

# Preliminary Ecological Assessment

EC2023 004

Countryside & Wildlife Team  
Neath Port Talbot CBC

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## DECLARATION

The information, advice and opinions which we have prepared and provided is true, and has been prepared and provided in accordance with the CIEEM's Code of Conduct. We confirm that the opinions expressed are our true and professional bona fide opinions.

Signed:

Lewis Badham

The following report is considered a reasonable and true representation of the ecological situation on the site assessed. The report is however just a snapshot assessment, therefore the authors are unable to guarantee that all biodiversity interest has been identified. In addition, if works are not undertaken as programmed, a re-assessment will be required. The survey information is considered applicable for one year from the date of the survey.

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report has been prepared by the Countryside and Wildlife team to assess any potential ecological impacts of the current development proposals. The Site comprises a collection of agricultural fields with associated farm outbuildings and is situated to the south of Pontneathvaughan Road and is approximately 1.57ha in area, in the village of Pontneddfechan.

Development plans within the site include the construction of a 'visitor hub' with a suite of visitor facilities, which includes the construction of a bunkhouse. A new car park is proposed with a total of 136 spaces and a further 10 spaces for mini buses. These proposals will involve the complete demolition and replacement of the present outbuilding complex.

Habitats within the site include a Standard Tree, Semi-improved Neutral Grassland and Farm Outbuildings. A riparian corridor containing broad-leaved woodland and the River Neath is situated immediately adjacent to the eastern boundary.

The Coedydd Nedd a Mellte Special Area of Conservation (SAC) and the Dyffrynoedd Nedd a Mellte a Moel Penderyn Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) are within close proximity to the site. These two statutorily protected sites lie approximately 40m north of the site.

Provided adequate mitigation measures are formulated and adopted, to avoid or minimise impacts to the identified biodiversity features of interest, it is considered on current evidence that the proposed development would not be detrimental to biodiversity within the site.

Enhancement and appropriate mitigation measures are recommended.



proposals will involve the complete demolition and replacement of the present outbuilding complex, as seen in Figure 2 below.



**Figure 2 - Site proposals**

This report was written to assess any potential ecological impacts of the current development proposals, to any protected species of fauna or flora within the site, and within the immediate local vicinity, and identifies key ecological constraints to allow significant ecological effects to be avoided or minimised wherever possible.

## 1.2 LEGISLATION AND POLICY

### 1.2.1 THE HABITAT REGULATIONS 2017 (AS AMENDED)

The Habitat Regulations protect certain sites and species. If a protected species is on site, then certain licencing requirements may be needed in order to carry out works. The eastern site boundary, namely the wooded riparian corridor, has the potential to support otter which are protected under these regulations.

## 1.2.2 ENVIRONMENT (WALES) ACT 2016

Under section 6 of the Environment (Wales) Act 2016, NPTC has a statutory duty to maintain and enhance biodiversity in the exercise of its functions.

S7 of the Environment (Wales) Act 2016 lists habitats and species that the Welsh Government consider are of key significance to sustain and improve biodiversity in Wales.

Both of these will need to be considered as part of any future proposals.

## 1.2.3 LDP POLICY EN6

This policy states:

### **Policy EN 6**

**Important Biodiversity and Geodiversity Sites Development proposals that would affect Regionally Important Geodiversity Sites (RIGS), Local Nature Reserves (LNRs), Sites of Interest for Nature Conservation (SINCs), sites meeting SINC criteria or sites supporting Local Biodiversity Action Plan (LBAP) or S42 habitats or species will only be permitted where:**

- 1. They conserve and where possible enhance the natural heritage importance of the site; or**
- 2. The development could not reasonably be located elsewhere, and the benefits of the development outweigh the natural heritage importance of the site.**

**Mitigation and/or compensation measures will need to be agreed where adverse effects are unavoidable.**

The requirements of this policy would need to be met if any plans are put through the Development Control process. NPTC usually require mitigation/compensation to be provided double the size of the habitat lost. However, with careful planning a smaller area could be sufficient provided it was higher quality than that lost.

