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CHARTERED LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTS

Neath Abbey Car Park
GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE STATEMENT
Neath Abbey | Monastery Road | Neath | SA10 7DH

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UPRN	Originator	Zone	Level	Type	Role	File number	Suitability	Rev
2355	HIR	XX	XX	RP	A	06802	S2	P1
Suitability		S2 - Issued for Information						

FOREWORD

Address

Neath Abbey
Monastery Road
Neath
SA10 7DH

Grid Reference (NGR)

SS737973
E 273720
N 197313



///people.adjust.hint

Unitary (Local) Authority | Neath Port Talbot Council

Listing

Neath Abbey is a Scheduled Ancient Monument

Location

The site is not located in a Conservation Area.

Hiraeth Architecture

Architects specialising in the conservation of historic buildings, and advising upon the architectural and conservation aspects of the project for this report.

This document has been produced on behalf of **Neath Port Talbot Council** to support a planning application to Neath Port Talbot Council regarding proposals for the new vehicular parking in proximity to Neath Abbey.

It is to be read in conjunction with the associated information and drawings pertaining to the scheme, as detailed on the attached drawing issue sheet.

Ownership

The land adjacent to Neath Abbey is within the ownership of Neath Port Talbot Council. Neath Abbey is in the guardianship of Cadw.

To arrange a site visit, please contact the applicant using the following details:

Karleigh Davies
Destination and Development Coordinator
Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council
The Quays, Brunel Way, Baglan Energy Park, Neath, SA11 2GG

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CONTENTS

Introduction	2
Existing Site	4
Green Infrastructure Strategy	7
Landscape Proposals	8
Conclusion	11
Appendices	13
Contact	14

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Aerial View of the land adjacent to Neath Abbey showing the approximate red line boundary

INTRODUCTION

Overview

This document has been produced in reference to the recently published updated Chapter 6 of Planning Policy Wales which sets out the policies to support 'Distinctive and Natural Places'.

6.0.1 The Distinctive and Natural Places theme of planning policy topics covers historic environment, landscape, biodiversity and habitats, coastal characteristics, air quality, soundscape, water services, flooding and other environmental (surface and sub-surface) risks.

The proposed scheme provides a number of Green Infrastructure enhancement opportunities as described in the following sections.

The report will provide a brief summary of the design proposals, in relation to the Green Infrastructure, as described in the associated planning submission information pack for 25 new car park bays and associated coach parking facilities at Neath Abbey.

The following assessments have been carried out on the existing site landscape and surrounding context in recent years:

- Topographical Survey
- Preliminary Ecological Appraisal by Megan Price, Ecologist (Consultancy + Planning), Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council.
- Preliminary Ecological Appraisal by Western Ecology dated 7th April 2023.
- Tree Survey and Arboricultural Report by Nick Thomas, The ARB Team.

This statement should be read in conjunction with the following documents and drawings:

- Drawing Pack, specifically:
 - 2355-00020 - Existing Site Plan
 - 2355-01030 - Existing Site Layout
 - SPP3364 P 90 001 - Existing Landscape Layout
 - SPP3364 P 90 002 - Proposed Landscape Layout
- Design and Access Statement incorporating Heritage Impact Assessment
- Tree Survey and Arboricultural Report by The ARB Team



EXISTING SEWER
existing main sewer with easement line shown, no tree planting in these areas

Revisions

Score	Date	Drawing	Rev
1.2008A1	OCT 24	SFP3364 p 90 001	

EXISTING SITE

Site Context and Location

The site is located immediately to the west of Neath Abbey, OS grid reference SS737973. It is set in an industrial environment, surrounded by industrial units to the north and west, with further industrial units and a salvage yard to the south. To the east is the Scheduled Ancient Monument of Neath Abbey. Whilst the proposed site is in the ownership of Neath Port Talbot Council, the Abbey site is in the ownership of Cadw. A railway line is located to the north, whilst the Tennant Canal immediately abuts the site to the south. The wider surrounding urban settlement of Neath Abbey is bounded by the A465 to the south, with Skewen to the west. The town of Neath sits to the south east separated from Neath Abbey by the River Neath and its associated floodplain.

Ecological Surveys

The surveys had the principal aims:

- To provide an initial assessment of the ecological value of the site in local context.
- To provide details supporting further surveys that may be required.
- To identify potential ecological constraints relating to the development, and recommend measures to avoid, reduce or manage negative effects, and to provide a net ecological gain.

