policy M1, it has been evidenced throughout this document that there is a need for the proposed works at Pontneddfechan, and further justification for this can be seen in the submitted Design and Access Statement.

Energy

- 5.41 Within the submitted Design and Access Statement, an Energy and Sustainability Statement has been provided. Principles for the proposal's sustainability aspirations have been considered in terms of embodied carbon, energy usage, renewable technologies, use of materials and health and wellbeing.
- 5.42 The proposed strategy focuses on reducing construction impacts and operational energy through a number of measures including utilising locally sourced materials, implementing a fabric first approach, the use of innovative offsite construction methods.
- 5.43 As a result of implementing the above measures, the proposal accords with LDP Policy RE2 (Renewable and Low Carbon Energy in New Development) and the Renewable and Low Carbon Energy Supplementary Planning Guidance.

Welsh Language Impact

- 5.44 Although the site is not located within a Welsh Language Sensitive Area, it has been requested by the Neath Port Talbot Council that a Welsh Language Action Plan is produced as this is a public sector tourist development. Policy SP22 (Welsh Language) of the Neath Port Talbot LDP outlines that the Welsh language will be safeguarded and promoted within certain areas of the plan area which are Amman Valley, Swansea Valley, Pontardawe and the community of Crynant in the Dulais Valley. LDP Policy WL1 (Development in Language Sensitive Areas) outlines that residential development for 10 or more dwellings; and retail, commercial or industrial developments with a total floorspace of 1,000 sqm or more require a Language Action Plan to accompany any planning application.
- 5.45 The Action Plan identifies that there are several Welsh language taking place in the area including a bilingual weekly service at Bethania Chapel, a weekly Welsh discussion group for adults, and Welsh coffee mornings hosted at Glynneath Library. In terms of measures to promote and enhance the Welsh Language as part of the development, bilingual signage and interpretation will be provided across the site

and there may be scope for staff to receive Welsh language lessons. As a result of the above, it is considered that appropriate measures have been put in place to protect, promote and enhance the Welsh Language in Glynneath.

Archaeology

- 5.46 An Historic Environment Desk-Based Assessment has been produced by Dyfed Archaeological Trust in respect of the application site. The assessment has identified a slight adverse impact upon several late post-medieval sites of relatively low importance. A low general archaeological potential has been recognised for the site as a whole. The potential rises for the post medieval period, but this largely concerns the specific sites studied in the report. A slight adverse impact on the general potential has been identified following development groundworks. In addition to this, a slight adverse to neutral impact has been identified for the Landmap historic landscape area of Neath Valley Bottom which is mostly as a result of the loss of agricultural land through the development.
- 5.47 In terms of mitigation for the proposed works, as a result of the significance of the identified sites and the likely state of below-ground preservation as a result of development, they are not likely to be of an importance needing preservation in site. Preservation through record of any such remains may still be desirable, but would need some archaeological mitigation. Mitigation could be undertaken in the form of archaeological monitoring during groundworks associated with the proposal which would need an archaeologist to be present on site. Consideration should be given in the event that key archaeological remains are discovered which need further mitigation, such as additional time and resources. The measures noted in the report are indicative, and any recommendations for archaeological mitigation lie with the archaeological advisors to the Local Planning Authority. From a policy perspective, the proposal intends to align with Policy SP21 (Built Environment and Historic Heritage) by safeguarding the existing historic significance of the site, and will notify the relevant parties if any further archaeological findings are made on the site.

Lighting

- 5.48 The site will be lit by vandal resistant wall mounting luminaires and decorative steel bollards as shown on the Lighting Plan (Drawing Ref: 9003-2081-00-MCP-E-DR- 9000-S0-P02). The lighting has been developed to consider the influence of artificial light on the movements of bats and other species within the area. The lighting strategy will involve the illumination of car parking spaces, entrance road and pedestrian access and egress, whilst providing ambient lighting to important design features. All luminaires will be controlled via daylight

level monitoring to prevent unnecessary operation and through time control to switch off at certain times.

Waste

- 5.49 A Waste Management Plan (Drawing Ref: 2081-04-HIR-A-DR-00450-S2-P5) has been produced to accompany the application. This sets out the waste arrangement for the proposal during the occupation phase. The intention is for the development facilities to be leased to a single or a small number of tenants. Any lease between the Council and tenant will contain the requirement to comply with the Local Authority's guidelines for larger commercial developments. In addition to this, a Site Waste Management Plan has been provided by the contractor which addresses how waste will be managed during the construction phase. In summary, it is considered that the information submitted fully complies with LDP Policy W3 (Waste Management in New Development).

Conclusion

- 6.1 This Planning Statement has been prepared on behalf of The Head of Property and Regeneration at Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council for the proposed development of Waterfall Country Pontneddfechan Visitor Infrastructure Scheme to include retail shop, welfare facilities, tourist accommodation, ancillary plant room, car parking facilities, demolition of outbuildings adjoining Sgwd Gwladys and existing toilet block, and creation of farm track access with associated infrastructure works. This proposal has been supported by Levelling Up Funding (LUF) from Welsh Government, with the aspiration of creating an attractive environment and priceless tourism opportunity that will benefit Pontneddfechan along with the wider area, making it a highly desirable destination with many economic benefits.
- 6.2 The proposed development area consists of part of the village square and an agricultural parcel of land located to the south of Pontneathvaughan Road. The site also comprises parcels of privately owned land, and some of Pontneathvaughan Road itself.
- 6.3 The key aspects of the proposal are the introduction of traffic calming measures and additional car parking spaces, improved public realm and landscaping works, and development of community and visitor focused facilities.
- 6.4 There are several opportunities associated with the proposal including taking advantage of the popularity of the Waterfall Trails which can aid local companies, provide improved pedestrian connectivity and movement by delivering highway improvements, reducing the existing parking problems through development of a new car park, and offer additional facilities that can be used by both visitors to the area and the local community.
- 6.5 This document has demonstrated that the development, as proposed, is compliant with relevant policies contained within the adopted NPTCBC LDP, in particular Policies SP13 (Tourism), TO1 (Tourism Development in the Countryside) SP20 (Transport Network), TR2 (Design and Access of New Development), SP21 (Built Environment and Historic Heritage) and BE1 (Design). In addition to this, the proposal accords with relevant Technical Advice Notes and policies noted within Future Wales and Planning Policy Wales.
- 6.6 Notwithstanding the above, a comprehensive assessment is provided in Section 5 of this statement. Separate supporting documents in respect of material considerations are also included in the application

package and highlight the proposal as acceptable in all regards.

- 6.7 As such, it is concluded that the proposal fully accords with both national and local policies. Furthermore, there are no material considerations which would prevent the planning application from being determined in accordance with the relevant planning policy framework. In this respect, it is respectfully requested that Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council consider this planning application favourably and grant planning permission for the proposed development.