## 1.2.4 WILDLIFE AND COUNTRYSIDE ACT 1981

Primary legislation for wildlife protection in the U.K. The legislation pertaining to wildlife and nature conservation covers three main areas: wildlife protection, including safeguarding wild birds, their nests and eggs, other animals and plants; nature conservation, countryside and National Parks; and other miscellaneous provisions.

## 1.3 SCOPE OF SURVEY

The survey comprised a visit of the site by two NPTC Ecologists to determine any ecological constraints to potential works. A desk study was also undertaken to identify any species of interest in the area. The objectives of the survey were to obtain sufficient data to:

- Identify any protected habitat and species present/likely to be present that may pose potential constraints to redevelopment of the site e.g. birds, reptiles, or mammals in and around the surrounding area.
- Assess whether any future proposals would be likely to have an impact upon those species.
- Recommend further survey work that would be required to inform the proposed scheme.
- Identify any opportunities for enhancement of the ecological value of the site.

## 2 METHODOLOGY

### 2.1 DESKTOP STUDY METHODOLOGY

Records were obtained from the South East Wales Biodiversity Records Centre (SEWBRc) within a 2Km radius from the centre of the site (LERC Reference 4). Data included protected, priority and important species and designated sites of all levels.

### 2.2 SURVEY METHOD

An Extended Phase-1 Habitat Survey was undertaken by Ecologist (Consultancy & Planning) Megan Price (BSc) and Ecologist (Planning) Lewis Badham (BSc) in clear weather conditions on 03/10/2023. The survey is based on the standard Phase-1 survey technique (JNCC, 2010) which involved identifying and mapping the principal habitat types. In addition, any actual or potential protected/priority species are identified.

### 2.3 SURVEY LIMITATIONS

No elements of the assessment were deemed to be constrained.

## 3 RESULTS

### 3.1 DESKTOP STUDY RESULTS

#### 3.1.1 STATUTORY SITES

The Coedydd Nedd a Mellte Special Area of Conservation (SAC) and the Dyffrynoedd Nedd a Mellte a Moel Penderyn Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) are within close proximity to the site. These two statutorily protected sites lie approximately 40m north

of the site. The Cwm Gwrelych and Nant Llyn Fach Streams SSSI lies approximately 600m south-east of the site.

### 3.1.2 NON-STATUTORY SITES

All watercourses in NPT are designated as Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINC); the River Neath flows alongside the eastern boundaries of the site.

### 3.1.3 LOCAL BIODIVERSITY RECORDS DATA SEARCH

Records of 585 priority species, 288 species of conservation concern and 995 species of local importance were returned from the data search.

## 3.2 HABITATS

### Outbuildings



North-eastern elevation of barn complex



North-eastern elevation of metal garage attached to barn complex



|                                                                                   |                                                                                    |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Lean-to shed attached to offsite eatery – facing south-west                       | Overview of southern-most barn – facing south-west                                 |
|  |  |
| South-eastern and north-eastern elevations of wooden stable block                 | South-eastern elevation of wooden stable block – facing north-west                 |

The outbuildings on site form a complex of interconnected units with varying functions:

A small shed with a corrugated metal roof is situated in the north of this area, leaning against the Sgwd Gwladys eatery which is situated off site. The structure is currently used as a wood store and is of breeze-block construction, with partial rendering. No door is present and the window is broken and accessible.

A metal garage is affixed to the north-west side of the barn complex. The structure is currently utilised as a gym facility. The outside is completely encased with metal sheeting and appears to be relatively new and in good condition. A small gap exists between the flashing and the adjoining off-site eatery of Sgwd Gwladys, but on closer inspection does not appear to extend further. Internal access was not possible during the current survey.

An asbestos sheet building, adjoining the gym and other parts of the complex, is situated within the centre of the overall structure. The internal structure is very open and suitable spaces for roosting are limited. The open nature of the structure results in a lack of thermal stability. Swallow nest cups were present upon the rafters.

A 'Dutch' barn is situated to the south-east of the asbestos sheet building. The structure is very open and is currently utilised to store hay. At the base, one third of the overall structure is of breezeblock construction, with the sides of the structure and roof made of sheet metal. Rafters are open and structure is not weather tight.