Key Impact and Mitigation Measures noted:

- The site predominantly consists of low-grade grass that is regularly mown.
- To the periphery of the site there are a number of ash trees, lime trees, red horse chestnut and sycamore trees. These trees have been

classified as part of the Tree Survey Arboricultural Constraints Report. The trees were planted to provide a screen between the abbey ruins and the industrial units and were planted in the early 1980's.

- The water course of the Tennant Canal is located to the south of the site. Depending on proposals these habitats may need to be protected during any construction phase through the implementation of a Construction Environment Management Plan.
- It is possible that occasional common bird species nest within surrounding trees. Any clearance of these habitats during the bird nesting season of March to August, should include provision for their inspection in advance by a suitably qualified person.
- The site has potential to support common lizard, grass snake and slow worm at its margins. Provided impacts are limited in extent, by following simple mitigation any adverse impact can be avoided.
- Otters may be present in adjacent watercourses. If any ground works are proposed within 50 metres of the river/canal or additional external lighting is proposed for these habitats, further surveys may be required to assess the likely impacts.
- Japanese Knotweed is present to the south east corner of the site. A method statement should be produced for any works within 7 metres of this area and a plan developed to eradicate Japanese Knotweed from the Site.

The comments from the appointed Ecologist concluded:

- PPW12 states that all tree removal needs to have 3:1 equivalent tree replacement planting. In its current form the scheme would deviate from PPW12.

- On its own the site would be challenging to develop and meet the necessary enhancement which statutory bodies have a legal duty to provide as part of all their functions. To enable the provision of a biodiversity enhancement, all available areas of the site should be seeded with an appropriate wildflower mix and entered into a cut and collect meadow management regime. There will be a loss of space due to the car parking areas so an alternative site will also be required, with the verge across from the site to be put to cut and collect management if possible.

