

The report sets out the methodology used to carry out assessment and records the results on the following areas within the proposed site including:

- Desktop study of statutory sites, non-statutory sites and local biodiversity records data search
- Habitats review
- Species including plants, invertebrates, amphibians, reptiles, birds, bats, badger, other mammals and aquatic species where appropriate

### **Statutory Sites**

Coedydd Nedd a Mellt Special Area of Conservation (SAC) and the Dyffrynoedd Nedd a Mellt a Moel Penderyn Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) lie 40m north of the main proposal site Area 1. Area 2 (now removed) was approx 15m SE of the protected sites and Area 3 (which no longer forms part of the proposed development area) would have encroached on this area. As such would have not been supported due to potential loss of biodiversity as a result any works in this area.

### **Habitat Constraints/Opportunities**

A wooded riparian corridor of the River Neath lies immediately adjacent to the eastern boundary. It is recommended by the assessment that all mature trees are retained and accommodated into development plans. Lighting must be kept to an absolute minimum and trees should not be subject to direct lighting.

If any tree requires works and/or removal to facilitate proposed works, an independent bat-tree assessment and surveys should be conducted to fully explore the trees potential to support roosting bats and inform mitigation

### **Species Constraints/Opportunities**

The report set out limited species constraints identified on the site, with protected species not detected on the site. It was noted that there were signs of previously nesting swallows in the outbuildings and, as such, guidance on appropriate timings for demolition have been set out.

### **Ecological Assessment Conclusions**

The assessment concluded the follow key points:

- The trees along the eastern boundary of Area 1 contain mature trees with potential bat roost features. Any works to these trees should be avoided or further bat survey work will be required.
- All structures surveyed were concluded to be of negligible roosting potential for bats and as such there are no constraints to works in these areas.
- All clearance works to trees and scrub should be undertaken outside of the bird nesting season (March to August inclusive). Buildings should be not be demolished during the nesting bird season (March to August inclusive). If demolition works are required during the nesting bird season, the outbuildings should first be thoroughly inspected for active nests by a competent ecologist. If active nests are discovered, the area should be set aside and a buffer zone of 5m set up around the nest site. This will allow the young to be reared without disturbance and allowed to fledge. Once no signs of active nests are witnessed by the supervising ecologist, then demolition works will be allowed to proceed.
- There are several opportunities to enhance the habitats on site, particularly within the proposed plantings and meadow creation / enhancement of the retained areas of SING. Bird and bat boxes should be integrated into the newly constructed visitor centre.

Following this report and identification of the mature Ash tree to the North of the proposal site and series of mature trees along the eastern boundary an Arboricultural survey was commissioned.

### Arboriculture

An arboricultural impact assessment of the project site was commissioned to record information on the trees on, or within influencing distance of, the proposed development area, in accordance with BS 5837:2012. This tree survey was carried out by Nick Thomas, arboricultural consultant for Neath and Port Talbot Council, on the 19th and 27th February 2024. The results of the site survey and associated desktop searches are provided in the form of a Tree Constraints plan showing the tree locations, canopy extents, Root Protection Area and tree quality categorisation for the site. Full survey data and management recommendations in response to any existing or developing defects, hazards and opportunities are also noted. Please refer to the full report included as part of this submission.

Constraints to development presented by the existing trees are dominated by the mature Ash tree to the North of the proposed development site and the trees lining the eastern boundary along the River bank, the report notes *“The majority of the trees are located on the riverbank which has a steep and uneven gradient to the river... The trees in this area are not protected with a tree preservation order and are not within a conservation area”* and when assessed collectively noted that *“Due to the nature of the development the impact of the development on the local landscape is minimal”*.