A stable block is situated on the south-eastern edge of the outbuilding complex. The structure is of timber construction and has a metal roof. Four stable doors are present rendering the structure open to the elements.

## Semi-improved Neutral Grassland (SING)

|                                                                                                             |                                                                                          |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                            |        |
| Overview of SING, highlighting grazing by sheep- facing west                                                | Overview of central portions of SING, currently grazed by horses – facing south          |
|                           |       |
| Highlighting immediately adjacent riparian wooded corridor to SING currently grazed by horses- facing south | Overview of lower field portions of SING, currently grazed by horses – facing south-west |

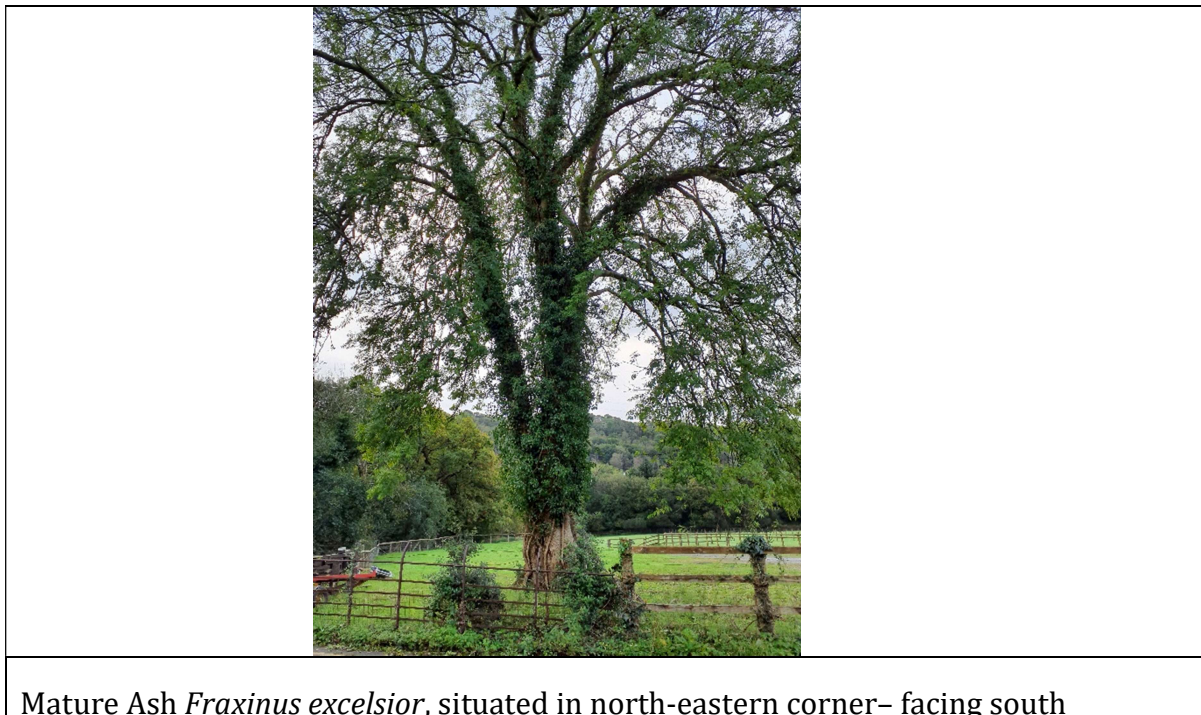
The predominant vegetated habitat within the site is SING, with a series of compartmentalised fields present across the majority of the site. The grassland is currently utilised as pastureland for horses and sheep and appears to be intensively grazed, with a sward height at the time of survey ranging between 5-10cm. Graminoids present within the sward include: Red Fescue *Festuca rubra*, Yorkshire Fog *Holcus lanatus*, Perennial Rye Grass *Lolium perenne*, Annual Meadow Grass *Poa annua* and Sweet Vernal Grass *Anthoxanthum odoratum*.

Characteristic forb species include: Creeping Buttercup *Ranunculus repens*, Meadow Buttercup *Ranunculus acris*, Creeping Cinquefoil *Potentilla reptans*, Red Clover *Trifolium pratense*, White Clover *Trifolium repens*, Ribwort Plantain *Plantago lanceolata*, Yarrow

*Achillea millefolium*, Field Speedwell *Veronica persica*, Creeping Thistle *Cirsium arvense* and Black Medick *Medicago lupulina*.