Site Constraints

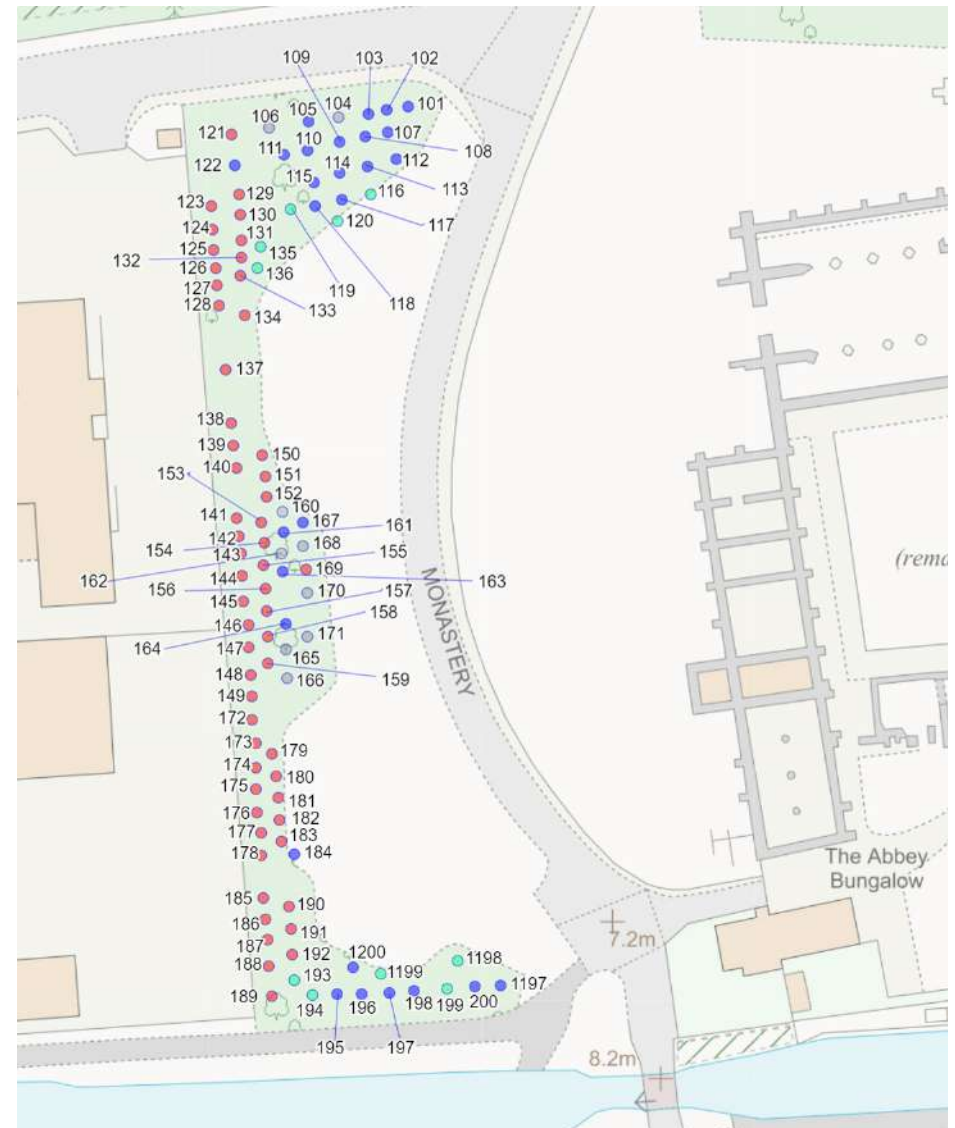
Arboricultural Survey

A key consideration identified in the arboricultural survey of the site is the presence of a number of ash trees to the perimeter of the site. The survey states that,

'Due to their condition and proximity to the existing and proposed structures, it would be advisable if the 56 Ash trees and tree number 169 are removed.'

This places a pressing health and safety concern on the site, that the project has the potential to assist in addressing. Together with identifying the root protection areas for all other trees, addressing this concern provides a principal constraint and consideration for the strategy to the site.

In addition to this it is noted that some trees are struggling due to



Site plan showing the trees that require removal in red as reproduced from the report by the ARB Team

their size and proximity of planting with other trees. The removal of trees therefore provides an opportunity to carry out tree maintenance works to other existing trees to remain such as clearing through crowns to promote healthy tree growth.

SUD's

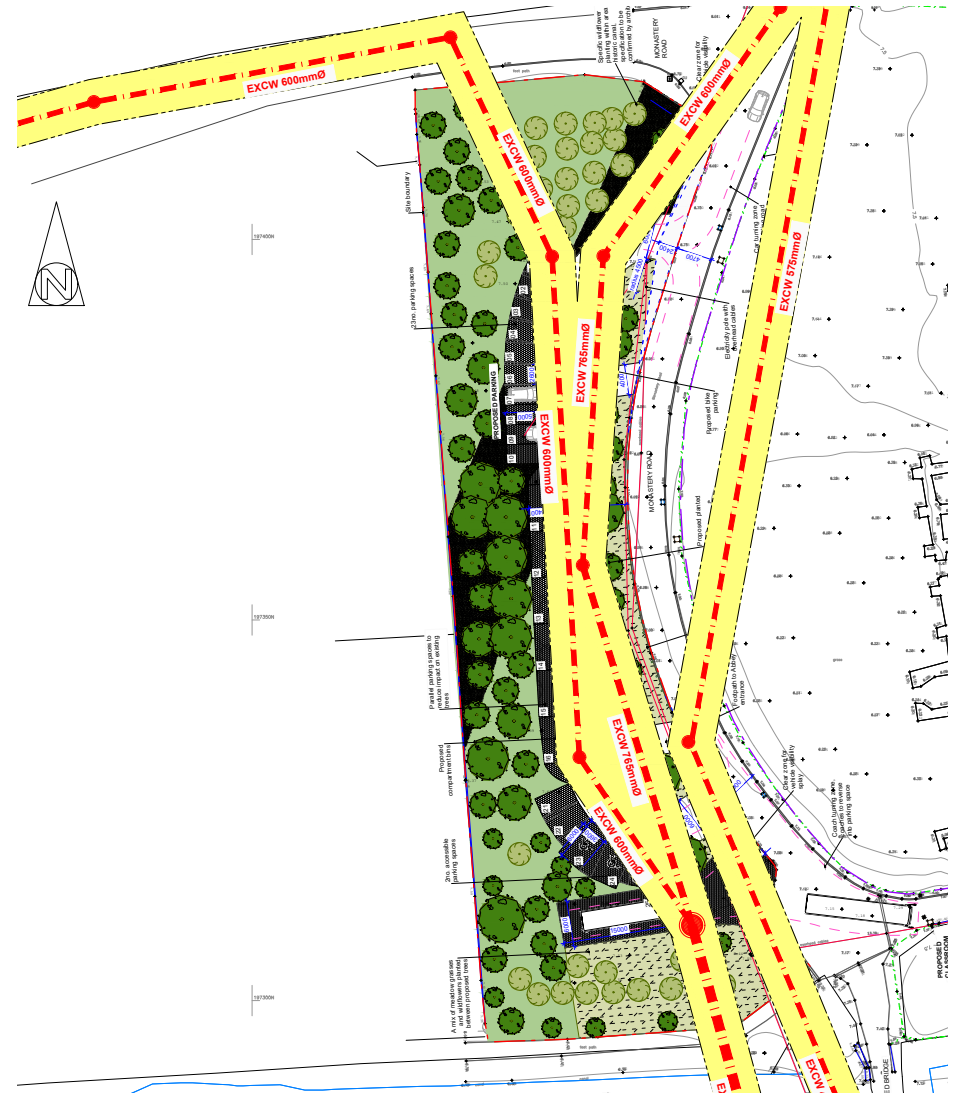
The brief for development in order to meet funding requirements includes the provision of a minimum of 25 parking spaces and a coach car park. This leads to a built area in excess of 100m² and consequently SUD's landscaping proposals form a key part of any scheme being taken forwards.