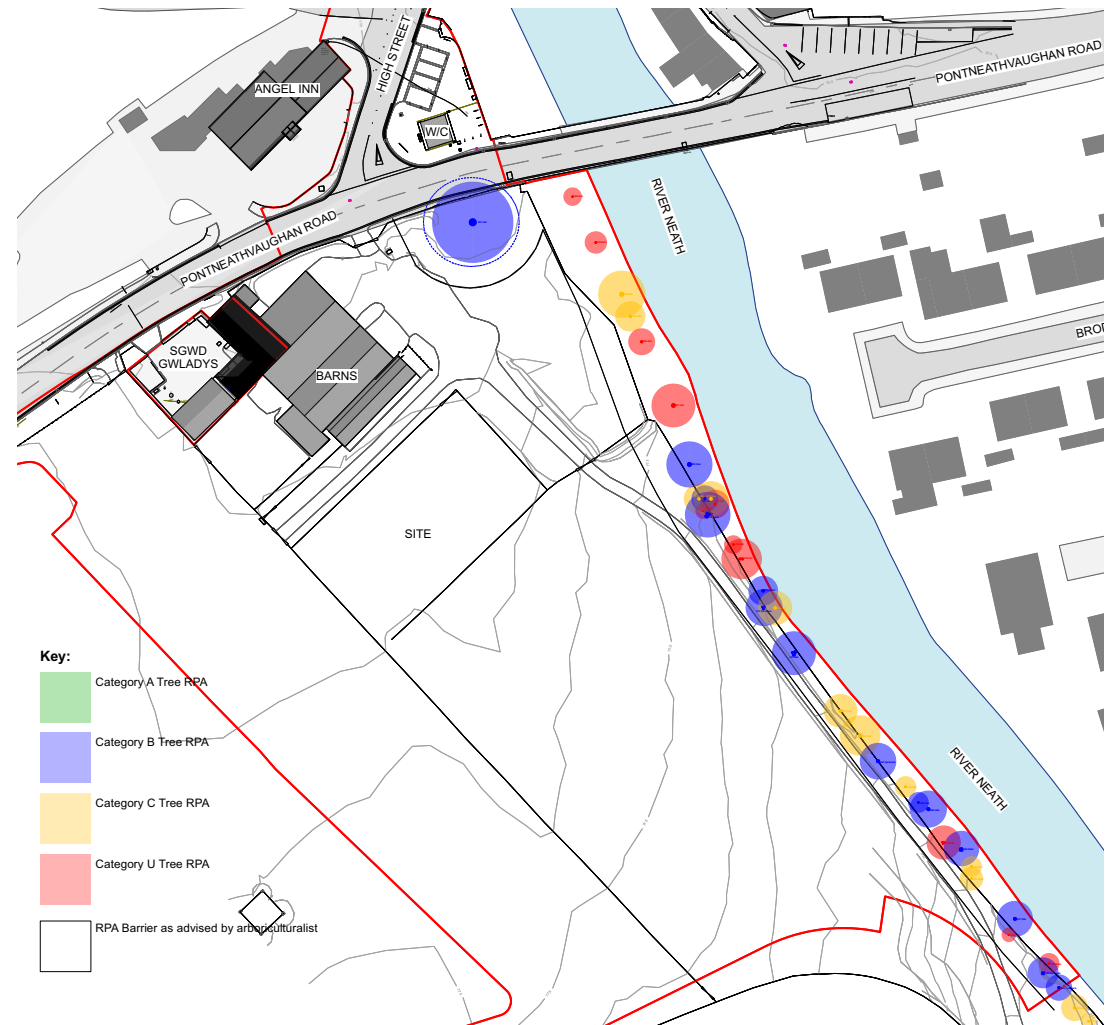
Photo above shows the existing mature Ash tree identified on site showing proximity to road side and prominent village centre location.

## Impacts on Landscape Development

The mature Ash tree identified in the prominent roadside position to the North of the proposal site creates a major constraint on the positioning of the proposed buildings but also impacts the landscape design development. To ensure both building and site development would not adversely impact the surveyed trees the Root Protection Area was identified on the site constraints plan and Nick Thomas was consulted on any areas where the proposals may cross into the RPA.

As part of the landscape proposals a new low wall and fencing have been proposed along the existing road edge to improve safety and direct visitors towards the safer crossing point opposite The Angel. Consultation with Nick Thomas concluded that building these landscape elements within the Root Protection Area of the mature Ash tree would be acceptable stating the recommendation that *“any footings are kept as shallow as possible or the wall can be constructed on a pile and beam footing and the extension of the railings will involve the excavation of individual holes which will maintain any root damage to an acceptable level. Any hard surfacing within a RPZ should be placed on a cellular confinement system and be permeable for air and water infiltration.”*

Further recommendations for tree retention, removal and potential impact from the design proposals, with the aim of keeping tree impacts to an absolute minimum and identifying opportunities to enhance, have all been noted within the report.