Species associated with disturbed ground, particularly around the peripheries of the grassland, include Pineappleweed *Matricaria discoidea*, Sow Thistle *Sonchus* sp., Nipplewort *Lapsana communis*, Greater Plantain *Plantago major* and Cock's Foot *Dactylis glomerata*.

### Standard Trees



A mature Ash tree is situated in the north-eastern corner of the site, immediately adjacent to the northern site boundary. The tree exhibits signs of Ash-dieback *Hymenoscyphus fraxineus*, a serious fungal disease which causes the progressive death of the afflicted specimen's branches. The main stems are covered in dense ivy which may be obscuring other Potential Roosting Features (PRFs) from view. The tree also exhibits a butt-rott feature, which may extend further up the stem interior, providing a PRF.

## Riparian Corridor

|                                                                                        |                                                                                       |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|       |     |
| <p>Highlighting the River Neath lined with mature trees along the eastern boundary</p> | <p>Overview of mature trees which line the River Neath along the eastern boundary</p> |

A series of boundary trees form a component of the adjacent River Neath riparian wooded corridor, which serves as an important highway for riparian wildlife commuting through the surrounding landscape. All these trees are of an age / size whereby PRFs are



### Phase-1 Habitat Survey

### Pontneddfechan LUF Scheme

November 2023



### Legend

PH1

- A1.1.1 - Broadleaved woodland - semi-natural
- A2.1 - Scrub - dense/continuous
- B2.2 - Neutral grassland - semi-improved
- G2 - Running water
- J3.6 - Buildings



Cyngor Castell-nedd Port Talbot  
Neath Port Talbot Council

considered likely to occur. All trees present have bat roosting potential, but were not thoroughly assessed on the day of survey.

### 3.3 SPECIES

#### 3.3.1 PLANTS

Some plant species are afforded protection by legislation, including the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended). In addition, a number of species are listed under Section 7 of the Environment (Wales) Act 2016, as species of principal importance for conservation of biological diversity in Wales.

##### Survey/assessment

Notable flowering plant records which returned from the SEWBReC data search, within 1km of the site, which are listed under Schedule 8 of the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 (WCA 1981) only included Bluebell *Hyacinthoides non-scripta*. No species listed under S7 of the Environment (Wales) Act 2016 nor the Red Data Book (RD1 & RD2) listing for the UK based on IUCN guidelines were returned within 1km. The site walkover found no evidence to suggest that species of principal importance are present within the red-line boundary.

No notable species of fern were returned from the data search for the site.

Species of moss under the Red Data Book (RD1) listing for the UK based on IUCN guidelines, within 1km of the centre of the site include: Awl-leaved Swan-neck Moss *Campylopus subulatus*, Broadleaf Grimmia *Schistidium platyphyllum*, Brunton's Dog-tooth *Cynodontium bruntonii*, Common Pocket-moss *Fissidens taxifolius*, Creeping Feather-moss *Amblystegium serpens*, Curled Hook-moss *Palustriella commutate*, Don's Thread-moss *Bryum donianum*, Dwarf Streak-moss *Rhabdoweisia fugax*, *Fontinalis antipyretica* subsp. *antipyretica*, *Heterocladium flaccidum*, *Heterocladium heteropterum*, Narrow-fruited Crisp-moss *Chionoloma tenuirostre*, Neat Crisp-moss *Tortella nitida*, Park Yoke-moss *Zygodon rupestris*, River Pocket-moss *Fissidens rivularis*, Short-leaved Pocket-moss *Fissidens incurvus*, Toothed Streak-moss *Rhabdoweisia crispate*, Transparent Fork-moss *Dichodontium pellucidum*, Wall Screw-moss *Tortula muralis*, Welsh Pocket-moss *Fissidens celticus* and Yellowish Fork-moss *Dichodontium flavescens*. It is considered possible that several species of these mosses may be present upon the trees along the riparian corridor to the east of the site.