Welsh Water Sewer Pipe

An assessment of surrounding utilities established that a key Welsh Water mains sewer runs directly beneath the site. In order that Welsh Water might continue to gain access to the sewer, an easement exists over the site whereby development is restricted. This includes the provision of SUD's solutions in this area.

Heritage

The associated Design and Access Statement with Heritage Impact Assessment sets out the heritage context in which the proposals have been developed. Key considerations include the potential for below ground archaeology within areas of the site, and with the setting of the Abbey of critical concern, a requirement to largely screen the parking from the Scheduled Ancient Monument.



Site plan showing the indicative easement associated with the Welsh Water mains sewerage pipe running below the site

6.2.1 Green infrastructure is the network of natural and semi-natural features, green spaces, rivers and lakes that intersperse and connect places. Component elements of green infrastructure can function at different scales.... at a local scale, it might comprise parks, fields, public rights of way, allotments, cemeteries and gardens. At smaller scales, individual urban interventions such as street trees, hedgerows, roadside verges, and green roofs/walls can all contribute to green infrastructure networks. - Planning Policy Wales - Chapter 6

Central principles to a successful development advocate a design strategy which integrates and prioritises the natural environment, as the enhancement of biodiversity and green infrastructure have direct benefits and impact on the residents. Including helping to enhance health and wellbeing, building a sense of community through improved amenity spaces and preparing for the impacts of climate change. This approach addresses the key goals identified in The Well-being of Future Generations Act and goals for Wales and have informed the design development of the proposal.

When assessing planning applications, Planning Policy Wales instructs planning authorities to take account of and promote the resilience of ecosystems, in particular the five attributes of ecosystem resilience. The DECCA attributes are explained further in NRW's Terrestrial and freshwater Resilient Ecological Networks: a guide for practitioners in Wales', but as a broad summary, the definitions are as follows:

GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE STRATEGY

Diversity: maintaining and enhancing diversity at every scale, including genetic, structural, habitat and between-habitat levels. This supports the complexity of ecosystem functions and interactions that deliver services and benefits.

Extent: incorporating measures which maintain and increase the area of semi-natural habitat/ features and linkages between habitats. In general, smaller ecosystems have reduced capacity to adapt, recover or resist disturbance.

Condition: The condition of an ecosystem is affected by multiple and complex pressures acting both as short term and longer-term types of disturbance. Both direct and wider impacts should be considered, for example avoiding or mitigating pressures such as climate change, pollution, invasive species, land management neglect etc.

Connectivity: This refers to the links between and within habitats, which may take the form of physical corridors, stepping stones in the landscape, or patches of the same or related vegetation types that together create a network that enables the flow or movement of genes, species and natural resources. Developments should take opportunities to develop functional habitat and ecological networks within and between ecosystems, building on existing connectivity.

Aspects of ecosystem resilience (adaptability, recovery and resistance): ecosystem resilience is a product of the above four attributes. Adaptability, recovery and resistance to/ from a disturbance are defining features of ecosystem resilience.