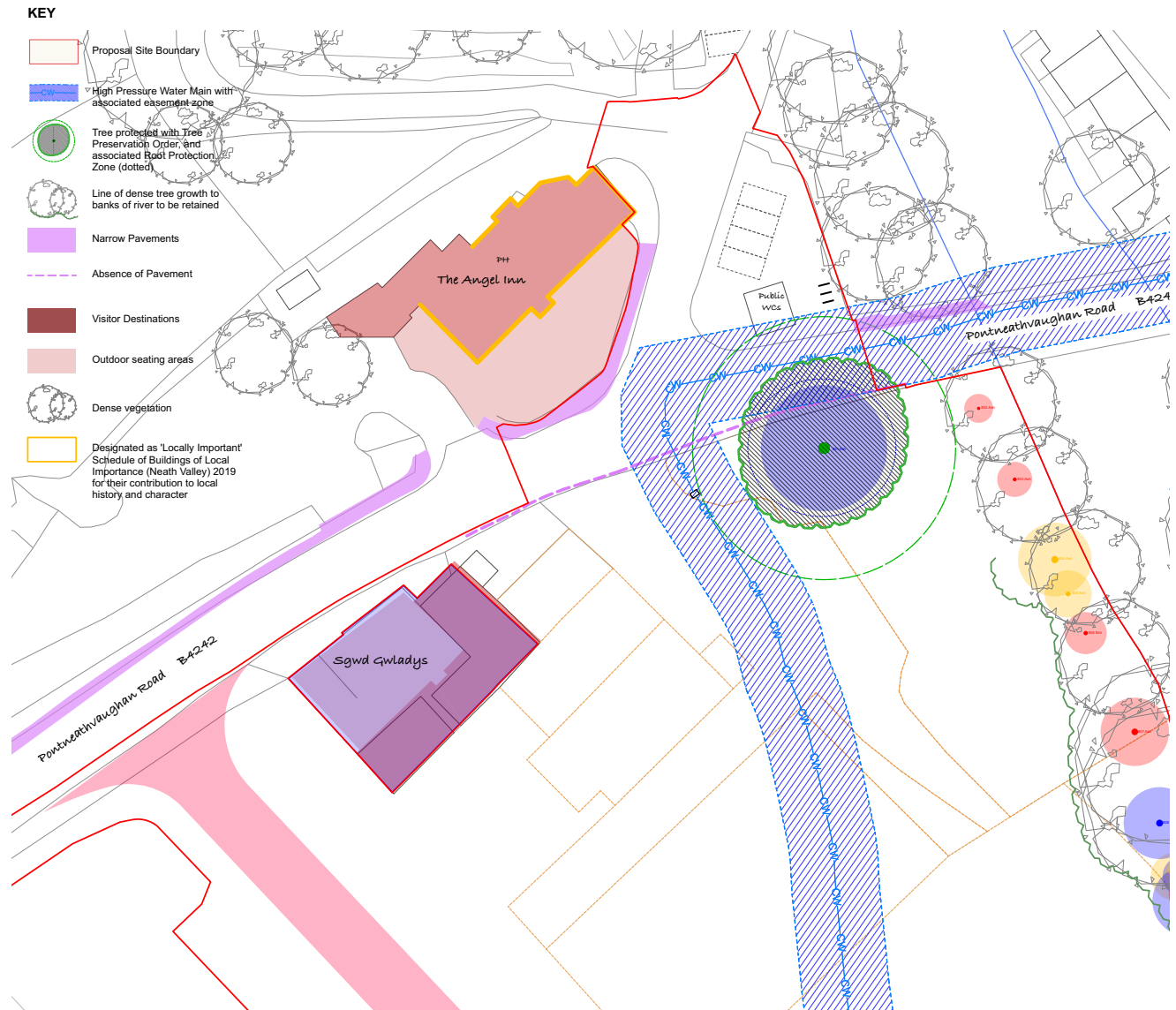


*The tree survey identified and categorised the trees across the site, which were then plotted and recorded as part of the existing site information.*

### Significant Site Constraints

Following further site investigation and surveys of the proposed development area undertaken following the LUF bid, significant site constraints were identified, this diagram shows the additional constraints specific to this area:

- A high pressure water main was identified and is drawn here to indicate the required easement zone either side of the existing pipe. No buildings or significant structures can be built on or above this easement area, the pipe splits the site along an approximately north-south axis across the whole area.
- A large Ash tree has been plotted on this diagram following an arboricultural survey of the site, alongside the existing range of trees within the proposed development area, to provide a defined route protection zone. Any proposed building work should avoid this zone indicated, where possible, to reduce the impact of the existing root system. Where this cannot be avoided construction methods and systems must be identified and agreed to mitigate the impact.