Species of liverwort under the Red Data Book (RD1) listing for the UK based on IUCN guidelines, within 1km of the centre of the site include: Hairy Threadwort *Blepharostoma*

*trichophyllum*, Handsome Woollywort *Trichocolea tomentella*, Hutchins' Hollywort *Jubula hutchinsiae*, MacKay's Pouncewort *Marchesinia mackaii*, Mountain Notchwort *Mesoptychia collaris*, Pearl Pouncewort *Lejeunea patens*, Rock Veilwort *Metzgeria conjugata*, Western Pouncewort *Lejeunea lamacerina* and Wood-rust *Cephalozia curvifolia*. It is considered possible that several species of these liverworts may be present upon the trees along the riparian corridor to the east of the site.

No notable species of non-lichenised fungi were returned from the data search within 1km of the site. One species of lichen under the Red Data Book (RD1) listing for the UK based on IUCN guidelines, returned from the data trawl within 1km of the centre of the site, namely *Myriolecis crenulata*.

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### 3.3.2 INVERTEBRATES

Certain invertebrate species are afforded protection by legislation, including the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended). In addition, a number of species are listed under S7 of the Environment (Wales) Act (2016), as species of principal importance for conservation of biological diversity in Wales.

#### Survey/assessment

Lepidoptera (Butterflies & Moths) records within 1km of the site, those species listed under S7, RD1 and Schedule 5 (WCA5) of the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 from the data search, include: Marsh Fritillary (WCA5, S7, RD1), Argent & Sable (S7), Pearl-bordered Fritillary (WCA5, S7, RD1), Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary (S7, RD1), Forester (S7), Ghost Moth (S7), Wall (S7, RD1) and Small Heath (RD1, S7).

The vegetated habitats of the site are considered to be unsuitable to support Marsh Fritillary given the absence of the larval food plant, Devil's-bit Scabious *Succisa pratensis*, the heavily grazed nature of the site and a lack of recent records. Pearl-bordered Fritillary is considered absent, given the lack of bracken, extensive leaf litter and species of Violet, the favoured larval food plant.

Two notable Coleoptera (Beetles) records returned from the data trawl within 1km of the site and is for *Quedius auricomus* and *Platydracus fulvipes*, species listed under the Red Data Book (RD2) listing for the UK based on IUCN guidelines, both situated approximately 820m away from the site.

A single notable Diptera (True Flies) record, although historic (1968), returned within 1km of the centre of the site from the data trawl, namely *Dactylolabis transversa* (RD2).

No notable Orthoptera (Grasshoppers & Crickets), Hemipteran (True Bugs), Hymenoptera (Bees, Wasps, Ants & Sawflies) nor Odonata records (Dragonflies & Damselflies) were returned from the data search within 1km.

The vegetated habitats of the site are sure to provide forage and shelter to a wide range of common invertebrate species.

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### 3.3.3 AMPHIBIANS

The Great Crested Newt (GCN) is afforded the highest level of protective legislation of all native amphibian species. The Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) prohibits: killing, injuring, capturing and disturbance of individuals. Habitat is also protected from damage and destruction. Individuals are also prohibited from being sold and possessed. These protections extend to all life stages.

All other common species of amphibian that inhabit South Wales, namely Palmate Newt, Smooth Newt, Common Frog and Common Toad, only receive protection from law against sale and trade. Common Toad is also listed under S7 of the Environment (Wales) Act 2016 as a priority species of conservation concern.

No records for GCN were returned from the data search within 2km. No aquatic habitat suitable for breeding by GCN is present within the areas of the site. The terrestrial habitats of the site provide foraging habitat for this species; however, given the lack of local records and optimal terrestrial / aquatic habitat, it is considered highly unlikely GCN exist within the local area and unlikely that the terrestrial habitats support GCN.

The nearest records for other species of common amphibian species which returned from the data search include: Common Frog (840m away) and Common Toad (840m away).

It is considered likely that common species of amphibian are present within the site and utilise the terrestrial vegetated habitats of the site to forage and take shelter.

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### 3.3.4 REPTILES

All species of common reptile, namely Adder, Grass Snake, Slow worm and Common Lizard, are protected by UK legislation. The Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) prohibits the reckless and/or intentional killing of individuals. Protection also extends to prohibit the sale and trade of individuals.