LANDSCAPE PROPOSAL

The site landscape proposal describes the strategy for addressing the site. This includes the following:



The Well-being of Future Generations Wheel | Identifying the seven goals identified by the Welsh Government - <https://www.gov.wales/well-being-of-future-generations-wales>

- The siting of vehicular parking to provide a green buffer zone between parked vehicles and the Abbey
- The avoidance of locating parking within root protection areas of trees
- A predominantly 'no dig' construction to minimise impact on existing ground conditions and features including root protection zones
- The reduction of new non-free draining surface area by the formation of car parking areas in grasscrete construction
- The necessary siting of a swale to the western boundary of the site, outside the Welsh Water easement, noting that mounding to rear of parking bays is to use the soil from the swale to gently bank down to existing levels. This banking will not be over any existing tree roots so water logging should not be an issue.
- The removal of Ash trees in accordance with the recommendations of the Tree Survey and Arboricultural Report, noting that 'this is due to the condition of the trees not the proposed development' and is consequently dealing with an existing health and safety issue.
- The selection of replacement tree species from the list published called Natural Resources Wales (Cyfoeth Naturiol Cymru) Aug 2015 in line with The Wales Strategy for Woodlands and Trees guidance and given space to some of the larger species.
- The creation of new, low level hedgerows to the rear of the site to improve ecological habitat onsite and beyond, together with low level screening of surrounding industrial buildings.
- New planting to the frontage to the east of the site to enhance biodiversity and to form a visual hedge like barrier from the Abbey.



Revised 8 Species oriented ecological comments
Rev 9: final species oriented historic cam alignment
Revisions

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CLIENT: NEATH PORT TALBOT CC

PROJECT: NEATH ABBEY CAR PARK

TITLE: Proposed Parking Layout

Scale: 1:1000
Date: 10/01/2012
Drawing: 01
Rev: 1

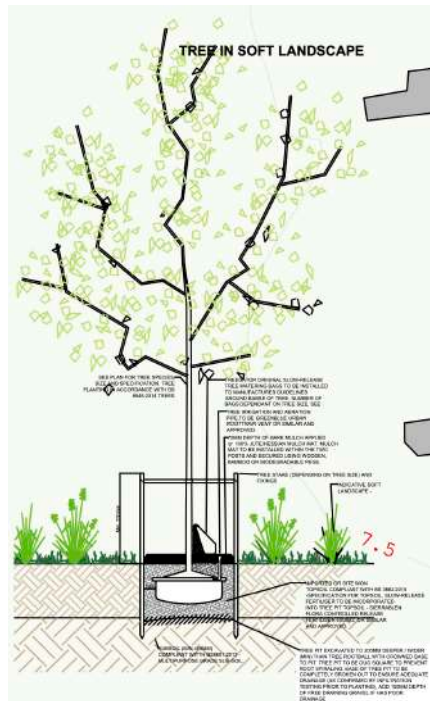
Responsibility is not accepted for errors made by others
using plans from the drawing
Dimensions, quantities and services to be checked in
drawing

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 CLIENT: NEATH PORT TALKBOT CC
 PROJECT: NEATH ABBEY CAR PARK
 TITLE: Proposed parking layout

- Increased biodiversity through the provision of bee friendly wildflower seed mix from a local supplier, with a SUD's seed mix to increase the biodiversity to the swale.
- The re-use of any red horse chestnut tree branches to form wildlife log piles to increase the diversity noting that we are wary of using any ash because of potential disease
- The delineation of the historic canal alignment using a bulb mix to add winter colour and also using a varied bulb mix to extend the season.
- Creation of footpath links between the parking and the Abbey.

Planting

Species have been selected that are native to the site. The proposed planting layout therefore provides a sense of place to the development



Planting proposals for trees in soft landscaping

alongside the rich wildlife habitats created. It further helps to screen the surrounding industrial setting that is currently a key detractor to the setting of the Scheduled Ancient Monument and a key heritage consideration. Alongside the biodiversity benefit, planting has been selected for a longer flowering season of bulbs including Narcissus pseudo-narcissus. To the roadside, red currant and blackthorn have been added into a native cornus mix that will provide spring interest and food for insects coming out of hibernation, whilst also adding year round colour and interest.

SuDS, Rainwater Harvesting and Bio-retention Systems

Integrated civils and highways design has provided a resilient and efficient strategy as part of the proposed landscape proposal to ensure the proposal can obtain SAB approval.