*This diagram focuses on the primary development area within the proposed site, highlighting the significant site constraints.*

## INVOLVEMENT

### Community Consultation

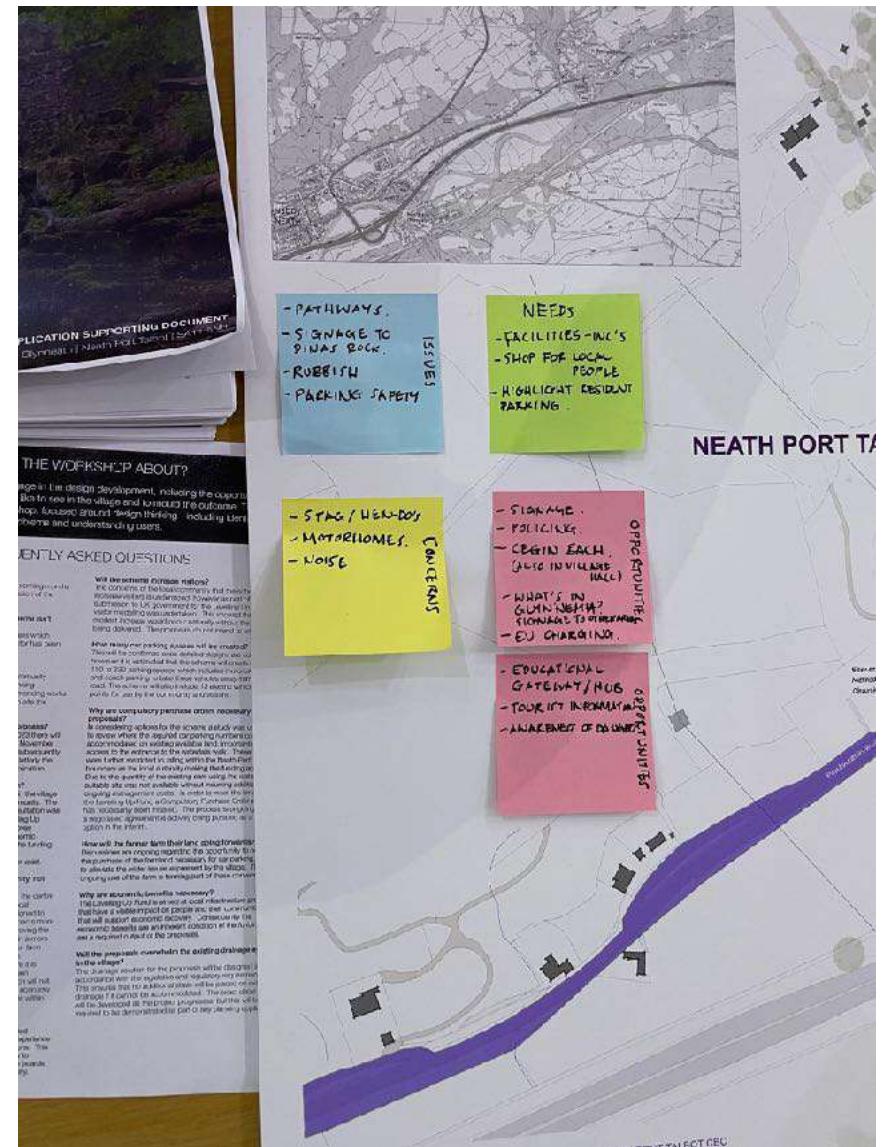
The LUF grant facilitated Community Consultation. Planning Solutions Consulting Limited and Hiraeth Architecture carried out a module of primary research and managed a series of workshops to help inform the early concept designs that had been submitted for LUF.

This primary research was based upon an online survey, which was designed by Planning Solutions Consulting and Hiraeth Architecture. The survey was promoted by Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council and ran from the 25th of September to the 13th of November 2023 and generated 157 responses. The survey was available in English and Welsh.

Alongside this, Hiraeth Architecture held 3 'drop-in' workshop sessions in the area to gain feedback on the early concept design proposals. The 3 'drop-in' sessions had a total attendance of 123, however it should be noted that some residents attended all three sessions.

These culminated in a report prepared by Hiraeth Architecture Ltd., which itemised a number of recommendations for the development of the scheme. A client statement was prepared and is available on the NPT website, to address how these recommendations have been considered and where they have been implemented, as possible.

The proposals were subsequently published as part of the Pre-application Consultation process (PAC), sharing the developed scheme publicly and allowing the opportunity for further feedback ahead of the full planning application, this consultation concluded 8th August 2024.



The workshops enabled residents to attend 'drop-in' sessions with Hiraeth Architecture and NPTCBC to discuss the constraints and opportunities.