No records for Adder nor Grass Snake were returned from the data search within 2km of the site.

Records for Common Lizard (1.7km away) and Slow worm (1.4km away) were returned from the data trawl within 2km of the site.

Overall, the grassland areas are extensive within the site but lack sufficient height, depth and overall structural diversity to provide cover for sheltering purposes for common reptile species.

The presence of aquatic habitat along the eastern boundary and potential for common amphibians to be present, increases the likelihood that Grass Snake may also be present on site occasionally whilst commuting.

Given the limited quality of reptile habitat on site, it is considered unlikely that significant populations exist within the site, and as such, further survey is not required.

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### 3.3.5 BIRDS

All wild birds are protected under law when they are nesting, under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended). In addition Schedule 1 species are protected at all times.

The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended) includes a duty for appropriate authorities, nature conservation bodies etc. to take appropriate steps in the exercise of their functions to secure: *" the preservation, maintenance and re-establishment of a sufficient diversity and area of habitat for wild birds in the United Kingdom, including by means of the upkeep, management and creation of such habitat, as appropriate, having regard to the requirements of Article 2 of the new Wild Birds Directive."* In addition, a number of species are listed under S7 of the Environment (Wales) Act (2016), as species of principal importance for conservation of biological diversity in Wales and listed as species of conservation concern by the RSPB.

#### Survey/assessment

Records for species within 2km which are listed under Schedule 1 (WCA1.1) of the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) include: Barn Owl, Hobby, Honey-buzzard, Kingfisher, Osprey, Peregrine and Red Kite.

Kingfisher most likely commutes along the eastern site boundary although the habitats of the site are considered unsuitable for nesting by this species, which prefer muddy river embankments. The mature tree in the north-eastern corner of the site is unsuitable for nesting by raptors given the highly disturbed nature of the site, which will deter prospective individuals from taking up residence.

Many species which are listed under S7 of the Environment (Wales) Act 2016 returned with records within 2km, and include: Bullfinch, Cuckoo, Curlew, Dunnock, Grey Partridge, Herring Gull, House Sparrow, Kestrel, Lesser Spotted Woodpecker, Marsh Tit, Pied Flycatcher, Reed Bunting, Skylark, Song Thrush, Spotted Flycatcher, Starling, Tree Pipit and Wood Warbler.

S7 species which are likely resident within the habitats of the site include: Bullfinch, Dunnock, House Sparrow, Marsh Tit, Song Thrush, Starling and Tree Pipit.

The open areas of the outbuilding complex did show signs of nesting use by swallows.

### 3.3.6 BATS

In the U.K. all bat species and their roosts are legally protected, by both domestic and international legislation (Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) & Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations (2017) (as amended)).

It is an offence to:

- deliberately take, injure or kill a wild bat
- intentionally or recklessly disturb a bat in its roost or deliberately disturb a group of bats
- damage or destroy a place used by bats for breeding or roosting (even if bats are not occupying the roost at the time)
- possess or advertise/sell/exchange a bat of a species found in the wild in the UK (dead or alive) or any part of a bat
- intentionally or recklessly obstruct access to a bat roost.

Several roosting records were returned from the data search within 2km, the closest of which is situated approximately 170m away and relates to the finding of a Lesser Horseshoe Bat roost, comprising 11 individuals within a viaduct. Records of other species roosting within 2km include: an unidentified Myotis species roosting within an attic space approximately 470m away and an unidentified Pipistrelle roost also within an attic space, approximately 1.9km away. No other species records of roosting bats were returned from the data trawl for roosting within 2km of the site.

Other species recorded commuting and foraging within 2km include Brandt's Bat, Daubenton's Bat, Greater Horseshoe Bat, Nathusius's Pipistrelle, Soprano Pipistrelle, Natterer's Bat, Noctule, Barbastelle and Whiskered Bat.

The roosting potential for outbuildings on site is as follows:

A small shed with a corrugated metal roof is situated in the north of the site. No signs of roosting bats were observed within the structure at the time of survey. Given the lack of thermal stability, and lack of suitable spaces for bats to utilise for roosting, the structure is considered to have negligible roosting potential.