The design addresses the six SuDS Standards as noted below:

S1: Runoff destination

S2: Hydraulic control

S3: Water quality

S4: Amenity

S5: Biodiversity

S6: Construction, operation and maintenance

Headings taken from the Sustainable Drainage Systems Standards for Wales document 2018.

A number of SuDS features are utilised including free draining, grassed car parking spaces and swales to support a more sustainable approach to drainage on the site. These systems also add value to the sense of place and enjoyment of the development as they create additional areas of soft landscaping and planting across the area.

CONCLUSION

We understand the importance of integrating green infrastructure and biodiversity enhancement into proposals from the earliest design stages. This is often undertaken on sensitive sites where there are competing challenges to overcome. In this instance the existing condition of trees on site has led to a necessity to remove an existing quantum of ash trees. Their replacement in line with PPW 12 and a 3:1 equivalent tree replacement planting is not physically possible on the existing site, particularly in the context of delivering the outcomes that the proposed project, on which funding is based, set out to achieve. Consequently a decision is required – whether to address the existing tree issue and deliver the scheme, or not to deliver the scheme and look to address the trees via other means.

In approaching this problem as a design team we have looked to consider the stepwise approach as follows:

Avoid

The provision of dedicated vehicular parking on the site is driven in part by the requirements of the existing Scheduled Ancient Monument as an established visitor facility and its lack of appropriate parking facilities, together with addressing the presence of ash trees on site. There are no alternative sites in the immediate area that are available to address these issues.

Minimise

Funding for the project seeks to deliver a minimum 25 parking spaces and associated coach parking. In developing these proposals, the minimum number of spaces has been provided as opposed to larger

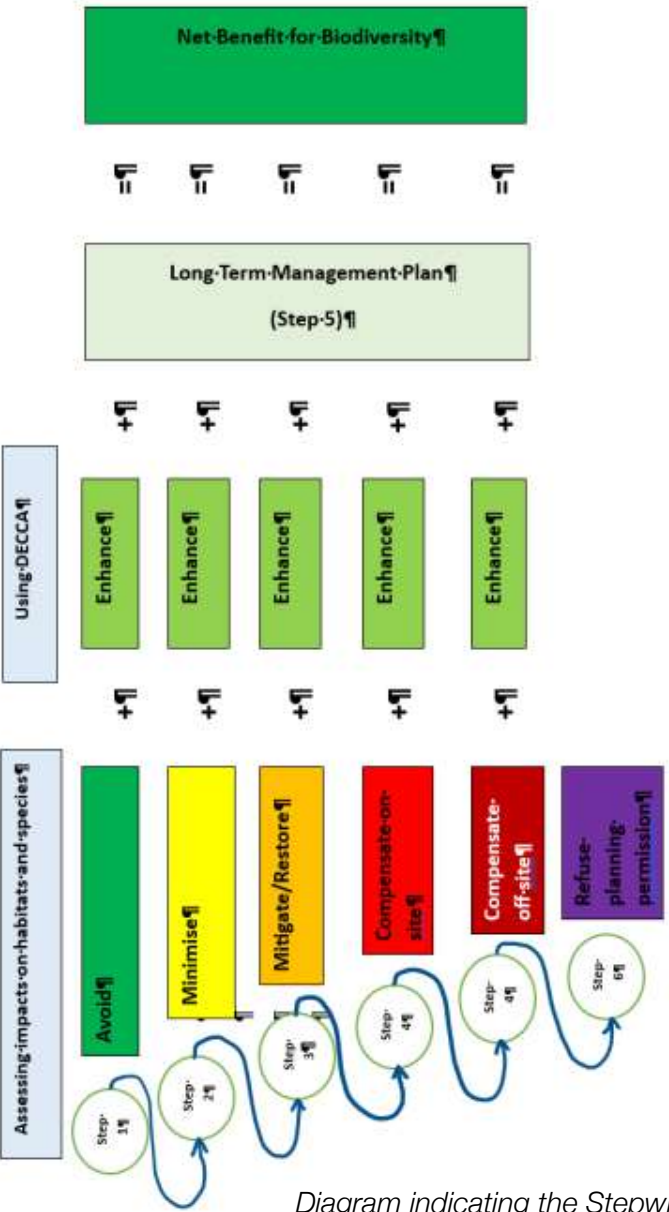


Diagram indicating the Stepwise Approach

options that are documented in the Design and Access Statement and Heritage Impact Assessment. This, in terms of scale and by its nature, will have the minimum potential impact on the biodiversity.