A metal garage is affixed to the north-west side of the barn complex. Given the highly limited accessibility into the structure by prospective bats, and the tightness of the overall structure, the bat roosting potential is considered to be negligible.

An asbestos sheet building, adjoining the gym and other parts of the complex, is situated within the centre of the overall structure. The internal structure is very open and suitable spaces for roosting are limited. The open nature of the structure results in a lack of thermal stability. No signs of bat roosting were observed within the structure during the current survey. Roosting potential is considered to be negligible.

A 'Dutch' barn is situated to the south-east of the asbestos sheet building. The structure is very open. Rafters are open and the structure is not weather-tight. The structure has negligible roosting potential but may provide an area for bats to forage within.

A stable block is situated on the south-eastern edge of the outbuilding complex. Four stable doors are present rendering the structure open to the elements. No signs of roosting bats were present and the structure is considered to offer negligible roosting potential.

A mature Ash tree is situated in the north-eastern corner of the site, immediately adjacent to the northern site boundary. The tree exhibits signs of Ash-dieback *Hymenoscyphus fraxineus*, a serious fungal disease which causes the progressive death of the afflicted specimen's branches. The main stems are covered in dense ivy which may be obscuring other Potential Roosting Features (PRFs) from view. The tree also exhibits a butt-rot feature, which may extend further up the stem interior, providing a PRF.

The mature trees bounding all areas of the site are of a size, age and condition whereby PRFs are considered likely to occur. These boundary trees were not thoroughly assessed for their ability to support roosting bats.

---

### 3.3.7 BADGERS

The Protection of Badgers Act (1992) is a piece of UK legislation which protects badgers and their setts by law.

It is an offence to:

- intentionally capture, kill or injure a badger
- damage, destroy or block access to their setts
- disturb badgers in setts

Several records for badger were returned from the data trawl within 2km of the site, the nearest of which relates to the finding of a deceased individual involved in a road traffic collision, approximately 760m away. Other records within 2km relate to field observations and sett locations.

Habitats within the site are unsuitable for sett construction given the flattened topography of the site. No characteristic field signs were observed during the current survey. Badgers are unlikely to be present on site as there is no suitable habitat,

however, it is considered possible that badgers may occasionally forage/commute through site.

### 3.3.8 OTHER MAMMALS

#### **Dormouse**

No records were returned from the data trawl within 2km. This species is thought to be likely absent from the site given the lack of records and a lack of suitable habitat within the site. Choice plant species preferred by this species as forage and nesting material, namely Honeysuckle and Hazel, are also absent from the site.

#### **Otter**

Many records for Otter were returned from the data trawl within 2km, the nearest of which is situated approximately 270m away, and relates to the finding of 3 old spraints in a block-stone holt within a retaining wall.

No signs of this species, namely footprints, spraint, slides or lie-ups, or holts were seen during the site walkover. It is considered likely that Otter may visit the site occasionally whilst commuting through the landscape.

#### **S7 Mammals**

Brown Hare is considered to be occasionally present given the highly exposed nature of the site, especially the pastureland.

Polecat may occasionally visit the site whilst foraging and commuting through the landscape.

Hedgehog is considered likely present and may forage across the grassland habitats of the site.

### 3.3.9 AQUATIC SPECIES

No assessment of aquatic species was made, as the proposals do not affect the adjacent riparian corridor of the River Neath.

## 4 CONSTRAINTS AND OPPORTUNITIES

The below sets out the identified ecological constraints to the development, initial recommendations of how these can be addressed and any opportunities to enhance biodiversity on site.

### 4.1 SITE CONSTRAINTS/OPPORTUNITIES

#### 4.1.1 STATUTORY SITES

The Coedydd Nedd a Mellte Special Area of Conservation (SAC) and the Dyffrynoedd Nedd a Mellte a Moel Penderyn Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) are within close proximity to the site. These two statutorily protected sites lie approximately 40m north of the site. The Cwm Gwrelych and Nant Llyn Fach Streams SSSI lies approximately 600m south-east of the site.

The Coedydd Nedd a Mellte SAC is a very large and diverse example of old Sessile Oak wood in South Wales. The woodland extends along a series of deeply incised valleys and ravines, and contain complex mosaics of Sessile Oak *Quercus petraea* woodland, Ash woodland (some of which is referable to Annex 1 type 9180 Tilio-Acerion forests of slopes, screes and ravines), and transitions to lowland woodland types. The whole site is biodiverse, with many woodland plant communities represented and rich bryophyte and lichen assemblages.

#### 4.1.2 NON-STATUTORY SITES

Ancient woodland SINCs are present within 2km of the site.

The adjacent SAC and SSSI are also designated as a SINC, designated for characteristic vascular plants, lower plants, lichens and other fungi. Under the Environment Act 2016 there should be no loss of this habitat.

### 4.2 HABITAT CONSTRAINTS/OPPORTUNITIES

#### **Semi-natural broadleaved woodland – A1.1.1**

The woodland element of the immediately adjacent riparian corridor of the River Neath is mature and contains several mature trees with PRFs.

It is recommended 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 etc..

Some selective thinning and removal of non-native species and dead Ash may be acceptable as part of works and would provide an enhancement to the habitat.

#### **Neutral grassland – B2.2**

Forb species within the sward provide sustenance and forage for a wide range of pollinator invertebrates, while the graminoid species provide forage for other species.

Removal of areas is acceptable, only if retained areas are managed appropriately to encourage the proliferation of biodiversity within the sward, by supplementing with additional and appropriate species, to mitigate for this loss.

## **Running Water – G2**

The adjacent River Neath is situated to the east of the site, situated within a wooded riparian corridor, and provides an important highway for commuting wildlife. The river should be safeguarded against accidental spillages and siltation during the construction phase; standard pollution control measures should be adopted and followed.

## **Buildings – J3.6**

Internal surveys of the outbuildings yielded no evidence to suggest roosting suitability for bats. 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 with regards to roosting bats.

The outbuildings did show signs of previous use by nesting swallows. As such, buildings should 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.

## **4.3 SPECIES CONSTRAINTS AND OPPORTUNITIES**

### **4.3.1 PLANTS**

The area of woodland along the riparian corridor may support notable species of bryophytes, lichens and fungi, those species of which form a part of the designation criteria. As such, work in this area should be minimised, to avoid potential disturbance to priority species prevent the loss of SAC and SSSI habitat.

### **4.3.2 AMPHIBIANS**

Amphibians are unlikely to constrain any works on site as they can be moved from the construction areas by using habitat manipulation techniques prior to work starting.

GCN are highly unlikely to be present on site, given the lack of local records and suitable habitat, and as such will not provide any constraints.

### **4.3.3 REPTILES**

The SING areas are extensive but lack sufficient height, depth and overall structural diversity to provide any meaningful cover for sheltering purposes for common reptile species.

Due to the limited suitability of habitat on site for common reptiles, the supervisory services of an Ecological Clerk of Works are not deemed necessary in this instance for vegetation clearance works.

If any reptiles are found during clearance works, work will stop and the Local Authority Ecologist will be contacted immediately. A method statement to prevent reckless killing and injury to reptiles will then be adopted for the rest of the construction works.

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#### 4.3.4 BIRDS

All tree works will take place outside of the bird nesting season (March to August inclusive). Enhancement opportunities are possible, with integrated boxes being the most suitable option, positioned within the structure of the newly built visitor centre hub and hostel.

The outbuildings did show signs of previous use by nesting swallows. As such, buildings should 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.

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#### 4.3.5 BATS

Internal surveys of the outbuildings yielded no evidence to suggest roosting suitability for bats. All structures surveyed were concluded to be of negligible roosting potential for bats and as such there are no constraints to works upon the outbuildings.

Enhancement opportunities are possible, with integrated boxes being the most suitable option, positioned within the structure of the newly built visitor centre hub and hostel.

## 5 CONCLUSIONS

The trees along the eastern boundary within the riparian corridor 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 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, 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.

Further surveys and assessment may be required dependent on proposals.

## 6 REFERENCES

**Anon.** HMSO, London. All legislative references. [www.legislation.gov.uk](http://www.legislation.gov.uk)

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