Mitigate/ Restore

In developing the proposals it has become clear that the existing ash trees present a clear and present issue for the site. The project therefore provides a vehicle by which these might be addressed, with mitigation provided to replace these. The replacement proposal looks to avoid introducing a monoculture and therefore provides a diversity of native trees, hedgerows and planting, enhanced by wildflower seeding across the site to enhance the existing biodiversity. To further mitigate impact, a no dig construction has been developed. This will negate the impact of construction on existing root protection zones.

Compensate On Site

The introduction of parking onto the site has introduced a requirement for SUD's as compensation. This has necessarily been incorporated to the rear of the site, away from an existing Welsh Water easement. The impact on existing, retained trees has been mitigated by avoiding the laying of bankings over any existing tree roots, thereby preventing water logging.

Compensation off Site

Whilst further compensation measures have been considered off-site, it has not been possible to identify suitable space. In terms of Neath Abbey, looking beyond the site not being in the ownership of the Client, the provision of new trees in this area would have significant potential to affect existing extant archaeology and has therefore been actively avoided. This said, ongoing discussions are currently being undertaken

to see if further biodiversity enhancements can be introduced through the provision of no-cut areas within the site.

Overall, this considered landscape proposal has identified and considered existing features of the site, ensuring their enhancement in the new plans and addressing existing concerns. The scheme creates new planting zones, establishing native hedgerows, integrating rainwater attenuation, and incorporating landscape elements that not only mitigate environmental impacts but elevate biodiversity and enhance the overall amenity value of the site.

We believe the scheme balances a sensitive proposal with green infrastructure that supports improved connection between people and nature, providing a positive impact on the community's well-being and ensuring a sustainable and enriching environment for the future.

It is therefore considered that the proposed scheme would comply with the updated Chapter 6 of Planning Policy Wales which sets out the policy for biodiversity and nature, albeit noting that a departure from PPW12 will be required in order to sensibly address existing tree concerns on site in a proportionate and deliverable manner.

APPENDICES

Scheduled Monuments- Full Report

Summary Description of a Scheduled Monument

Reference Number	Name	Date of Designation	Status
GM006	Neath Abbey		Designated

Location

Unitary Authority	Community	Easting	Northing
Neath Port Talbot	Dyffryn Clydach	273790	197367

Broad Class	Site Type	Period
Religious, Ritual and Funerary	Abbey	Medieval

Description

Summary Description and Reason for Designation
The following provides a general description of the Scheduled Ancient Monument. Neath Abbey was founded in 1130 by a Devonshire Knight named Richard de Granville. Built upon a rocky terrace overlooking the marshland beside the River Neath, its proximity to the marsh afforded it peaceful seclusion. It was established as a daughter house of Savigny in Normandy but was, together with all the other houses of the Order of Savigny, absorbed into the Cistercian Order in 1147. As the Abbey consolidated its estates, the expanding monastic community soon began to outgrow the initial buildings and several major programmes of reconstruction occurred during the period between the late 12th and 14th centuries. The church itself was erected in one building operation between about 1280 and 1330.

The ranges around the cloister survive on the east and west sides. The east range contained the dormitory, reredorter and chapter house and was completed in the early 13th century. That portion of the range nearest the church has almost entirely been destroyed, although several of the vaulted undercrofts in the southern end of the range survive. The south range contained the refectory and kitchen although these have almost entirely been destroyed. The west range contained the dormitory, refectory and common room of the lay brothers and was completed in the late 12th century.

After the Dissolution of the monasteries in 1539, the abbey was purchased by a wealthy Tudor magnate. During this time a large Tudor house developed over the south-east corner of the monastic complex. The house was lived in by a succession of wealthy families until the early 1700's when it was abandoned and copper working in the abbey grounds began. By 1900, the abbey site was disused and overgrown.

The monument is of national importance for its potential to enhance our knowledge of the organisation and practice of medieval Christianity. The site forms an important element within the wider medieval landscape. It retains significant archaeological potential, with a strong probability of the presence of associated archaeological features and deposits. The structure itself may be expected to contain archaeological information concerning chronology and building techniques.

The scheduled area comprises the remains described and areas around them within which related evidence may be expected to survive.

CONTACT

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